Is It Ethical to Study Africa? Preliminary Thoughts on Scholarship and Freedom

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Abstract: This article explores the manner in which ethical concerns have been addressed within Africa's progressive intellectual tradition through the eras of anti-colonial, pan-African, and nationalist struggles for freedom, and into the era of globalization. Africa is characterized as the region bearing the most negative consequences of globalization, a reality that offers a critical vantage point well-attuned to the challenge of demystifying the global policy dictates currently dominating the global landscape. Ethical considerations are conceptualized as being framed by considerations of identity, epistemology, and methodology. It is suggested that Africa's radical intellectuals have effectively pursued anti-imperialist ethics, and developed regional and national intellectual communities of scholars who have worked for freedom, often challenging and subverting the constraints of dominant and received disciplinary approaches and paradigms. However, it is suggested that the liberatory promise of the anticolonial nationalist eras has not been fulfilled. While the fortunes of higher education and research in Africa have declined, scholars have established independent research networks in and beyond the campuses to keep African intellectual life alive. However, it is argued that Africa's intellectuals need to engage more proactively with the methodological implications of their own liberatory intellectual ethics. To do so requires that we address the intellectual

challenges of Africa's complicated and contradictory location in the world and ensure that our unique vantage points inform methodological and pedagogical strategies that pursue freedom.

Introduction

Let me begin by extending my sincere thanks to the Executive Board of the African Studies Association (ASA) for inviting me to share and exchange ideas with this large gathering of scholars. As an African scholar, I must confess to being a little uneasy at presenting to such a large gathering of experts on Africa. However, when I saw the theme of this meeting, which suggests an interest in how Africans think about and study Africa, I was encouraged to accept. I thought it might be useful to share some of the internal reflections that have arisen within the continental intellectual tradition in which I would locate myself.

I was further encouraged to read the ASA "Resolution on the Study of Africa after 9/11" (April 28, 2005), in which this body takes note of the current global climate and recommits itself to:

> support... the open and transparent determination of research priorities and awards, and [reject] research determined by the priorities of military and intelligence agencies...;
>
> reject... secret grants, fellowships and awards whose sources are not publicly acknowledged...;
>
> provide time and meeting space for the discussion of issues of academic freedom, research ethics and human rights at the Annual Meeting of the Association;
>
> [and to] establish an Ethics Committee... and... urge reporting of violations of academic freedom, research ethics, and human rights relating to African studies and to the conduct of research on the African continent.

I read this as an expression of intent to correct past wrongs, as Africanists in the United States have at times been complicit in imperialist agendas and have displayed a tendency to give insufficient consideration to the intellectual agendas and scholarship of African scholars.

I will not be discussing the work of Africanists, but rather discussing the

manner in which ethical concerns have been addressed within an intellec-
tual tradition of African scholarship that is largely progressive in its orien-
tation. This is not a tradition defined by conventional and obedient disci-
pline-based academic study. I would instead describe it as a critical tradition
premised on an ethic of freedom. Such scholarship regards itself as integral
to the struggle for freedom and holds itself accountable, not to a particu-
lar institution, regime, class, or gender, but to the imagination, aspirations,
and interests of ordinary people. It is a tradition some would call radical,
as it seeks to be socially and politically responsible in more than a neutral
or liberal sense. It is guided by an ethic that requires scholars to be identi-
fied with, and grounded in, the broad landscape of Africa's liberation and
democracy movements.

The current context is one in which Africa's marginalization within the
global order appears to be reaching new extremes; Africa is perhaps the
continent of globalization's deepest discontents. It is the region where
many of the most negative effects of free-market capitalism and the
post–Cold War resurgence of militarism are being lived out. The overall
scenario is familiar to us, and we all have some idea of what it means to the
people in the various places we study. It is therefore difficult for us to
fathom why major texts on globalization fail to give this continent of fifty-
three nations and over eight hundred million people any serious consider-
ation. African scholars have mounted extensive critiques of globalization
that are largely ignored in the major published works on globalization.
Africa's most rigorous analyses are thus reduced to nothing more than
futile protest literature, while the continent's fortunes continue to
decline.[1]

There is much to be gained from an African perspective on globaliza-
tion. The empirical data measuring the impact of global prescriptions on
the continent challenge hegemonic theorizations and generate critical per-
spectives on the applicability of neoliberal policies to Africa.[2] These exter-
nally defined policies are dogmatically applied to Africa as if they were uni-
versally valid. Analyses that take their devastating effects on African people
seriously, and critique the academic literature that informs them, are not
just an academic matter, then, but an ethical imperative.

