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The Social Sciences in Africa*

The history of the social sciences in Africa is very closely linked to that of the universities, themselves being "a fruit of nationalism", which makes them "a post-colonial development" (Mamdani 1998: 2). The development of social science teaching and research in Africa went hand in hand with the birth and evolution of the modern state. More than any other institution, the post-independence state contributed to the creation and spread of public universities in which much of social science teaching and research is taking place. In the 40 years or so of Sub-Saharan Africa's post-independence history (at least for most of these countries), the state and the societies, and the universities with them, have gone through profound transformations. The tertiary education landscape has also changed dramatically. Higher education was expanded at both the basic and the tertiary levels, in rapidly changing economic, social, political and technological local and global environments. The last fifteen years or so witnessed an acceleration of the pace of change. There has been a diversification of institutions and knowledge production sites. A whole range of new kinds of institutions has emerged. They include private universities, distance learning institutions, virtual universities, research NGOs, social science councils and various kinds of knowledge networks. Traditional institutions such as the public universities have themselves been evolving in increasingly complex ways. The links and flows between these different kinds of institutions, and the broad range of outputs and publics give an extremely complex picture, and it has been argued that real 'knowledge systems' have been formed or are in the process of being formed.

From being primarily state-supported processes, the creation of universities, social science teaching and research have therefore in recent years come to involve a wider range of actors. Among the most important factors in this diversification process of actors and stakeholders is the market. Changing development paradigms have led to a re-conceptualization of the role of the state, including in its relation to the universities. The tendency at the level of some of the leading multilateral institutions is to see the role of the state with regard to almost everything as being one of creating "an enabling environment"

* This article is based on a longer research report on "The Social Sciences in Africa: A Perspective on Trends and Issues", prepared for and presented to the Social Science Research Council in New York on 29 October 2001. I am grateful to Ron Kastimir, Amina Manna, Fred Hendricks, Gusmane Kané, Henning Melber and the participants in the various SSRC, Association of African Universities, Sida/SAREC and CODESRIA workshops for the extremely useful comments on aspects of this paper contained in earlier versions.
for the market, the private sector, civil society, the universities and other non-state actors to function. "The state has a responsibility to put in place an enabling framework to encourage tertiary education institutions to be more innovative and responsive to the needs of a globally competitive knowledge economy." (World Bank 2001: 2) This conception is very different from the conception that the leaders of the African nationalist movements and later of the independent states, such as Nkrumah, had of the state, of development, and of the role of the universities. For them, the universities were expected to serve the nation and participate in the development of the country. The concept of a 'development university' actually gained currency in some countries. The reference to 'national priorities' and 'development needs' is, until today, very frequent in the language of both the state and of the academics themselves, and is probably one of the distinctive features of African scholarship of the first few decades of independence.

What is a social science and which disciplines to include in the social sciences are the subject of academic and policy debates. To many researchers, "the social sciences are those academic disciplines that attempt to impose the scientific method on the study of aspects of the human condition and life. The problem that arises has to do with the complexity and diversity of both the scientific method and the human condition" (Aina 1998: 7). Disciplines classified as social sciences range from history to law, sometimes for purely pragmatic reasons. The role of the social sciences is, precisely, to decipher, read, name, map and make sense of local, regional and global social processes and transformations such as the ones referred to above. Over the years, local and regional scientific communities have begun to emerge in Africa. The question is that of how strong these communities are, and to what extent they have been capable of producing a body of literature that has shaped or at least contributed to the expansion of the frontiers of knowledge in and on Africa, as well as of the human condition generally. There are now local and regional networks of institutions and scholars, local and regional debates in journals and other kinds of scientific fora, and significant, individual, local and regional scholarly engagement with broad inter-regional and global issues.

1. Post-Independence Development and the Shifting Agendas of the State

Like everywhere else, knowledge production and dissemination in Sub-Saharan Africa could be said to be as old as the societies themselves. However, the development of research-based scientific knowledge came with the modern university, itself being, as far as most African societies are concerned, a post-war period and, especially, a post-colonial phenomenon. Social science research and teaching in Africa have a history that begins well before most countries became independent (Ajayi/Goma/Johnson 1996). Colleges, universities and fully developed universities existed before independence in countries such as Sierra Leone, Ghana, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Uganda, Senegal, Rhodesia and Nyasaland, Egypt, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and South Africa. However, the development of social research and of the teaching of the social sciences is very much a post-colonial phenomenon. The post-colonial state built most of the institutions (universities, institutes and centers) where the training and research were carried out during the first few decades after independence in almost all the countries. The history of the disciplines, how they were introduced, how they were institutionalized, the rate at which each one of them developed, and the issues taken up by the researchers are all quite closely linked to political and social developments on the continent.

