The Social Sciences in Africa: Breaking Local Barriers and Negotiating International Presence

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Introduction

Let me first thank the organisers for inviting me to deliver the keynote address at this important gathering. It is indeed a great honour to me personally but I also take it as recognition of the endeavours of African social scientists to promote social science research in Africa. One such African social scientist was a colleague and friend, the late Professor Claude Ake who did so much to institutionalise social science research in Africa. I would like to use this occasion to pay him tribute.

Whatever the origins of the name of the series, it is today a salute to the many who struggle for democracy in Africa and a grim reminder that the scourge of militarism still haunts our continent and that those who would rule by the sword are either in power or lurk behind the corridors of power ready at any time to ambush the democratic process.

The title I gave to the lecture must already suggest how unwieldy the subject is. I obviously cannot deal adequately with all the constricting and enabling contingencies within which

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social science in Africa is practised. Time and space demand that I be highly selective in my presentation. If I seem to emphasise problem areas in the social sciences in Africa and in the relationship between Africans and their non-African counterparts it will not be because I do not recognise the real gains made in the search for solutions. I should also state at the outset that I am aware of some of the travails of students of Africa in North America and it is not my intention to add more to them. If this is any consolation, let me assure you that your woes are nothing compared to ours.

The first part of the paper deals with local problems faced by the African social scientists both as individual researchers and as a community. The second part deals with the relationship between the African social scientists and their Africanists counterparts and the larger international social science community. It recounts rather telegraphically the problems we face in asserting ourselves in what has historically been a rather exclusive activity of the study of Africa. I chose the word negotiate to underline our choice of basically peaceful means for increasing our presence in the understanding not only of Africa but of the human condition. I also assume that those who, by design or inertia, are gate keepers of the study of Africa will be gracious enough to accept to dialogue with us.

Let me also state that if at times I sound querulous and too insistent on declaring our existence, it is partly because others have chosen to obliterate us either by studied silence about our existence or by declaring that we simply do not exist. A well-known French Africanist concluded only recently that there was only one intellectual in the whole of Black Africa. I hope you will appreciate, in light of such remarks, why in our collective bouts of paranoia we sometimes feel that the invisibility of African scholarship has gone on for so long that we are inclined to attribute it to deliberate attempts to render it invisible.

Part 1:
The State and Social Sciences

My focus in this paper will be on constraints that impinge more directly on intellectual sensitivities and responses of African academics. And so while I am conscious of the role of brute force and military repression that has been guided by nothing other than self-aggrandisement and megalomania, I have chosen to concentrate on ideological straitjackets which are more insidious because once accepted, they become internalised and self-imposed. Looking back at the conditions of academic freedom over the last thirty years one is struck not only by the detentions, the closures of universities, the visits of jackbooted party thugs to campuses but also by the ideological straitjacket that held back social science research and in many ways deprived us of the capacity for self-organisation and protest.

In thinking about the social sciences in Africa, the state looms both menacingly and enticingly large. No single social force has affected the social sciences as profoundly as the state. On the one hand it is the only major indigenous source of funds, albeit a stingy and impecunious one. It has the money. Virtually all institutions of higher learning are state owned[2]. As such the state can, to some extent, call the tune. On the other hand, it has not hesitated to use its power to bludgeon our skulls, close universities, ban books and generally do everything to silence real and imagined dissidents in institutions of learning. Not surprisingly, in any discussions of constraints on social science research in Africa the state often emerged as a key villain. It has in most cases criminally neglected the infrastructure for learning. It has time and again sent soldiers on campuses. It has closed universities, banned books, incarcerated scholars, forced some into exile and murdered some. There is a growing amount of exposures of such acts by the state that I will not recount them here. Suffice to say that African universities are in a terrible material state that poses severe constraints on serious scientific work.

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[2] This is now changing as private universities begin to emerge in Africa. Most of these institutions are confined to undergraduate teaching or to very specialised technical subjects such as management and computer sciences. They are not likely to make much of an impact on research.

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In many ways African universities, for all the joyous celebration at their birth, were born in chains. This is true of both those born in the colonial and post-colonial eras. In the post-colonial period, one set of chains was created by the dominant perceptions of the new authorities of what were the imperatives and exigencies of nation-building and development. These perceptions acted on two levels — both of which were to have enormous implications for the development of universities and research capacities. The first level was technocratic. It assigned to universities the role of producing the "manpower" necessary for the indigenisation of the administrative functions of the state. Given the low levels of the technical bases of the economy and the poor economic performance of most African countries, and therefore the low levels of demand for skilled labour force, such targets were relatively easy to meet. In most countries universities have more than fulfilled this task, leading to an identity crisis and a sense of purposelessness, at least in the eyes of those that pull the purse strings. The sense of superfluity of university education has been buttressed by the presence of large numbers of expatriates that come along with aid programmes and has been fanned on by tendentious studies by these very experts suggesting that the rate of return in higher education is so low that it may be advisable in some cases not to invest anything in tertiary education.

The sense that universities are not that important has been re-enforced by deceptively easy access to foreign expertise. There are an estimated 40,000 experts in Africa - more than at independence - and they are costing Africa at least 10 billion dollars annually, if World Bank figures are to be believed.