Moreover, after 9/11, there are few who would deny that the effects of
global paradigms and policies do come home to roost. If so, it is well worth
taking globalization's discontents more seriously, and absolutely *not* leaving
them to the United States's national security and military interests cur-
rently dominating the global landscape. It is imperative to take steps to pro-
tect scholarship from the influence of these interests. A proactive stance
would have us do more than merely evade them. It requires that we move
beyond our liberal tradition of policy neutralism to develop a more radical
ethic, one that actively questions and challenges global hegemonies.

One of the things this ethic would include would be a commitment to
greater levels of collegiality and solidarity with Africa's radical intellectuals,

and taking their critical perspectives more seriously—not just in area studies, but also in global thinking. To my mind, colleagues based in the relatively well-endowed and -resourced U.S. academy have an ethical responsibility to support, facilitate, and participate in this engagement, instead of just disseminating their own ideas, as if Africa had no intellectuals, no knowledge to contribute.

Why do I say this? The marginalization of Africa within the world order is echoed in the global knowledge arena. Africa is said to contribute less than 0.5 percent of the world's scientific publications (Zeleza 2003). The fact that most of these—and nearly all of the social science production—come from just three nations (Egypt, Nigeria, and South Africa) means than many countries produce none at all. There is no gender breakdown given, but the gender profile of African universities (only 6 percent of the professoriate, with most women in junior ranks or in administrative positions) suggests that African women produce a negligible proportion of this knowledge. The general picture of African underrepresentation in world knowledge is replicated across fields, disciplines, and diverse subject matter. It tends to be compounded rather than mitigated through the international partnership arrangements that are set up to favor the Western partners in the deal (Samoff & Caroll 2004).

Of course, international publication counts do not include all the research carried out and written up by Africans. There are certainly many theses that do not get published, and there is much that is being commissioned outside the academic institutions these days. There is in Africa much gray matter to be excavated, developed, and disseminated, and there is quite a tradition of questioning the definition of "science" and challenging the gate-keeping of the global publishing industry. Even so, the fact is that this inequality in production is the result of a material reality of institutional and financial inequalities. Today's unequal profile indexes the continuation of the oppressive and exploitative legacies of a colonial patriarchal order that excludes—sometimes doubly or triply— large swathes of the worlds' intellectuals and leaves the potential of millions more Africans unrealized.

When it comes to research that is specifically on Africa, one could be forgiven for expecting a different scenario, but alas, the same global inequalities are still in evidence. Most of that which is received as knowledge about Africa is produced in the West. African studies in the U.S., specifically, dominates the production of knowledge on Africa. In this sense the title of this meeting, "Internal Reflections, External Responses," is something of a misnomer, because of this persisting reality of external domination. Perhaps the extent to which this is so varies among fields. Within the field of gender studies, where reviewers have made particular efforts to track down and procure locally based research, surveys confirm the external domination of publication. The largest number of published books and journal articles are written by North Americans, followed by

Western Europeans (Mama 1996; Lewis 2003), and all this despite the strong anti-imperialist voice within feminism.

Paulin Hountoundji (2002) is among the African philosophers who problematize the effects of the internalization of global hegemonic thought within African scholarship. He refers to the failure to decolonize intellectual life as a continued "externalization" of African scholarship, characterized by an uncritical reliance on externally generated paradigms, concepts, and methodologies which simplify and homogenize Africa. However, such critiques of colonial mindsets and intellectual imperialism are nothing new.[3] We also need to better acknowledge African intellectual production, past and present, as we face the newer challenges posed by globalization and its attendant effects in the arena of knowledge production.

The current global scenario intensifies the responsibilities of intellectuals who work across the widening gap between Africa and the U.S. More than a decade ago, Claude Ake (1994) declared that intellectuals have a particular responsibility to demystify the workings of capitalism and all its oppressive manifestations in the lives of African people. The U.S. anthropologist Philippe Bourgois recently made a similar point, stating that

> writing against inequality is imperative. Denouncing injustice and oppression is not a naïve old-fashioned anti-intellectual concern.... On the contrary, it is a vital historical task intellectually, because globalization has become synonymous with military intervention, market-driven poverty and ecological destruction. It is impossible to understand what is going on anywhere without paying attention to the power dynamics that shape inequality everywhere. (2006:x–xi)

At the present time, African scholars are facing many challenges, working under conditions that severely constrain or even stifle scholarship and research production in numerous ways. The possibilities for maintaining a liberatory ethic that links scholarship with freedom cannot be taken for granted in today's global and continental landscapes. I have chosen to recall and critically reflect on the changing scholarly ethics that have framed Africa's radical intellectual tradition, while drawing attention to some of the limitations that have confounded its liberatory intentions and its transformative potential.