Chris Allen (1998: 11) defines the research 'environment' as "the set of largely material circumstances that determine the presence and shape of research activity, and in particular whether it is healthy or not. By 'climate' I refer to the remaining objective and subjective factors that determine the limits set upon research activity whether or not the environment is supportive". One of the key words in the contemporary context is 'change': changes in economic regimes and fortunes, political changes, social changes, changes in ICTs and change at the level of the universities. These changes affect the social sciences and form important aspects of what they are addressing. The spread and densification of the community of scholars and its institutions, particularly the universities, and the production of a body of knowledge on contemporary social issues that is partly disseminated through the media has also contributed to the processes of social change, especially in terms of democratization.

Among the different kinds of change that characterize the context of social science teaching and research in Africa, five seem to be particularly important:

i) economic change (from developmentalism to decline and liberalization);
ii) social change (changes in the status of large sections of the elite from high to low; rapid urbanization and a rise in mass poverty);
iii) political change (authoritarianism, followed by liberal democratic reforms in some countries, conflicts and civil wars in others);
iv) change in information and communications technologies; and
v) change at the level of the university and other research institutions of social research (expansion of the sector and diversification of types of institutions and governance systems) (see Allen 1986; Aina 1998; Unesco 1999; World Bank 2001). These changes span the 40 years or so of post-independent Sub-Saharan, or rather Equatorial Africa, impacting on the development of the social sciences, and forming the object of social research. Changes in the research community are discussed in section two of this paper. This section will focus on the first four types of change.

From being just a handful in Sub-Saharan Africa at the beginning of the sixties, the number of universities increased tremendously in the sixties and seventies. "Along with a national flag and a national anthem, a national university came to symbolize national independence." (Mamdani 1998: 2) Sub-Saharan
Africa (excluding South Africa), had some 120 universities in 1996, with 1,928,000 students. With South Africa's 22 universities, where some universities were built in the 19th century, the figures become much more impressive. An Association of African Universities (AAU) 1999 "Guide to Higher Education in Africa" puts the number of institutions officially designated as universities in the 40 Sub-Saharan African countries at 174. Some universities (e.g. The University of The Gambia) were not included (Szanton/Manyika 2001: 6), and more have been established since the report was published. The actual number of universities is therefore higher. Current estimates, the number of universities and other tertiary education institutions in Africa put it at several hundreds. This, in the words of Mamdani (1998), is a simple but important "sociological observation": the institutional base of the intelligentsia in Africa was very weak in the early sixties. The institutional base has since clearly become both stronger and broader. From the "one country, one university syndrome" (Mamdani 1998), many are the countries where there are now several universities. Nowhere else is this spectacular development more visible than in Nigeria where from two at the beginning of the sixties – Ibadan, created in 1948, and Nsukka, symbolically inaugurated the day after independence was obtained in 1960 – (Lebeau 1997; Ajayi/Goma/Johnson 1996), there are now 44 universities, out of which only four are private universities. This means that there is a concentration of universities in a few countries: Nigeria, South Africa, and Egypt together have almost half of all the major universities on the African continent. These three countries also happen to be the leading "scientific countries" of Africa in terms of publications (Chatelain/Waast 1996).

One effect of the "one country, one university" syndrome was the fragmentation of the higher education sector, specifically what were originally intended to be regional higher education and/or research institutions. The university of East Africa became three distinct national universities in Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania. From sharing a common university, the University of Dakar, the Francophone West African countries also each created its own university. The Makerere Institute of Social Research in Kampala, and the Dakar based Institute Fondamental d'Afrique Noire, IFAN, both started off as regional institutes for East and West Africa respectively. They no longer are. Language and regional barriers made the fragmentation even more critical from the point of view of research, publishing and access to scholarly works produced in different countries, sub-regions and languages.

Yet in many cases, the critical mass of academics required to be a sizeable scientific community that can, for instance, sustain a good scholarly journal, is inexistent at the national level. Moreover the "one nation, one university" syndrome brought the academics face to face with the state, which often regards critical scholarship with apprehension, and sometimes outright suspicion. Confrontations between the state and academics were therefore very frequent (Mamdani 1998; Mkandawire 1997; CODESRIA 1996). The post-independent state was highly centralized and power concentrated in the hands of the head of state and just a few people around him, with a literal aversion to critical thinking. Academic freedom was therefore often violated through both state harassment and neglect.

A greater challenge, however, was the restriction of the institutional autonomy of the universities: "In fact, the governments cared much less about the curricula than about administrative control-the appointment of the Chancellor, members of the Council, Vice-Chancellor and, if possible, deans and Heads of Department. The aim was to ensure political support or, at all events, to eliminate opposition within the university community." (Ajayi et al. 1996: 95) There was actually an open contestation of the very concept of academic freedom in the context of newly independent, developing countries, including by some of the most highly respected leaders such as Kwame Nkrumah (Diouf/Mamdani 1994; Hagen 1994; CODESRIA 1996; Mkandawire 1999).