One consequence of the ubiquitous and overbearing presence of "experts" is the marginalisation of African social sciences from public policy-making. This, in turn, pushed African researchers towards a self-imposed insulation from practical issues. However, even in instances where researchers have deliberately sought to engage in research directed towards policy-making, they have not always had easy access to policy-makers. There are many sources of these barriers to corridors of power. One of these is that policy-makers do not always appreciate the usefulness of local research. This may be because the research is wrongly "packaged" and thus totally incomprehensible to policy-makers; it may be that the

recommendations of the researchers are in conflict with the political agendas of the policy-makers or is so counter-intuitive as to be indigestible. However, more often than not it is that policy-maker's ears are turned elsewhere - towards foreign experts whom they find politically less threatening and whose counsel, even the most banal, comes with money.

This sense that universities are superfluous and dispensable partly accounts for the anaemic allocations of resources to institutions of higher learning, leading to the "crisis of the African universities" recounted in so many official documents - dilapidated buildings, overcrowded classes, overworked, underpaid and demoralised faculty, empty libraries, etc.

Ideological Constraints

The second level of constraints consists of ideologies informing both political leaders and academics.

Nationalism and nation-building

The first of these ideological straitjackets was the quest for "national unity" as an essential element of nation-building. Under this imperative of nation-building, nationalism became a totalising ideology, seeking to bring under its ambit every manifestation of political interest or collective action. Some of this fervour for "unity" was motivated by a genuine desire to rapidly kneed together disparate ethnic groups and nationalities into modern states. However, all too often the quest for unity was conflated with a quest for uniformity. In its less innocent and more paranoiac expression, nationalism tended to view political opposition as unpatriotic and divisive. This view was given credence and nourished by the "divide and rule" machinations of the outgoing colonialists. Remember Katanga! Consequently, political dissension was identified with foreign interference and secessionism - two unforgivable crimes in the demonology of the nationalists. Given such a stance, the new states denied themselves the possibilities of dealing with the inherent social pluralism of their societies in dialogical and non-confrontational manner. Every articulation of genuine local

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interests, or manifestation of ethnic identity was viewed as almost treasonous and was harshly suppressed.

The rhetoric and proclamations of nationalism were difficult to contend with. First, in the early years the triumphant nationalist, armed with impeccable testimonies to their personal commitment to the nation (many years in exile or detention), stood on very high moral grounds and indeed, could, with some justification, claim they spoke for the nation when they chastised academics for abusing academic freedom by engaging in trivial pursuits which did not address the urgent tasks of nation-building and development. Second, the nationalists had demonstrated their commitment to university education and their genuine conviction that universities would produce the manpower that was required for development by funding the universities rather lavishly, at least when compared to the miserly allocation to African universities today. Third, African universities were cursed by their parentage which made them easily suspect in the eyes of the nationalists. Most of the universities were modelled after similar institutions in metropolitan countries and were initially staffed by expatriates. This genesis made them vulnerable to charges that their opposition to the nationalist agenda was a reflection of their alien character or worse, their "colonial mentality", which made them a "veritable breeding ground of unpatriotic and anti-government elements", to use Nkrumah's characterisation of the University College.[3]

Fourth, academics themselves shared the nationalist ideology and aspirations and many African intellectuals contributed to the construction of this ideological edifice of authoritarian rule. Those informed by theories of modernisation tended to equate "political development" with national integration or nation-building both of which were said not to permit the "luxury of democracy". In this they had the support of their mentors in the universities of the "North" and there were hoards of experts to assure the new leaders that they were headed in the right direction. Those of a more revolutionary persuasion viewed authoritarian rule as essential if reactionaries were to be defeated.

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[3] Cited in Hagen (1993)

One consequence of this was that there was a tendency to avoid research themes that were putatively divisive or encouraged centrifugal forces that threatened national unity. It is thus not surprising that the study of religious movements, ethnic identities and conflicts are relatively new in African research circles.

Individual rights and collective well-being

The nationalist ideology, one of the greatest liberating impulses on the African continent this century, encouraged a false dichotomy between individual and collective rights which also provided a formidable intellectual burden. In the early post-independence years, stress by both states and intellectuals was on collective rights. One reason for this bias was the continued importance of the struggle against imperialism and racial domination in Africa. To the extent that both these denied a whole people their right to self-determination they could not be but the central focus of African discourse. Under conditions of collective subjugation, individual rights appeared secondary to these larger rights. Indeed it was argued that the preconditions of the exercise of individual rights was the attainment of collective rights such as self-determination. However, what was not sufficiently underlined was that the indisputable necessity of such a condition did not constitute a sufficient condition. Self-determination did not always lead to the enjoyment of basic human rights as enshrined in the UN Charter and other documents to which African countries had been signatory. The nationalist movements which had ably used clauses on collective rights in the various international conventions were usually not able to go beyond those rights. And indeed once in power, they were so to stress the dichotomy between collective and individual rights as to suggest that while the former were African, the latter were foreign. To compound matters there were other "rights" (e.g. rights to development) that were somehow juxtaposed against the list of conventional human rights and in a manner that gave the false impression that somehow these rights were in conflict.

As far as academic freedom was concerned the sign of things to come was characteristically signalled by Kwame Nkrumah in the following words:

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"We do not intend to sit idly by and see these institutions which are supported by millions of pounds produced out of the sweat and toil of common people continue to be centres of anti-government activities. We want the university college to cease being an alien institution and to take on the character of a Ghanaian University, loyally serving the interest of the nation and the well-being of our people. If reforms do not come from within, we intend to impose them from outside, and no resort to the cry of academic freedom (for academic freedom does not mean irresponsibility) is going to restraining us from seeing that our university is a healthy university devoted to Ghanaian interest." (Cited in Hagan, 1993)

The particular circumstances informing Nkrumah's remarks will not detain us here. What is ominous here was that Nkrumah was raising an issue that has dogged the state-university relationship ever since - reconciling the utilitarian views about universities and the maintenance of standards and the autonomy of universities. This immediately raised the question about the appropriateness of the university models inherited from the Metropolitan countries including the vaunted autonomy of universities. It also pitted the university against the state, with members of the former arguing that tinkering with the inherited system would lead to a "lowering of standards" while the representatives of states argued that exigencies of development and nation-building demanded change to convert the "ivory towers" into instruments of development and nation-building.