Ethics

To pursue questions of ethics is to engage in an exploration of the good and bad effects of how we live and what we do, to question ourselves and our work. It is to ask the question: "Is what we do and the way we do it moral?", instead of complacently assuming the inherent goodness of our vocation and approach. Ethics do not exist in a vacuum, but rather are

deeply affected by matters of identity and context, both of which inform our epistemologies and our applications of the various methods we use. Therefore, to raise questions of ethics in scholarship is to question the moral values—again, the good and bad—of being scholars and producing scholarship. These are ultimately questions of identity, epistemology, and method.

In *The Ethics of Identity*, Appiah (2005) treats us to a philosophical discussion on the relationship between ethics and identity. He argues that we all construct our lives (and do our work) through our identifications with various collective identities—as women and men, gay and straight people, Africans and Americans, and so on—and, I would add, through various combinations of these. Such identities, he further observes, make ethical claims upon us (Appiah 2005). In other words, our ethical predispositions are likely to be influenced by our identities, diverse and emergent as these are. The choices one makes are likely to bear the marks of one's connections with definable collectivities.

This is not to suggest that the ethical responsibilities and claims of a particular person are predetermined by identity, or that we cannot imagine new kinds of community or identity. While we may exercise a degree of agency in determining who we are, the point is that our choices are to some extent framed by the kind of bodies we inhabit, and by our social context. The identities available to one—and thus their content—depend very much on one's historical context and location. For example, sexual orientation may be an important social identity in San Francisco in 2007, an African identity may or may not be part of the repertoire of black people there, and, in any case, the meaning of any given identity will vary from one place and time to another.

If identities are continuously invented, contested, and negotiated, as contemporary social theory would have it, then what kinds of claims do our various (and shifting) identities make on our scholarship? How do we make sense of these claims; what choices do we make to define and pursue them? Following Appiah (2005), I would suggest that our intellectual identities—and the ethics that we adopt to guide our scholarly practices—are informed by our identifications with particular communities and the values they uphold.

I would further maintain that our scholarly ethics are brought into effect through our paradigms, that is, through the epistemological frameworks and methodologies that we use. It is here that we exercise our professional agency and integrity, by making choices that are not just technical or rational, but also moral and political.

To pursue a consideration of scholarly ethics therefore requires that we consider matters of identity, location, and epistemology. While our scholarly practice will tend to emanate from our historically constituted identities and reflect particular institutional and geopolitical locations, we also have multiple opportunities to engage critically and reflexively with these

as we proceed to conceptualize our studies. For instance, we might choose to design engaged methodologies that set out to demystify, question, and perhaps challenge global hegemonies, or we might choose to remain disengaged and reject any such responsibility. This, I would argue, is an ethical choice.

Ethical questions indeed arise at all levels of the research process—from question formation, resource acquisition and research design, to field methods, interpretation, analysis, and dissemination. They arise in the relationship between the research and the social context, as well as between researchers and the researched communities, all of whom inhabit bodies that are perceived, received, and related to in ways that convey histories and historical relations. Perhaps the best we can do is become more conscious of the ways in which our identities, who we are, influence what we do and how we do it, so as to make more informed ethical choices—about the good and bad of what we do.

Let me sum up this part of my discussion by suggesting that it is in the context of profound global and systemic inequality that it seems fair to question whether studying Africa is in fact an ethical thing to do, and to consider the implications of the our identities, locations, and institutional affiliations, as well as the epistemological and methodological constraints and choices that inform such studies. What does our research and knowledge contribute to the various contexts and peoples we study? How do our research activities affect those we study? Can we develop the study of Africa so that it is more respectful toward the lives and struggles of African people and to their agendas, studies that contribute to the good of Africa?