"The newly established independent governments made their impact felt in asserting their sovereign rights to own and to control their universities. This was made manifest in the failure to sustain attempts to create inter-territorial or regional centers of higher education. The intention of governments in seeking to control the universities was usually stated as being to make them more responsive to development plans." (Ajayi et al. 1996: 95) For a time, calls for academic freedom and institutional autonomy came mainly from expatriate academics, as most local academics tended to both sympathize with the leaders of the country, and to be in favor the Africanization of the university, itself being both a part of and a factor in the process Africanization of the state, the administration, and of other institutions.

The epoch of 'university building' was the period from the late fifties to the mid-seventies. These were also the years of "development hope" (El-Kenzy 1995). Then came the crises, followed by a long period of general 'adjustment' in which almost every sector of the society and every institution were affected. The economic conditions in which teaching and research are being carried out have therefore undergone dramatic changes. For the scholars, however, even the years of "development hope" were "good years" only in the sense that universities were better funded and equipped, and living conditions better. Freedom of research, freedom of expression and democracy were all very severely restricted. The years of "development hope" were also years of 'silence'. The motto of the time was, in the words of the historian Joseph Ki-Zerbo, "silence, on developpe" (silence, development in progress; see Mkandawire 1999). Scholars and scholarly institutions were invited to join the nation building and development effort, or had to keep their mouth shut. Academic freedom was shunned as an idle, petty bourgeois affair, and advocates for it were suspected of indulging in "anti-government activity".

As Nkrumah put it: "We do not intend to sit idly by and see these institutions (the universities) which are supported by millions of pounds produced out of the sweat and toil of common people continue to be centers 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 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 restrain us from seeing that our university is a healthy university devoted to Ghanaian interest." (cited in Hagen 1993; and Mkandawire 1999)

Among the scholars themselves, there was, and to a large extent there still is a sense of social responsibility, a sort of moral obligation to part-take in the general development effort. The social engagement of scholars was considered almost as important as their scholarly endeavors. This view was shared by a number of African academics partly out of populism, and partly as a result of a sort of elite complex consisting of feeling ashamed of claiming intellectual freedom where millions are impoverished. In a sense, Mkandawire (1999: 22) argues, "the right to development" morally overwhelmed the "right to think". Scholarship was seen as having to be of necessity applied, or relevant to national development agendas. This has been observed in a number of reviews of scholarly works in Africa (Copans 1990; Allen 1986) and is still partly true today. Two streams of scholarship emerged among the 'committed scholars', one remaining closely linked to official/state initiatives, and another one that was much more autonomous, seeing itself as being part of the more general effort towards social transformation and development but on the side of the masses (Africa Watch 1991; Mafeje 1994). The third stream of scholarship was the one that did not define itself along any clear-cut lines of engagement.

2. Generations of Institutions

Among the most notable changes that have had an impact on social science teaching and research in Africa are those that took place in the institutions of higher education and in the scholarly community itself. The different phases in the evolution of the institutions and the successive groups of scholars in the social sciences can be described in terms of generations (of institutions and scholars). However, generations, even in families, do not necessarily entirely replace one another: they co-exist, at least for some time. The process of replacement is gradual, and new or younger generations live for some time with the older ones, except when there is a fundamental break with the past. For this reason, we have a situation in which institutions and scholars of different generations, with a multiplicity of ages, times, concerns, and operational modes co-exist, with various kinds of linkages and interactions among them.

The dominant trend in the institutional landscape is one of diversification. Moreover, both the institutional landscape and the community scholars seem to be getting "younger", with the birth of new, and new types of tertiary education institutions, the diminution of senior scholars and the increase in the proportion of young scholars in the teaching staff. As has been noted above, social science research and teaching is both historically and currently very closely associated with the modern university. Besides the universities and a few other institutions of higher learning that existed in medieval states situated in what is present day Morocco (Fez), Tunisia, Egypt (the Azhar), and Mali (Timbuktu) that were rooted in local cultures and Islamic traditions that were different from those of the West, the creation and development of 'modern' higher education and research institutions in Africa began in the latter part of the nineteenth century, and in the first few decades of the twentieth centuries. In the last years of colonial rule the numbers increased. With a few, relatively minor variations, the history of the colonial and post-colonial universities and social science institutions has been "periodized" in five stages, each of which ushered in a new "generation" of institutions.

Aina (1994) classifies the institutions into what he calls "colonial universities", "development universities" and the "crisis-era universities":

"Colonial Universities" were those that were born in the colonial period. Although most of those universities were set up in the period from 1900 to 1960, some of them were either constituted as such or the colleges that were later transformed into universities (e.g. Fourah Bay College in Sierra Leone) were started much earlier (Ajayi et al. 1996). The main objective of these institutions was to train human resources for the public sector.