Nkrumah was also touching on a soft spot of the African intelligentsia. For even within academic circles it was clear that the inherited institutions were somehow at odds with the reality surrounding them, not only in terms of material well-being, but also in terms of priorities and preoccupations. There was thus considerable soul-searching within universities about the relevance of the institutions, their responsibilities to the less privileged, etc. Indeed most academics shared the basic ideological tenets informing Nkrumah's threat (nationalism, developmentalism and egalitarianism. And if one adds to the overall ideological congruence, the material comfort and the bright prospects promised by a rapidly expanding civil service and indigenisation programmes, one had all the preconditions

for harmonious state-academia relationship. And indeed, for a while at least, there was relative peace between the state and academics. To be sure, from time to time there were altercations on campus but these were largely confined to the material well-being of the denizens of those hermetically located communities and rarely touched upon the larger societal issues of governance, equity or progress. Generalising from this period, many observers of African politics have sometimes argued that this relative harmony was because the intelligentsia in Africa was itself the recruiting ground for high state functionaries; social analysis for it was therefore to be uncomfortably close to self-analysis! The academic community was therefore conceived as basically collaborationist. This may be true but it is equally true that academic communities shared the same ideologies as the new rulers.

Developmentalism

A second source of authoritarian rule was the "modernisation" and "developmentalist" ideology which tended to subject every other value to its own peculiar and unrelenting exigencies. According to its precepts, development needed national unity; it needed foreign investment which in turn needed discipline and docile labour; it needed a singleness of purpose that would be compromised by the ambivalence and compromises inherent to democracy. One party or authoritarian rule would curtail "decision costs" incurred through democratic decision-making procedures. This developmentalist discourse was so pervasive and so much part of conventional wisdom in both African and donor countries that it permitted the most extensive violation of human rights to take place as long as "development" was somehow taking place. Indeed high rates of economic growth and political stability were considered enough justification for the violation of human rights. Development was "No Easy Task". We were told, ad nauseum, democracy was a luxury we could not afford. The main slogan of this position could as well have been "Silence: Development in Progress". If democracy was to be placed on the agenda at all, it had to demonstrate that it was promotive of development, or at least, was compatible with it.

Not only did "developmentalism" give rationale to authoritarian rule, but it also determined the research agenda.

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Its demands on us were that we should carry out research which would support the state in its struggle for development narrowly defined to mean growth of per capita incomes. Most African researchers accepted the view that somehow their research must address the problems of extreme poverty of their continent and, indeed in the early years they saw themselves as being a t the service of the developmental state. However, over time the gap between the research community and the state widened. First, the state's moral right and political capacity to define national priorities was severely compromised by gross mismanagement of national resources, corruption and authoritarian rule. Second was the end of the "national project", around which research could be mobilised. Dominance of foreign devised development and adjustment strategies and the blunt conflation of the private with the national alienated the research community. Despite all this, African researchers still sought to influence the policy-makers although from an increasingly much more critical stance. As a result today we walk the tight rope between an instrumentalist or developmentalist orientation and a critical social analysis of social change.

Here again African intellectuals were in a vulnerable position. I would argue that the visceral populism of most African intellectuals tended to persuade them to condone, albeit grudgingly, assaults on institutions of learning. In the "developmentalist" logic that they also embraced it always appeared immoral to ask for freedom to think and express oneself when such elementary freedoms as freedom to eat were denied to so many.

The late Claude Ake (1993) posed the question quite sharply thus:

> "...why should we care about academic freedom in Africa? It is difficult enough to justify the demand for political freedom where limitation of poverty, illiteracy and poor health and the rigour of the daily struggle seem to demand entirely different priorities. It is difficult still to defend the demand for academic freedom which is a very special kind of bourgeois freedom limited to a very small group. Why do we think we are entitled to demand academic freedom and why

do we think that our demand deserves to be upheld by the rest of society" (Ake, 1993).

It is a question that still haunts African intellectuals. It is also a point that repressive governments have tellingly raised against academics, sometimes with devastating effects especially when the public has been turned hostile to academics or youth brigades have been orchestrated to rampage campuses. This has at times bred a disarming ambiguity among African academics about the relationship between academic freedom and their social responsibility, an ambiguity that has been a source of much soul-searching by a community whose populist bent has cast doubt on the priority of academic freedom when other such "basic freedoms" (as the right to food, shelter and education) are denied to so many of their compatriots.

The "empty mind full belly thesis" implied by the demands of the state has turned out to be illusory in a situation where bellies remain empty despite the assiduous efforts of the state to close or empty the minds. Our dictators could not, as their Asian counterparts are prone to, point to material well being of the citizenry to justify the silence they had imposed.

