

Africa-centered Research in the Context of the New Industrialization

Scientific production is self-centred around a social formation when it touches on crucial issues by producing within its research institutions knowledge about society and by offering it a worldview chiefly shaped locally.

Sub-regional research institutions such as CODESRIA and the Third World Forum (TWF) emerged from the need to develop an African self-centred research. And this departed from the observation that social sciences have never been and will never be neutral with respect to internal contradictions between societies and between those very sciences. More relevantly, since the nineteenth century, the focus of research is clearly shaped by the ruling classes of the most powerful countries. They expect public and private institutions involved in civil and military research, in the social sciences and humanities, to lay the theoretical and rational foundations for the management of capitalism-imperialism as if it marked the end of History. That is why research managers and selection policies for beneficiaries of academic distinctions, systematically side with the conservatives, as evidenced by the list of the winners of the Nobel Prize in economics. So are we not giving to the concept of *think tank* too obtuse a meaning as we tend to? In this context, as in other areas, the triad has dominion.

But while acknowledging the hegemony of Anglo-Saxon institutions, the states that want to command respect provide the human and financial resources needed to build and develop national or sub-

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regional research in different fields. Actually, the issue is not just economic – attracting capital and talent, having a balance of current accounts in surplus – but it is also strategic as it requires states to have on their territory a scientific community as part of the social formation. And no community can be truly effective and dynamic unless it is self-centred, inasmuch as it operates in a space relying on networks of institutions and researchers who interact and compete. In other words, the development of critical thinking and research on societies and the global system is intertwined with the existence of self-centred institutions in self-centred economies and societies.

To assess the progress made regarding the formation of a relevant scientific community in Africa, it is worth making the distinction between the issue of paradigm shift and that of their implementation. Starting from the critical analysis of social sciences that legitimized slavery and colonialism, Kwame Nkrumah, Patrice Lumumba, Samir Amin, Amilcar Cabral, Walter Rodney, Archie Mafeje, Mahmood Mamdani, Ali El Kenz, etc. have shown the importance that African leadership should give to the promotion of self-centred African research that would help take an unapologetic stance

against Eurocentrism. Most of them have rejected culturalism while accepting the paradigm of cultural diversity, but only in the context of the universality of reason and democratic drive. (Part of pan-Africanist research easily fits within this complex conception and produces very interesting works on Africa.)

In practice, the emphasis was placed on self-generated knowledge on African societies. In this area, CODESRIA has done tremendous work, but a significant portion of which should have been conducted by national institutions. In some instances, CODESRIA completed the work and filled the gap in others. In addition, it facilitated the formation of sub-regional research networks. Other institutions such as the TWF have done a lot in the same field.

The recognition of the value of these works by the scientific community based at such research institutions, however, is not to be taken for granted. It is a distressing banality to realise that these works are of unequal value. But the real issue is about their authority. We feel that the African social scientific community itself, let alone the non-African researchers, tend to belittle these works and overrate those of the Bretton Woods institutions and of the OECD member countries. CODESRIA could help fight for proper recognition in this respect.

However, the second component of the self-centred research is taking long to earn the consideration it deserves, even in institutions of regional or continental

scope. The proliferation of publications by NGOs on international relations or, as part of the negotiations on the place of Africa in the global system is illusory because the information they use mainly originates from the countries of the North. In fact no country has built a network of outstanding documentation centres and no sub-regional institution has done so either.

It is desirable that CODESRIA's new research priorities take into account the risk of disempowerment faced by the African people in the current phase of globalization. For us, the major structural factor is the potential third wave of industrial revolution which directly affects about 60 per cent of the world population. The leaders of the so-called emerging countries promise their people to catch up with the level and structure of the per capita consumption in developed countries. The fact that some of the newly industrialized countries are actually trying

to build their capacities to upgrade their production systems to equal those of the North, but also to produce weapons of deterrence, including nuclear weapons, accounts for the uncertainty about the outcome of the current global crisis. So the future of Africa is increasingly dependent on the development of some countries and regions that must be known from an African perspective.

This would include North America and the United States, the European Union (with particular emphasis on the former colonial powers), Germany, Scandinavia, Russia, Eastern Asia with a focus on Vietnam, China and Japan, India, Latin America with a focus on Cuba, Venezuela, Brazil, and Mexico. The likelihood of collusion between the old and new industrial countries for the control of natural resources in Africa should be explored. How is the African anti-globalisation movement to be guided in the choice of new challenges? Although it is

clear that the new industrialization involves the dispossession of farmers of their right to access agricultural land for the production of crops and livestock, the organized headlong rush for the control of raw materials and oil, and a degree of pollution which endangers the human species itself, a socialist alternative will not be credible unless great self-centred research efforts are made throughout the world. From this point of view, self-centred knowledge of the political and potentially social revolutions occurring presently in Latin America would be very helpful.

It is high time CODESRIA and other sub-regional or pan-African institutions of social science research gave priority to the production of knowledge on relevant components of the global system. Against this background, it seems necessary for CODESRIA to raise the awareness of the African scholarly community to place knowledge production at the heart of their advocacy efforts.