"Independence and development universities" were built in the 1961–1966; and 1967–1979 periods, respectively. Their primary objective was to contribute to nation-building and national development. The "colonial" and "independence" universities played a key role in the process of "Africanization" as they were themselves being "Africanized".

"Crisis-era universities" (1980-present) are all those that are faced with the challenge of having to function in times of severe economic and social crises and structural adjustment, which characterized the eighties (the "lost decade") and part of the nineties (see Aina 1994).

Tadesse (1999) has also identified four "phases" in the history of higher educational and research institutions:

The "formative years" were the period that runs from the latter part of the nineteenth century to 1960, which corresponds more or less to the epoch of what Aina calls "colonial universities". Most of the institutions created during this phase were actually born in the post-war period (1945–1960). The first colleges, institutes and university colleges were created before 1945. Institutions of these formative years were, generally speaking: a) sub-regional; b) patterned on and often were extensions of institutions based in the colonizing countries; c) fairly well resourced. The first journals were also started during these "formative years".

The Phase of "university building" runs from 1960 through 1976. Universities of this "generation" are the "independence" and "development" universities. Besides being key players and an illustration of the general trend of "Africanization" that was unfolding:
• these universities also grew in numbers at a much faster rate;
• student enrollment increased very rapidly;
• institutes of development studies mushroomed and almost every university had one.
• "schools" (of thought) emerged in Dakar (particularly in history), Ibadan, Dar es Salaam;

Among the names of the scholars involved in the debates during this period are: Samir Amin, Walter Rodney, Archie Mafeje, Peter Magubane, Cheikh Anta Diop, Memel Fote, Yash Tandon and Abdoulye Ly. This was also the period when the works of Kwame Nkrumah, Amilcar Cabral, Julius Nyerere, Frantz Fanon and Sekou Toure were widely read and frequently cited.

Phase three runs from 1974 to 1990. It was characterized by what Tadesse (1999) calls the "politics of exclusion, exit and democratization". One of the most notable developments that occurred during this phase is the replacement of the "defeathering silence" of the past by a democratic public sphere in which a "polyphony of voices, expressing a broad spectrum of interests" were heard. Regional social science councils such as CODESRIA, and professional associations such as AAPS and the Association of Historians also came in the scene, and with them journals such as "Africa Development" and "Afrika Zamani". This was also the period when independent research institutes and think tanks were built.

The Entrepreneurial University is a phenomenon of the nineties, and of the "post-adjustment" years. Not only have private universities entered the scene, but the public universities are also confronted with reduced budgets and increasing demands for rationalization and marketability. The pluralization of research institutions that began in the previous period, became much more important.

The colonial roots and the inspiration from the experiences of universities of the industrialized countries of the North has however shaped the orientation and life of the universities for several decades. Zeleza and Mkandawire have actually both argued that African universities were born "in chains" (Mkandawire 1997). For Mamdani (1993), the issue is (or was, at least in the case of those of them that have succeeded in indigenizing themselves) that of "rooting" them solidly "in African soil", in terms of disciplines, curriculum changes, etc. In the case of the universities of 'Francophone' Africa, Rene Degni Segui (1996) has clearly demonstrated how the texts regulating the life of these institutions and academic life in general, were copied directly from those crafted for the universities in France, without the strong French traditions of academic freedom and university autonomy being emulated. Decades after independence, the texts still remained almost unaltered. Discussions and attempts to reform the higher education system became much more important in the mid, to late nineties, often as part of the (terminal phase of the) structural adjustment experience, which gave birth to what has been called the "entrepreneurial university".

A recent World Bank strategy document (2001) identifies yet another generation of tertiary education institutions. The bank distinguishes the traditional institutions (mainly public universities), from those that emerged in two subsequent waves of institutional development. The first wave of institutional diversification took place "over the last two decades [during which] many countries have experienced a remarkable diversification of their tertiary education sector. Alongside traditional universities, a variety of new institutions have emerged (...) Among them are short duration technical institutes, community colleges, polytechnics, distance education centers, and open universities (...). "A second wave of institutional diversification is now discernible worldwide, with the emergence of new forms of competition in tertiary education that transcend the traditional conceptual, institutional and geographical boundaries among organizations. The new actors in the 'borderless' tertiary education market are virtual universities, franchise universities, corporate universities, libraries and museums, and education brokers. And on their heels come software producers, publishers, entertainment firms and others seeking to tap the potential of an emerging international market in tertiary education" (World Bank 2001: 5–6).