All this - the ideological proclivities of the state and intellectuals, the growing repressive character of African states - led to severe restrictions on academic freedom. A whole generation of Africans have been educated under incredibly repressive conditions. Research themes were off limits. Whole disciplines were simply banned. Sociology was banned in Senegal because it was identified with the radical left in 1968. In Malawi there was no department of political science because it was considered a superfluous discipline given the fact that the country's life President knew everything that was to be known about politics. Research on an institution that has played such a central and tragic role in Africa—the military—was off-limits. Repression because so much the norm that it bred what some have called the "culture of silence"[4]. It became so

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[4] In 1991 CODESRIA organised a conference in Ghana on the military and militarism in Africa. The security officers impounded the papers at the airport. What intrigued them was that some papers were in French and they could not figure out why we had brought papers in French on the military in Africa. The papers were only released after intervention from the top and after considerable embarrassment to authorities.

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commonplace and numbing that some even ceased to sense its presence as problematic. Since last year and following the recommendations of the Kampala Conference on academic freedom held in 1989, CODESRIA now publishes an annual report on the "state of academic freedom". In preparation of this report, individual scholars were requested to submit (often confidentially) reports on the state of academic freedom in their respective countries. One of the respondents to such a request wrote to inform CODESRIA that there was nothing to report with respect to academic freedom in his country, the University having been closed two years ago!

It should be pointed out that subservience and conforming to the developmentalist or nationalist dictates did not help much. First, the ideologies themselves were to be subjected to so many idiosyncratic interpretations that even the most attentive sycophants lost track of what the leadership meant to say. Second, the discrepancy between official pronouncements and reality became so cavernous that it would have taken extreme forms of professional supplicancy not to point them out, even if only surreptitiously. This, of course, only brought the wrath of the state upon the universities. Third, there was the uneasiness brought about by attacks on university education itself. African academics were constantly reminded that they were part of the privileged class and "bourgeoisie of the diploma" to boot. They were accused of being literary the "Trojan Horse" of western culture, "a relay of cultural imperialism" (Verhaegen 1992) disseminating ideas that undermined or denigrated their own cultures. The attack was not only from the Left. A recent pillorying of the African as late as last month comes from the Right:

> "Throughout Africa's post-colonial history, the opportunism, unflappable sycophancy and trenchant collaboration have allowed tyranny to become entrenched. Doe, Mobutu, Mengistu and other military dictators legitimised their regimes by buying off and co-opting Africa's academics for a pittance...Do Africa's intellectuals learn? Never...Therefore whatever happens to Africa's intellectuals - whether at the hands of the military despots or their own people - shed no tears for them. Never" (Ayitteh: 35).

Scorn of academics was never far from the lips of the public. When Mobutu gave cars to professors in order to silence them, the public renamed the professor's cars "PTT" - "Professor Tai Tois" - Professor shut up". Visiting experts simply lumped us together with rent-seekers so that whatever we said against their advice was treated as ultimately self-serving. All this is, of course, terribly unfair. It is true that some of us have succumbed to the exigencies of survival but on the whole we have sought, against incredible odds, to understand Africa, to defend its integrity and to inform the rest of humanity what the situation of their fellow humans in Africa is.

In looking back over all these years of repression, one is struck by how little support we received from the Africanists abroad. Several suggestions have been made for this absence of overt solidarity with their beleaguered colleagues. In some cases the pursuit of ones research agenda in so repressive an environment has counselled caution and prudence. One had to be in good books with the state if one was to get one's research licence. Some took such prudence to extremes, behaving as if they were collaborators with our oppressors and relishing their encounters with our tormentors without the slight tinge of conscience.

Responses

We have not taken these problems sitting idly. First, there are a flurry of initiatives at self-organisation to defend the university and to create space and institutions for research. Second , the movement in defence of academic freedom has grown and its manifesto is enshrined in the Kampala *Declaration on Academic Freedom*. There are many initiatives in Africa that are radically altering the physical and intellectual terrain within which social sciences are being produced. Regional and sub-regional institutions have been set up to bridge the language and spatial barriers. Specialised "institutes" have been set up to compensate for weaknesses in the university structures, joint graduate programmes are being set up in order to share the scarce resource, etc.

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The Research community

An important ingredient in all this is, of course the research community. I have elsewhere tried to portray, in rather broad strokes, this community by dividing it into three generations of scholars trained in the post-independence era (Mkandawire, 1995). The first generation consisted of those who went abroad immediately before or after independence. Most of these were to return home to constitute the first significant presence in the African teaching and research scene. The second generation which completed its studies in the mid and late seventies tended to stay abroad and not return home. It constituted the first major wave of the brain-drain. I see some of them in this room! A third generation is increasingly produced wholly or partly within African universities. It is not as mobile as the first two and it is already beginning to constitute critical pillars of the African scholarly community.

This generational change has had both temperamental and intellectual implications that have yet to be fully explored. It is unlikely that the third generation will feel the pressing need of defending the humanity of their people as was felt by the Nkrumahs, Senghors, Cheikh Anta Diops. The interest of the third generation in culture is much less likely to be motivated by a defensive imperative but by proactive recognition of its centrality in societal change. This generation is also less likely to be temperamentally disposed towards "externalist" interpretations of the African crisis. Instead they seem to place greater stress on internal agency. This is not so much because they believe the external constraints emphasised by their predecessors do not count anymore (who would in the era of structural adjustment) but because they take these as "givens" and seek to identify internal constraints to and opportunities for transcending the stranglehold of underdevelopment. This is a useful antidote to the rigid structuralism of the externalist interpretation of the dynamics of social change although it does frequently run the risk of throwing the proverbial baby with the bath water by downplaying the international context within which African endeavours are firmly embedded.