To respond, I am not going to detail the ethical challenges facing U.S.-based Africanists, as I am ill-equipped to do so given my own African identification and location. Instead I will discuss the ethical traditions that have informed contemporary African scholarship, for the benefit of all those who study Africa. I argue that the continental scholarly community has articulated ethics that have responded to the collective social and political concerns of Africans. Nationalist and pan-Africanist ethics have been expressed in terms of a broad commitment to African liberation, and defended against both external and internal challenges to intellectual integrity.

However, I will further suggest that this ethic is outmoded insofar as it has continued to be premised on a unitary identity that does not engage with the realities of diversity or the epistemological implications of social divisions. In resisting the insights of postcolonial and feminist epistemological interventions, African scholarship has remained poorly equipped to address the challenges posed by gender, class, ethnic, and other divisions that characterize social reality in Africa as much as anywhere else. In this respect African scholarship confounds its own ethical agenda and limits its contribution to the emergence of a more liberated and just social order.

Is It Ethical for Africans to Study Africa? Ethics in Africa's Postcolonial Intellectual Tradition

> *Professional intellectuals are fully aware that thought is not an innocent exercise.*
>
> Joseph Ki-Zerbo

African scholars are not exempt from ethical considerations simply because they are studying African societies. Being African scholars in Africa affords us a certain sense of entitlement and responsibility, but it also poses its own ethical challenges. Indeed, one could argue that these are intensified by the fact of proximity, as we are subjected to all the social and political allegiances and tensions of working in one's own backyard. Indeed there is a good basis for arguing that questions of identity and location have been central to African scholarly ethics throughout the colonial and postcolonial period. It is clear from the ongoing debates at all the regional scholarly gatherings that a deep sense of responsibility to African people and to the African continent has defined the articulation of these ethics. Globalization, in its negation and neglect of the specificities of identity and location, and through its detrimental effects to the continent discussed above, therefore poses particular challenges to African scholarly ethics.

An African Liberation Ethic

African intellectual culture emerged out of the politics of liberation. When Africanus Horton called for the establishment of an African university at the end of the nineteenth century, the idea caught on because it was assumed that such a university would play a key role in the liberation of the continent.

The early to mid-twentieth century saw little separation between politics and intellectualism. The first generation of Africa's modern intellectuals were all involved in the anticolonial and nationalist movements, and there was no middle ground, as any thinking person who identified as African was expected to join up and work in support of national and continental liberation. To do otherwise in the 1950s and '60s would have been a matter of self-betrayal: "The nationalist option was not really a matter of choice; it was structurally programmed as a dialective and antagonistic break with the realities, interests and values of the colonial nation-state whose intellectuals, drawn from the colonial school, had precisely to contribute to their permanent maintenance in power.... It was the catechism of students at that time" (Ki Zerbo 2005:81).

The nationalist ethic was not separable from the broader pan-Africanist philosophy. Continental liberation attracted the support of diaspora thinkers too, as evidenced in the scholarship of men like George Padmore, who worked alongside Nkrumah, Nyerere, Azikiwe, and Awolowo, all of

them dedicated to the cause of African liberation. In this respect it is not surprising that so many nationalist political leaders were drawn from the radical intellectual community.

Later years saw a continuation of the radical intellectual tradition in the work of Eduardo Mondlane, Mario Andrade, Amilcar Cabral, and the diaspora scholars Frantz Fanon and Walter Rodney. The activist scholarship of such thinkers did not conform to the notions of impartiality or scientific neutrality, or to the disciplinary organization of knowledge that was at that time being introduced in the new universities. To give an example from the nationalist years, Fanon (1967) roundly challenged the fragmentation of social realities by discipline-based analysis in his famous discussion of Octave Manoni's psychoanalysis of the Malagasy. What, he effectively asks us, are the ethics of theorizing the existence of a culturally determined "dependency complex" that predisposes them to accept white superiority, without considering the political context—the fact that thousands of Malagasies were massacred beforehand? The struggle for liberation was understood to require change at all levels of the social reality, and thus to defy disciplinary grids.[4] Consciousness, culture, ideology, politics, and economics are all discussed by the same writer, often in the same text. African anti-imperialist thought is in this sense undisciplined.