The 'second wave' of diversification is what gave birth to what could be called a fifth generation of institutions, such as the virtual universities, and the franchise and corporate universities. Much of this new development could be attributed to the ICT revolution and to the adoption and spread of the market principles in the management and actual functioning of higher education and research institutions. One consequence of these developments is the challenge that they pose to the traditional public universities who are faced with "new missions, new demands and new competitors" (World Bank 2001: 6). The impact could also be felt in the practice of data processing and analysis, in publishing, in access to documentation, and in the management of libraries (Altbach/Teferra 1998; Zeleza 1998). The latter is now as much a management of stocks as it is a management of flows of information, of both raw and processed data, and of scientific information.

For various reasons, therefore, the institutional landscape has become much more complex. As we have seen, different generations of institutions co-exist. The social sciences are no longer confined to the university. On the contrary, while the teaching of social science is still mainly a university activity, research is no longer confined to the university. Independent research centers and regional and sub-regional organizations and institutions such as SAPES/SA-RIPS, OSSREA, discipline-based professional associations and consortia (AAPS, PAAA, AERC, AAWORD), have become important centers of research. In addition, there are also a number of research NGOs and government research councils.

Many of these organizations and institutions combine research with some form of training, particularly in research methodology. Although they work very closely with the university faculty, most of the social science councils, networks, and independent institutes and centers "deliberately avoid basing themselves within universities" (Allen 1986: 23). They depend on the university for access to experienced researchers who are very often diverted away from their normal
academic duties, but they also offer university lecturers opportunities for carrying out research as well as additional income to supplement their low salaries.

Consultancy is a "deterrent to scholarship" (David Court; cited in Allen 1986: 25). Offers for consultancy from NGOs have been more detrimental to academics. In addition to taking precious time away from their duties as university faculty, consultancy relies heavily on existing research capacity, and does little to help renew research capacity (Carlsson/Wohlgemuth 1998). Consultancy is a particularly serious problem in East Africa, where the university of Nairobi, for instance, has sometimes been called a "consultancy university" (Allen 1986: 25). Besides academic organizations and institutions, a number of NGOs and think tanks are also involved in research on social issues. However, as has already been noted, teaching social science is still mainly done in the public universities, and in a rising but still relatively small number of private universities (e.g. Université Bougouiba and Université du Sahel in Senegal) where some social science subjects are taught. Within the universities are also new institutes created, such as the Africa Gender Institute at the University of Cape Town.

In the nineties, violence became widespread, including on university campuses. Political liberalization and the timid signs of the restoration of peace and the beginning of a turn around of the economies of some countries in the nineties have so far not been enough to restore the hope and euphoria of the independence and immediate post-independence years. On the contrary, up to 20 African countries have experienced violent conflict and civil wars in the last two decades, which left a number of universities in distress. The scarcity of resources and wreckage of infrastructure are in most cases accompanied by serious brain drain, as students and faculty leave for safer and materially better environments. A study on the rate of return of students who obtained their Ph.D. degrees in North American universities shows that the rates are quite low with students from countries experiencing civil conflict (Pires/Kassimir/Brahne 1999: 14).

Some of the institutions that have emerged set themselves the goal of, and have been working relentlessly towards the emergence of a proper scientific community that is both self-aware and aware of its belonging to a global scientific community. CODESRIA is one of such institutions. Its role and that of other regional social science bodies in promoting social science research in Africa has been extremely important. The spread of such regional bodies and networks has had a significant impact on social science research in Africa. Networking is, as it were, one of the defining characteristics of research. Although some of them were set up when the universities were in a much better state, the growth of knowledge networks such as CODESRIA, AAPS and OSSREA in Africa came at a time when the universities were in crises. It was also at a time when knowledge networks were spreading in other parts of the world (Fine 1997; Prewitt 1998).

Among the studies that give a good indication of the state of social science research in Africa in the mid to late eighties, two are remarkable: Chris Allen's review of social research in 13 countries of Eastern, Southern and West Africa, which looks at research from the point of view of its organization and actors involved, the constraints, the level, the quality and relevance. The second one, carried out by Orstrom, is a bibliometric survey which looks at research from the point of view of the production, or rather, the outputs in the period between 1987 and 1990 (Chatelin/Waast 1996). There have been several overviews of African studies in the United States (Geyer 1996), Germany, Portugal, France, the UK, Russia, and elsewhere. Other attempts have also been made to present a portrait of social science research in Africa. Some of these initiatives consisted of looking at the social sciences in general, while others were restricted to certain disciplines, for instance, political science (Mamdani 1998; Nnoli 1999); and economics (Jinadu 1989). Others focused on sub-regions (Allen 1986; and the several studies on Southern Africa); on issues such as gender (Mama 1997); phenomena such as globalization, or events (the new millennium, the or 21st century) as they relate to Africa (Aina 1996).