The growth of an African community has also meant counterpoising to the "others" vision of Africa with our own in the belief that only by combination of our own understanding of Africa with that of the "look of the other" could we enrich our

knowledge of Africa. This has proved a daunting task partly because of the nature of our efforts but also partly because of the resilience of institutions and ideas we have sought to combat or change. We have been keenly aware of our dependency on ideas and paradigms advanced by the countries of the North and even ideas from other parts of the South are only reaching the African shores after repackaging in the North. African publications are replete with references to mimetic scholarship and the need to build up autonomous understanding of our continent.

My own reading of the African situation is that we are beginning to get away from the mimetic mode. The sheer numerical expansion of our community has led to greater self-confidence and sense of belonging to a community of scholars whose appreciation is valued. The African community feels it can contribute to a new understanding in Africa. In this it is encouraged by the obvious failure of the dominant scholarship to give a credible account of what is happening in Africa and the rather ad hoc strategies adopted to account for the unexpected and to accommodate a whole range of phenomena that deeply concern the Africans.

Part 2:
The Contested Terrain

While contending with the local level constraints we have also sought to negotiate ourselves past the gatekeepers at the sites where the study of Africa takes place. And it is to this that I now turn. We are extremely dissatisfied with our presence in the international arena of the study of Africa.

The study of Africa is unfortunately still a contested terrain and sometimes bitterly so. I doubt whether the divide between area specialists and the indigenous scholars is as sharp elsewhere as that between the African scholars and their Africanist counterparts. Surreptitious battles seem to go on silently and incessantly. The weapons used include deafening silence from one side, paternalistic pats on the back, sly remarks and feigned ignorance about each others work. The vocabulary is still binary

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"us" versus "them", Africans versus Africanists, etc. The persistence of such a vocabulary is clear evidence of the fact that we have yet to evolve spaces which nourish mutual respect and allows us to engage in a common exercise without necessarily talking in unison. It is these walls that necessitate gate-keeping.

Each side probably has an explanation for the divide. To contribute towards the opening up of a dialogue I will try to indicate some of the African explanations for these differences and some of the sources of their discontent.

As Africans we should of course be pleased, some would even say grateful, that non-African societies set aside resources - both material and human - to understand us. However we should bare in mind that African studies are embedded in complex relations between Africa and the West. The importance of the knowledge generated by African studies is not merely an academic problem. It also extends to the larger realm of relations among nations partly because African studies have always informed the powers that be that have over the years sought to shape the destiny of the African continent. I am not here referring to the role of individuals as advisors or consultants to those powers but as moulders of the intellectual matrix that shapes the knowledge about Africa by policy-makers and society at large. This implies enormous responsibility for Africanists, especially those of what is often described "as the most powerful nation of all times". I am not suggesting here that all the mischief emanating from the powers that be is due to ignorance and thus amenable to a dose of good research. Politics are driven by something more than knowledge or the lack of it. Rather, I am suggesting that ideas of researchers have played a role, albeit indirectly.

If we do not always seem to appreciate these efforts by others to understand Africa and if our demands to be heard seem a trifle extravagant, it is because too often in our history the quest for knowledge of Africa has been motivated by forces or arguments that were not for the promotion of human understanding let alone the welfare of the Africans - they were at times to reinforce preconceived prejudices, or for mastering instruments of domination of our societies. Although much has changed over the years, considerable research driven by these motives still

exists, feeding African suspicions of even those whose quest for knowledge about Africa is driven by genuine interest in understanding the African continent as an important site for the performance of the human drama. This may perhaps explain some of the dispositions pushing us towards what may seem like paranoiac search for incriminating subtexts.

For more than a decade I worked in Africa's main social science organisation. This gave me the rare opportunity of interacting with a large number of African scholars. From the various meetings, papers and oral comments one can surmise the origins of the discontent as follows:

The first source of discontent is provoked by the gate keeping functions that Africanists have, consciously or unconsciously, assumed ever since the study of Africa became serious business. Reading Senghors, Kenyattas, Cheikh Anta Diops and Nkrumahs once is struck by the fact that we apparently having been carrying out these negotiations with the gate keepers for years.

The functions of gate-keeping have been thrust upon Africanist by many forces. Some are of course self-imposed on those for whom gate-keeping is second nature or is just plain fun. For others the inertia of history and the hierarchies embedded in structures have drawn up the assignment. To the African scholar, the Africanists appear as gatekeeper in various guises - some transparent, some scary, some comical. Sometimes they are referees to the journals to which African scholars must, as part of the rite of passage, submit articles. Sometimes they appear as our evaluators on behalf of those who fund research in Africa. Sometimes they appear as researchers desperately looking for compliant collaborators. Sometimes they are friendly gate keepers who comment on our mode of dress and provide paternalistic council on how to dress if we are to have a chance of entering the hallowed research sites. Sometimes they harshly announce that too many of us have already been allowed past the gate and that there is a danger of our turning the palace into a ghetto if more of us are allowed to pass the gate.

I personally do not mind that such functions exist. Where there are gates, the likelihood that there will be gatekeepers is

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necessarily high. And some of my best friends are vigilant gatekeepers. I only demand that the gatekeepers be aware that they are keeping gates and be able to draw some conclusions about the implications of their functions.