The early years of independence were years of university-building, with new postcolonial academies being established all over the continent. Within the new universities, the relationship between scholarship and politics was hotly debated, usually under the rubric of academic freedom. The Western disciplines were introduced and institutionalized in most places, with limited attention to the epistemological implications of importing paradigms and methodologies generated in very different historical and cultural contexts. It has been observed that the material conditions under which the academic disciplines developed in Europe—those of a late imperial war economy, industrial capitalism, and economic boom—could not have been more different from those facing Africa and other former colonies in the early years of independence (Wallerstein et al. 1996). At that time the continent was still predominantly a region of subsistence agriculture, natural resources, and mineral wealth, but it was to remain locked into exploitative relations with the colonial powers. The social conditions were also dramatically different, as Africa's multiethnic, multilingual, highly stratified and gendered societies were organized in ways not easily subject to analyses through existing paradigms. These were also traumatized societies, yet to be recovered from the epistemic and material violence of imperialism, and which appeared to defy industrial capitalist technologies of governance and social control.

African intellectual production was nonetheless energetic and far-reaching. Local academics flourished in the new universities; artists, writers, historians, ethnographers, political scientists, economists, natural scientists began to generate bodies of work. The great centers of African his-

toriography at Ibadan and Dakar, the extensive ethnographic studies carried out at Cheikh Anta Diop, the political studies and debates at Dar Es Salaam and Makerere, and the pan-African cultural projects at the University of Ghana's Institute of African Studies and the University of Ile-Ife were all endeavors motivated and animated by nationalist and pan-Africanist energies that coalesced into a continental intellectual movement to recuperate, restore, liberate, and advance Africa. Africa's universities also produced a full spectrum of home-grown professionals including lawyers, doctors, engineers, architects, administrators, civil servants, bankers, and accountants.

These were the patriotic fathers and uncles of the 1950s to the 1970s, and few women get listed among them. Although the postcolonial universities did not exclude women, they remained exclusive male-dominated institutions to which only a few women were able to gain access for many decades. I would suggest we include the likes of Funmilayo Ransome Kuti and Margaret Ekpo of Nigeria, Constance Agatha Cummings-John (granddaughter of Africanus Horton), as well as considering the political thought of grassroots activists like Bibi Titi of Tanzania or Gambo Sawaba of Nigeria, who did not have formal Western education but held and disseminated radical ideas across a range of subjects, including the rights of women.

From Nationalism to National Service

"Silence! Development in Progress"—thus did the late Joseph Ki Zerbo, speaking in Dakar at the fiftieth anniversary conference of the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA), characterize the orientation of the postcolonial state toward intellectuals. He continued with an unrelenting critique of the "apparatchiks," the academics and technocrats who uncritically served national governments, even when they defined the meaning of development to suit themselves, ceased to serve the people that had brought them to power, and became increasingly dictatorial.

The apparent capitulation of African academics to despotic regimes has been subjected to unrelenting criticism and self-criticism (e.g., Ake 1994). Zeleza (2003) catalogs the complicity of particular scholars with the Banda regime in Malawi, and in South Africa, Rwanda, and Nigeria, noting the role that scholars have played in authenticating and propagating chauvinistic and racist ideologies, legitimating discredited regimes, and facilitating genocidal policies and practices. In this respect it is worth noting that while there have always been conservative academics who have collaborated with dictatorial governments, Africa has not suffered a shortage of radical intellectuals despite the severe and at times life-threatening consequences of dissidence under dictatorships.

Intellectuals displaying integrity and courage have mounted extensive critiques of the postcolonial state and its antidemocratic and neocolonial

neglect of African interests. For this, they have attracted the ire of author-
itarian regimes that have not hesitated to subject academics to harassment,
intimidation, and condemnation, relegating them to the margins of their
societies. The history of assaults on academic freedom in Africa indicates
that repression, detention, assassination, eviction, campus closures, and
wholesale sackings are among the humiliations to which African scholars
have been subjected by despotic regimes, who dismiss criticism as "unpa-
triotic" (Diouf & Mamdani 1994). More than half of the continent was
under military rule by the mid-1970s, and the military rulers, like the colo-
nial regimes before them, were deeply hostile to African intellectuals, seek-
ing variously to co-opt, pacify, or eliminate critics.

In this context, the fact that a liberatory ethic has survived at all is per-
haps remarkable. Yet there has been an unrelenting flow of scholarship
delivering stringent critiques of undemocratic regimes and bad policies,
the authors of which have often risked their lives and livelihoods. For every
book justifying a dictatorship, there have been also been dozens of critical
texts.[5] And for every academic hired by the dictators, there have also been
dozens who refused appointments, who were hired only to be fired when
they did not toe the line, or who resigned once the writing was on the wall.
One need only refer to the famous example of the Nobel Laureat for liter-
ature Wole Soyinka, or that of feminist historian Bolanle Awe, both of
whom agreed to work for the Babangida regime, to drive this point home.
Professor Soyinka was appointed to establish a Road Safety Corps for a
time, while Professor Awe was appointed to head the National Women's
Commission but was later thrown into detention for failing to pay sufficient
obeisance to Mrs. Babangida (Mama 1995).