Much fewer have been the attempts to present an overview of the history, development, trends and issues in the social sciences in Africa (Jinadu 1989; Mkandawire 1997 and Mkandawire 1999; Unesco 1999; Aina 1998). A series of inventories of the social sciences (Sida/SAREC 2000) have been, or are being conducted, and workshops on the role of networks and regional organizations and the universities in Africa have been held by Sida/SAREC, CODESRIA, SSRC, the AAU and a number of other institutions (Prewitt 1998; CODESRIA-OSSREA-SARIPS's, ongoing inventory). The universities have been much more closely studied as institutions for higher education and research, partly because of the crisis that they have been undergoing, specifically by agencies such as the AAU and ADEA (see also Wohlgemuth in this issue). Almost all these studies and inventories show how much the social sciences have been influenced by the developments at the level of the institutions, particularly how the crisis of the universities has had a negative impact on research and teaching. SAP and the influence of the market on higher education and research have led to a certain amount of changes in terms of the importance given to each discipline and of branches within these disciplines. In some instances, market-based programmes tend to take the place of proper disciplines.

3. Generations of Scholars

The changes in the institutional landscape were accompanied by changes in the demographic profile of the community of scholars. Mkandawire (1995 and 1997) has argued that there have been three generations of African scholars. The first generation obtained their post-graduate training outside Africa, but returned to the continent to form the nucleus of the African faculty for the new institutions of tertiary education. The second generation also received its research training outside of Africa but, unlike those of the first generation, many of the scholars of this generation failed to return to Africa. Part of the explanation was the onset
of the crises of the mid to late seventies and eighties. The third generation of scholars is the current one, and it involves much larger numbers of scholars than the previous generations. Most of them do their post-graduate training in Africa where universities have become a lot more numerous. This is also at a time when the universities are confronted with many more problems than before (Mkandawire 1995, 1997, 2001 and in this issue).

The typology gives a good sense of what the generational changes have been. It however needs to be refined. The first generation was born and brought up under colonialism, shared the aspirations and joined the independence movements. They also shared the nationalist aspirations and statist views of development. Many of the leading scholars of this generation, such as Samir Amin, Memel Fote, Joseph Ki-Zerbo, Claude Ake, Cheikh Anta Diop, Amady Aly Dieng, and Abdouly Ly, to name just a few, were into some form of radical scholarship, mainly radical political economy, or had a strong Africa-centered perspective, or both. Their colleagues and contemporaries in literature and the humanities then were Amadou Hampate Ba, Cheikh Hamidou Kane, Chinua Achebe, Ngugi Wa Thiongo, Wole Soyinka, Sembene Ousmane, Amadou Kourouma, and Lenrie Peters. This group was joined in the late sixties and early seventies by another group that was larger but displayed similar tendencies.

Many scholars still manage to go for their post-graduate training outside Africa. This comes out quite clearly in both the Sida/SAREC commissioned study on Makerere and other East and Southern African universities (see Kwasiga et al. 2001: 8), and in the SSRC report on the rate of return of African students who obtained post-graduate degrees in the US to Africa. At Makerere, “over the last few decades, Ph.D.s in the social science field were obtained outside Uganda” (Kwasiga et al. 2001). Moreover, sending junior faculty to other universities in South Africa, Europe, North America and other places outside Uganda is one of the ways in which “staff development” is being carried out and institutional and individual social science research capacity built (Kwasiga et al. 2001: 8 and 16).

In the case of distressed universities such as the University of Sierra Leone, actually only a few people now do their doctoral studies there. For instance, for the academic year 2001-2002, the Department of Political Science has only one new doctoral candidate who is also currently a junior lecturer at the university. The Department of Economics does not offer Ph.D. programmes, and for the academic year beginning in October 2001 will have only three to four new admissions into its Bsc Hons program. This means that most of the students who wish to enroll in Masters and doctoral programmes in political science or economics go abroad. Several of those who do their undergraduate degrees in economics pursue a Masters in Economics program currently being run by the African Economic Research Consortium, in collaboration with several universities which have strong economics departments.

The SSRC rate of return study on Africans who do their PhDs in North America also shows that the majority of them go back to Africa upon completion of their Ph.D. programs. However, although the rates of return (on average 57% return to their countries and 5% to other countries in Africa, making a total of 62%, in the period between 1986 and 1996), are quite impressive, they are still relatively low, given that close to 40% of those studying in North American universities still stay away after the completion of their programs (Pires/Kassimir/Bhrane 1999). The question of whether PhDs obtained abroad tend to be more attractive to the university as an employer, and to employers in government and in the private sector may then be posed. It is also important to find out whether there is a difference in levels and modes of participation in scholarly debates, publishing, etc. For instance, most of the respondents in the Dutch commissioned study on The Flow of Information: Social and Economic Science in Sub-Saharan Africa obtained their doctoral degrees from universities based outside of Africa.