A second source of discontent is the primacy increasingly given to the deductive method by the Africanists. African states, societies and economies are simply assumed to behave according to the prediction of certain models. We understand this has partly to do with increasing lack of funds for field work and the crisis and the academic and political devaluation of "areas studies". This presumably has tended to push scholars towards writing papers that can be published in journals with specific disciplinary orientations which may demand that the writing be clearly and explicitly linked to some theoretical model, with the African "case" merely used to find the evidence to fit the theoretical constructs. One effect of this is the sloppiness and anecdotal manner with which empirical data on Africa is treated. The overall impression that this leaves is that Africanist research is adrift, detached from its empirical moorings. .

A third issue that irks African scholars is the rather peculiar relationship between visiting Africanists scholars and local research communities. Africa has always attracted discoverers of all sorts. In many cases these have been guided around the rugged African terrain by natives. It has however been the habit to claim that single-handedly one discovered the "Victoria Falls". Unfortunately this tradition continues virtually unchecked. Many African scholars can cite cases of researchers who came to our institutions, were given access to on-going work, working papers, theses, etc., which they then proceeded to studiously avoid mention of in their work.

A fourth reality we have to contend with in Africa is an international division of labour in African studies. In field research, this has essentially meant that the "North" carries out the conceptual work, designs the field work programmes for African researchers who conduct the interviews, fill in the forms, etc.. The more frequent form that such a division of labour appears in is that of consultancies. As funds for research become scarce, an increasing number of Africanists visit Africa as consultants attached to development projects. They at times

associate local researchers as collaborators or assistants. As a consequence in many African countries researchers are tied to a whole range of consultancies in which they churn out reports that are used by the principal consultants that write reports for donors or national governments. The research carried out by the African counterparts is often disjointed, intellectually unrewarding and at times down right humiliating. But in our circumstances of penury, it is irresistibly lucrative. The fees received in such consultancies dwarf the official remuneration of the researchers within their respective institutions. And in the dire financial straits in which most of us find ourselves, it is difficult to be selective about one's sources of income. Some have exploited our penury to reduce us to nothing more than barefoot empiricists.

African social scientists have always had to tread the thin line between Scylla of mindless empiricism encouraged by contract research and the Charybdis of de-contextualised theorisation and misplaced abstraction that acceptance by the international community demands. This division of labour has only made things worse. One effect of this division of labour is that it pushes African scholars towards local minutiae. This might seem a commendable antidote to the extroverted discourses on Africa but as, Hountoundji observes, even this focus on the local is externally driven, shaped by the needs of the "North" and ends up reducing African researchers into "knowledgeable informants". More seriously, as a result, Africans are tethered to local minutiae in such a manner that they are "incapable of and not very eager to rise to the universal" (Hountoundji 1994: p. 24).

A fifth source of discontent is the failure to establish intellectual bridges between the two research communities and the invisibility of African scholarship. We are probably the only part of the world about which it is still legitimate to publish without reference to local scholarship. Let me venture to say that if there is an Achilles heel to Africanist work it is this lack of meaningful relationships with its African counterparts. Africanists scholarship proceeds blithely as if its African counterpart did not exist. One is often struck by the deafening silence over and the peremptory dismissal of African scholarship. It is interesting to note that most reviews of books by Africans in North American journals are done by Africans often resident in North America. We all have to recognise the

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paradoxical situation in which we find ourselves. The Africanists' work will often contain the latest bibliographical references and rather dated facts while the African one will contain dated bibliographical references and the latest facts. And if one looks at the references, one gets the impression that we have a process of self-citation and cross-citation which has the ring of a self-serving roll call of members of a club. Africa becomes delineated by this closed circle of citations that accommodates no other references. I recently conducted an admittedly unprofessional bibliometric study of 10 recent books on Africa. Virtually all of references were accounted for by 10 Africanists. There were two references to recognisably African authors. Obviously such a divide is unsatisfactory and does nobody any good.

Historically the study of Africa has been premised on the fiction that the natives do not know. They do not know the Victoria Falls, the source of the Nile, Kilimanjaro exist. These had to be discovered by the Great White Explorers. The premise was essential to the colonisation and subjugation enterprise. In their quest for providing "knowledge-based" justification for their precedence, the colonialist had to deny native knowledge, denigrate local tradition and, in the words of Miller, produce a "blank darkness" (Miller 1985) on which they would inscribe whatever they wanted. Much of the writing on Africa seems to be written as if it were premised on that fiction, although I cannot figure out what is the rationale for this today.

Natives do know and know a lot about their condition. If in the past such knowledge was made opaque by language barriers, by the mystification surrounding it and its oral transmission, the situation today is different. Today the knowledge of the "natives" is not hidden in some mysterious shrine nor is it transcribed in some indecipherable code requiring profound ethnological skills to decode. It is written in the language and script of the master and it is made available through media with which the West is perfectly familiar - books, journals, articles, dissertations, etc.

The sixth source of conflict stems from the fact we are caught up in the tension of the antinomy between universal and particularistic which will simply not go away and impinges heavily on our debates. Those operating in the very centres that

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claim to produce universalistic disciplines must be under great pressure to justify their work on the particular in terms of their contribution to the universal.

The seventh is the preachy approach of most writing about contemporary Africa. If in the 1960s and 1970s we had to contend with the teleological bent within which the study of Africa was cast, we now have to deal with the prescriptive and adjucatory proclivity of the writing on Africa. Everyone feels competent to admonish the Africans for their thinking and practices, to give them advice and to even elaborate on their behalf complete plans on such burning issues as economic recovery, transitions to democracy, resolutions of conflicts. The temptation to gratuitously proffer tips on how to get things right must be extremely tempting where one is confronted with the terrible condition of humanity in Africa. And I am sure that humanistic instincts account for some of this generosity with advice. But it could also stem from the hubris that working in conditions of poverty easily nourishes. Even more significantly is that it points to what damage the increased reliance of Africanist research on development projects for consultancy work is doing to research. Social science is usually at its worst and most banal when it turns prescriptive.

Finally is the divergence in the "moods" with which we approach Africa. One's view of Africa has always been refracted by all kinds of prisms, some of them so opaque as to convince the viewer that the African continent is a "Dark Continent". If the euphoria of the immediate post-independence period infected the moods of both Africanists and the new breed of African scholars and strengthened their faith in social engineering, the recent terrible events in Africa, the extremely poor image of Africa, the aid fatigue, the so-called "CNN factor" have all conspired to nourish a much more sombre mood among Africanists. Africa's self-esteem and standing in the world have been severely wounded and probably at their lowest since independence.

This has induced a far from justified Afro-pessimism. Studying "successful" societies does seem to impart some prestige to the scholars doing so. Studying societies in deep crisis may not only always do much good to one's social standing, it may also be debilitating to ones morale, as witness the "Afro-pessimism"

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that has infected scholarship and styles of writing on Africa. It has in many cases pushed individuals towards embracing views founded almost entirely on cynicism. The language and descriptions of African phenomena have become increasingly derogatory. At a conference in Berlin in 1993 I heard African societies described as "venal societies". Societies and social agents are portrayed as essentially fixated with matters of the belly, and like Napoleon's Army, match on their stomachs. Their politics are driven almost entirely by these visceral concerns - no commitment, no morality, no solidarity beyond the most primordial.

If in the 1960s solidarity and admiration of the nationalist leadership led to a more laudatory choice of words, the situation to day is different. Disdain and contempt for local elites has replaced the wide-eyed solidarity and admiration. Local elites are now portrayed as without redeeming qualities, convincing some of the need to bypass them altogether by using international elites in governmental or non-governmental organisations. The economies we run also have special designations, such as "pirate capitalism", "crony capitalism", "nurture capitalism", etc. Nations are said to be caught up in various post-colonial syndromes that ineluctably lead them to doom. Africa is seen as moving toward final collapse, oblivion and self-destruction. Anecdotal deployment of facts and derogating epithets have now become the stock in trade in scholarship and these are evoked to describe African societies, states, social movements, a point poignantly underscored by an inflation of epithets and catch phrases to describe African situations or phenomena.

The state, the quintessential abode of the elite is now the "lame leviathan", "the swollen state", soft state, predatory state, patron-clientelist state, "rent-seeking state", "overextended state", the "parasitical state", "crony", "kleptocratic state", "perverted capitalist state", "unsteady state", "fallen states", the "Underground state", etc. The last epithets evoke images of subterranean bandits in their hideouts who from time emerge to wreak havoc on society. The characterisation I found intriguing was one which describes African states as something that "squats like a bloated toad, simultaneously "overdeveloped and underdeveloped".

The accretion of epithets is not evidence of the need to expand vocabulary to capture, even for a flitting moment, the essence of a rapidly changing complex phenomena. It is not driven by the exigencies of new discoveries that demand new representations. In most cases the words and phrases mean the same thing and often nothing really special. The search for new terminology seems driven more by flippancy, disdain for the object of analysis, academic hubris that fuels the quest for originality i f not in conceptualisation at least in labelling.

What we finally have is a striking picture of enormous commotion without motion let alone direction. Indeed if one were to run a correlation between the volume of epithets about African social classes and African societies on the one hand and our understanding of these classes and societies on the other hand, one would most likely obtain negative coefficients.

The lexicographic acrobatics are reflections of spurious originality that Africa has always encouraged among its explorers (Livingstone "discovered" Victoria Falls, etc..). It is also likely that the exigencies of academia have spawned this accretion of epithets in the sense that one's academic renown demanded that one coin some such expression to enter the citation indices or to be the first one to apply to Africa some phrase or concept developed from elsewhere. Eclecticism surely had its share in the barrage so also had opportunism and intellectual frivolity. The epithets and the anecdotes used to clinch them have another function: to give an illusion of familiarity with the continents and its people. In this the most prised is the self-uttered insult. "They said it. I didn't".

Now that we all have become aware of the contingency of representations, we should be able to critically reflect on the context within which such usage of language flourishes. The ease with which these terms are accepted in academic discourse and in scientific journals obliges one to ask the question: Who authorises the language? Is it a reflection of disillusioned optimism which may have led to recoil in frustration from the development and modernisation projects. Is it so that these epithets cause no cognitive dissonance within a pre-analytic disposition to the terminology itself? Are the fabricators of these epithets playing upon a conditioned sensibility for known responses? Is it simply a style of discourse that the Africanists

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have accepted among themselves and for which one is rewarded by a profusion of citations from fellow Africanists who are also striving to add on to the collection of epithets? Simply stated, is it that they do not really violate the demands of existing prejudices about African societies, its people and institutions? Imagine the editorial reception for a scientific paper that simply described the Nixon Government as the "mendacious regime". And how come it never occurs to these users of these epithets that the hurling of these epithets may strain our own semantic patience? And why has academic writing acquired uncomfortable affinity of tone with those of the journalistic diagnoses of the African malaise?