However, the late eighties and nineties can, broadly speaking be called years of the ‘third generation’ of scholars, most of whom have done or are doing their post-graduate training in Africa. Student populations have reached extremely high numbers, and the numbers of those who enroll in doctoral programs is also much higher than they were in the sixties and seventies, although the rates are still below what they are in the OECD countries. World bank figures show that the tertiary education "enrollment gap" between developing countries and OECD countries has actually become wider: "the tertiary enrollment rate in the US was 55% compared to an average of 5% for developing countries as a whole. In 1995, the numbers were 81% and 9% respectively.

Equally important is the low level of development of postgraduate education in many parts of the world. In the Latin American and Caribbean region, for example, students enrolled in postgraduate programs represent, on average only 2.4% of overall tertiary enrollment, compared to 12.6% in the United States." (World Bank 2001: 7) The rates are generally even lower in many countries of Africa. This has important consequences in terms of differences in research capacities, for instance. The situation is made much more critical by the high rate of turnover in certain faculties, for example the faculty of economics at Edward Mondlane University, in Mozambique which, within a period of ten years, has had eight deans (Uthuri et al. 2001: 6). Institutional capacity is therefore still quite weak in many universities.

The CODESRIA Small Grants for Thesis Writing Program gives a good indication of how significant the ‘third generation’ is. In the eleven years or so of its existence, the program has funded about 1200 masters and doctoral theses, out of a total number of applicants that is five times higher. OSSREA, AERC and other institutions have similar programs. The CODESRIA Industrial (now ‘Economic’) Policies Network has also given out nearly 200 research grants to Francophone economists, many of whom in the early stages of their academic careers, in the last ten years. Yet, for a number of reasons having to do mainly with the problems of access to information, a large number of tertiary education and research institutions are still outside of the areas covered by these grants programs. The actual numbers of graduate students are therefore high.
Besides the numbers, we need to know this ‘third generation’ in terms of its concerns, movements, membership of networks, the research issues and themes it is interested in, the paradigms it seems to espouse, etc. (see Mkandawire 1997). The implications of these changes in the demographic profile of the scholarly community for the universities and for social science teaching and research are very important. The implications are also in terms of research priorities, and of training needs (capacity building). There are also implications for policy. How are the universities responding to the changes? What happened to the other generations of scholars (the first and the second), and what are the intergenerational relationships like? Is significant intergenerational learning or transmission of knowledge going on? How does the combination of generation changes, dwindling resources and paradigm shifts manifest itself in the social sciences? These questions come up regularly in discussions on graduate programs, grants and fellowship schemes for post-graduate and post-doctoral scholars, and in methodology workshops and other research capacity building schemes. In its report, the selection committee of the 1998 round of competition for CODESRIA’s Small Grants for Thesis Writing observed that the range of topics is extremely broad, indicating both pluralism and the dynamism of the social science research community. However, the primary concern of the applicants (418 in number) was with “the immediate and the empirical”. Little attention was paid to literature and philosophy, “which are two disciplines that also give, and in pertinent ways, a key to the understanding and interpretation of the social world. Moreover, the richness of the research themes is in a total mismatch with the theoretical, methodological and bibliographical poverty [of the dissertation projects presented]” (CODESRIA 1998: 4). The Committee therefore urged CODESRIA to contribute to the dissemination of “theoretical and methodological innovations”.

Today, the very mission of the university is seriously debated. In the 1960s, the emphasis was on training, mostly in government owned or controlled institutions. The 1970s witnessed a significant expansion of academic research capacity both within and outside of the universities, particularly with the spread of “knowledge networks” and organizations that are ‘owned’ by the academic community itself. However, the research capacity of a number of universities and university-based institutions and centers became seriously affected by the crises of the 1970s and 1980s. The networks managed to survive and ease the strain on research budgets by mobilizing donor support. The challenge for both the university and the research institutes and centers is to maintain but re-think their basic or traditional functions and adapt to the new context and live up to the new challenges.

Secondly, issues of governance and sustainable resource bases have become extremely important in the discussions on the universities (see Hyden 1999; Carlsson/Wohlgemuth 1996; and Wohlgemuth in this issue). With the crises and subsequent structural adjustment, the universities are faced with the challenges of having to go through deep reforms that may entail the rethinking of their very mandate. Much of the discussion on the need for reform in the higher education sector is however put in fairly narrow “managerial” terms, losing sight of what the traditional role of the university has been, and of the fact that historically, as providers of public goods, most universities survived on subventions from the state, and/or grants from private foundations.