The semantic onslaught on African societies has obfuscated rather than illuminated African societies and, in the process, obliterated grounds for mutual comprehension. While we battle with the complexities of our experiences, such labelling flattens and homogenises these experiences. It has led to a devaluation of theory and a denial of theoretical integrity of the African experience. It has also nourished our paranoia about African studies, forcing us to search for the subtexts such labels point to. Metaphors chosen say much more about these subtexts than is usually made explicit. The choice reflects the prior existence of a semantic grid which makes these epithets "normal science". The socially constructed representation of Africa is encoded by these epithets which in themselves do not describe something "out there" whose characteristics inhere in the epithets but is an outcrop of an underlying discourse.

It may be necessary to call for a moratorium on this barrage of terminology for in many ways it only widens the gap between the Africanists and Africans. I am not suggesting here that scholars engage in the propagation of mindless optimism or "Dr. Feel Good" pamphleteering, the kind that emanates from international financial institutions anxious to prop up the sagging spirits of members states. And I am aware that Africa has in too many cases provided grist to the mill to the growing army of Afro-pessimists. Nor am I suggesting political correctness. Rather I am suggesting rigour in the use of words and parsimony of terms that will facilitate communication and understanding. I am also suggesting that an objective account of any society must recognise the capacity for both retrogression and progression and pay attention to the aspirations and

capacities of the key social actors and not only to the views of the peripatetic expatriate advisors who seem to be a major source of information for visiting scholars and journalists.

All this brings me to the question of the relevance of Africanists work to Africans. By the sheer volume of their output, financial resources and the efficacy of their distribution channels, the work of Africanists has always been relatively more accessible to Africans than the work of Africans is to the Africanists, or for that matter than African works are accessible to other Africans. Consequently, the work of Africanists has played a more important role in the work of Africans than the reverse is the case. One has only to look at the pattern of citation in African and non-African writing to appreciate the point I am making here.

This reverence for non-African writing is changing for a host of reasons. One trivial one is the growing inaccessibility of Africanists work to book-starved Africans. The second is the growing African literature. Africans are simply publishing more today than ever before. The third is the sense of decreasing credibility of and reverence for Africanist scholarship among Africans. Indeed, one question that is increasingly raised among Africans is: would Africans not benefit more by relating directly with the disciplines than with area studies and, with respect to area studies, would we not do better reading Latin Americanists or orientalists than reading Africanists. I know this places the Africanists in an awkward position, given the pressures from the disciplines for the Africanists to justify themselves to them. But I thought I might report the facts anyway.

Part 3:
New Directions

There are a number of things we ought to do. First, we need to do greater efforts to know each others work on Africa. One makes this demand not to appease individual egos but because of the demands of serious scientific work. Both our communities will benefit from drawing with greater catholicity from the well-spring of knowledge about Africa generated by all of us. If we

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agree on the need to transform the intellectual terrain, then we ought to experiment with new division of labour which will further or be compatible with this new undertaking.

We also ought to find ways of institutional and individual collaboration in research where this makes sense. This will demand creativity and sensitivity on the part of everyone of us. We as a community must take initiatives in devising new forms of collaboration. If we do not, others will. Already, in some cases "collaboration", is often imposed by funding organisations who may insist that non-Africans find African counterparts even when neither the perceived research exigencies nor the researchers convictions and temperament call for such collaboration. One occasionally runs into non-African scholars in hot pursuit for collaborators they must absolutely have if funds are to be released. The result is that researchers go through a process of going through the motions of collaboration which are best lived as merely farcical and at worst as demeaning and likely to lead to mutual recriminations. In most cases the better-financed non-Africans will accuse their African counterparts of "not delivering" while the Africans will accuse the former of being exploiters.

In talking about new structures, we also have to consider a problematique that is probably peculiar to the USA-Africa link. African studies in North America have also to address an issue that is not so obvious in Europe - the demands of citizens of African decent to be heard on matters relating to the continent from whence some of their ancestors came. In many ways, how American social sciences view Africa has had a lot to do with the politics of race relations in this continent. A racially sanitised encounter between Africans and non-Africans in the current situation involves a large dose of self-deception.

It will be clear from my remarks that the relationship between Africans and Africanists is not as close as what we would want it to be. We have yet to constitute a community of scholars working on Africa - mutually aware of each others contributions citing each others work, critically or otherwise. There is the distinct danger that if we continue along current paths we will become totally mutually unintelligible. We need each other too much to allow prejudice and inertia to keep us apart. It is also clear that by both sheer numbers, existential interest and proximity to the

reality African scholars will play an important role in the generation of knowledge about Africa. The thought that Africans will one day become the acknowledged masters in the study of Africa may seem illusory or even preposterous to others, especially given the multitude of problems we face in institutionalising the production of such knowledge in Africa and in light of the arrogance those who have specialised in knowing us. Many of us in Africa do, however, tenaciously hold to that illusion and assiduously seek to realise it. And in doing this we are willing to learn from others and are willing to collaborate with others.

It is also true that Africans need the critical gaze of the "other" to understand themselves. And thus it is in our interest as Africans that we create salubrious space that would accommodate both us and those who seek to know and understand us, not so much out of generosity but out of self-interest because we as Africans will definitely benefit from "les regards des autres" as long as that look is not the only "look". If our experiences of Africa are counterpoised with those of others we shall all be the better for it. There are carloads of premature generalisations about Africa whose removal on the path towards an understanding of Africa should keep us all busy for many years to come. And if we put together our ingenuity and will we will produce an intellectual community that is really knowledgeable about that exciting continent.

I thank you for you attention.

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