Thirdly, issues of quality and relevance are at the center of most of the discussion about the universities and the social sciences that is going on. African scholars, as we have seen, have always been mindful of their social relevance and responsibilities. These days, in policy debates and general public discussions on higher education and social research, the production of ‘marketable’ ‘goods’, e.g. courses and people (graduates), tends to be given pre-eminence before academic excellence. Or rather, academic excellence is defined more and more in policy circles in government terms of the marketability of the courses, and of the outputs (graduates etc.). Research quality is gauged not only through peer review, but by the “market”. “Relevance” today tends to imply what is immediately ‘useful’.

An entirely demand-driven approach to higher education is however quite hard to imagine, especially as where the “demand” is expected to come from, i.e. industry and the state sector is, in Africa, beset with problems. Examples of “marketable” courses or disciplines often include medicine, engineering, computer science, business administration, etc. However, unemployed holders of degrees in disciplines such as these can also be found in Senegal, Morocco and several other countries. Moreover, the drive for marketability probably poses today as great a challenge to academic freedom as the state does. As Shivi (2002) puts it, “the State declares its intention to hang you, and tries to do just that. But you can see it attempting to do so and therefore resist (e.g. encroachment on academic freedom), and put up a fight. The market, on the contrary, ‘gives you a long rope for you to hang yourself’.

Academic Freedom and the autonomy of academic institutions have therefore become critical in new ways. Autonomy is both vis-à-vis the state and civil society, and vis-à-vis the market. However, autonomy vis-à-vis the market in a highly liberalized economy is quite difficult to achieve. At the end of the day, it is at the heart of the very issue of academic freedom that the threat manifests itself: institutional autonomy — to determine admission policies, curriculum development and course contents — and peer review. ‘Stakeholders’ sometime claim to have a right to have a say in the determination of what ought to be the courses to offer and of research quality and relevance.

3. Concluding Remarks

Making Africa a major site for the production of knowledge by and about itself, and about the world is a major challenge. It means evolving from the position of a mere object and a ‘consumer’ of social science research to that of an effective
producer of social knowledge. The research community is larger and stronger than it was in the sixties and seventies, and it is more diversified. The institutional landscape is more complex. However, many of the issues are pretty much the same. Regional and international networking and various forms of collaboration are going on, not only in North – South relations, but also within the region, among institutions of various kinds. New programs bring together researchers and NGOs and government officials. Private sector research is however still fairly underdeveloped. Claims of the existence of at least an emerging if not a strong scientific community in Africa are often made on the basis of a examination of the numbers of active researchers and institutions involved, the outputs both at the regional level and at the level of some countries of Africa such as South Africa, Egypt and Nigeria and the issues taken up in scholarly debates, and the perspectives. This paper has shown that such claims are justified. African scholars engage one another and engage scholars in other parts of the world, particularly in the North.

The challenges facing the community are many and varied. Everywhere, social reality is becoming increasingly complex. Discourses in the social sciences worldwide must therefore avoid being simplistic. The drive towards ‘marketability’ is also a global phenomenon. So are the knowledge production and dissemination techniques that go hand in hand with the IT revolution. For social research in Africa, specifically, the IT revolution brings along its own cohort of opportunities, but also of risks. The reproduction of the community of scholars is a major issue. In some cases, capacity has been reduced through brain drain. Brain drain is both external (movement away from home countries, either towards other African countries, or, which is more common, towards the industrialized countries) and internal (scholars quitting the scholarly institutions for much better paying jobs in NGOs and other agencies within the same country). This poses the problem of what kind of support is available for the ‘third generation’ of scholars; quality development and control, and creativity – peer review; how to understand relevance – not only to policy, but also social relevance; visibility, understanding and accessibility.

There seems to be no alternative to public funding of higher education and research, especially as the whole world now seems to agree that higher education is a vital factor in the global ‘knowledge economy’ (World Bank/ Unesco 2001). These challenges are closely linked with the global and continental social processes. Responses must therefore be seen in that context. And the scholars have been very creative in doing that. The major challenges facing the social sciences in Africa are quite formidable. In some sense, this is about the production of modernity in Africa, what Africans could call, paraphrasing Chatterjee (1998), ‘our modernity’.

Abstracts


The capacity to generate or adapt relevant knowledge is part of development. The social sciences came with the modern state, and the modern university, both being, in Sub-Saharan Africa, post-colonial phenomena. From being barely ten in 1960, there are now 175 universities. Knowledge production sites now include private universities, distance learning institutions, virtual universities, independent research centres, councils and knowledge networks. The first generation of scholars is replaced by younger scholars trained in Africa. Scientific communities and knowledge systems have begun to emerge. The question is how strong they are, and to what extent they have been capable of producing a body of literature that has contributed to the expansion of the frontiers of knowledge, democracy and development in a context of crises, conflicts and rapid social and technological transformations.

Note

1 Shivji made these observations at a round table on academic freedom, which was part of the University of Dar es Salaam Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences’ 35 anniversary conference, held in Dar es Salaam, on 29 September–1 October 1999.

Literature