Students in various parts of Africa have mounted periodic insurgencies
against authoritarian regimes and policies. For example, the imposition of
structural adjustment policies and the governments' acceptance of highly
conditional World Bank loans for higher education met with extensive
strikes and demonstrations by both students and academic staff in Nigeria
throughout the 1980s and 1990s (Jega 1994). Similar evidence can be
found in other African countries (Federici et al. 2000). Student dissent has
not been stopped by campus closures, expulsions, or by the orchestration
of campus cultism and violence. In some nations—Ethiopia for instance—
blatantly repressive practices have continued up to the present day.

The vast majority of Africa's academics have probably not been in
direct confrontation with the repressive state, nor have they directly ser-
viced the narrow political and policy agendas of the neocolonial state. They
have rather been keeping their heads down and struggling to get on with
the daily business of teaching and research, under increasingly difficult
conditions. Overall, it is radical perspectives, with their more visionary
understandings of freedom and development, that have been marginal-
ized, and the role of African intellectuals in defining and contributing to
the realization of popular hopes and aspirations has often been compro-

mised. The fact that there have been many dissenters should not blind us to the realization that the national university has functioned in the service of the state, rather than as the visionary and reflective intellectual space that its architects dreamed of.

The postcolonial context is characteristically complicated and uncertain terrain. The publicly funded higher education sector has grown to include more than six hundred universities with more than five million students enrolled, yet Africa continues to have the lowest tertiary enrollment rates in the world, with many groups unable to access the training they seek. Vast swathes of the population have little or no hope of accessing higher education at all. Women continue to be seriously underrepresented in most institutions, still accounting for only a small proportion of faculty, mostly at junior levels and concentrated in administrative positions.

If the local conditions have posed major challenges to the ethical integrity of African scholars, the unfavorable external climate has only added to these, as the development crisis took hold and Africa's status in the world deteriorated. By the 1980s it was necessary to defend the idea of the university in Africa against the policy prescriptions of the World Bank. While that particular script has been redrafted, the enforcement of global neoliberal economic policies has led to a divestment of the public sector, coupled with new calls for the revitalization of African universities and new donor investments. The reform process currently under way confronts African scholars with new ethical challenges, both within and beyond the university.[6]

Globalization

The manifestation of globalization in higher institutions poses new challenges to the intellectual integrity and commitment of African intellectuals. The inclusion of "higher education services" in the General Agreements on Trade and Tariffs (GATT) looked set to compromise the extent to which universities could even aspire to serve national and regional agendas by subjecting them to global market forces (AAU 2004).

Observers variously depict the broad shift of the last few decades as one in which political constraints on academic freedom have been superseded by financial exigencies. This shift sits within a broader geopolitical context in which social justice agendas have often been compromised by economic policies, as seen in the divestment of the public sector. In the African higher education sector, most of which is publicly financed and publicly supported, divestment has already had devastating effects, especially with regard to research and provision for graduate study.

The higher education reforms conducted in the climate of neoliberal economic policies pose a major threat to an African-centered ethic of freedom and social responsibility, as intellectual concerns are displaced by financial and administrative exigencies (Sall 2003; Sawyerr 2004; Zeleza

2003). University-based academics are subjected to a reductionist focus on institutional survival which allows little space for reflection and ideas. These are global processes, but in higher education systems that are already impoverished and depleted, the effects are more immediate and extreme.

In practical terms, where there are no public resources for research, there is less freedom to pursue independent research agendas. Erinosho (2002, cited in Sawyerr 2004) describes a situation in which research funds are scarce and academics are so poorly paid that they in any case use their time in a desperate quest to subsidize their salaries through various forms of moonlighting. Where research is carried out, there is little time for field-work, and graduate supervision and publication activities are neglected.

Current research on the institutional and intellectual cultures of selected African universities points to the manner in which perilous institutional conditions lead to new levels of violence and insecurity on the campuses. This is creating a culture of fear that impinges on the freedom and mobility of students and staff, particularly those who are women, with drastic implications for the intellectual culture and free expression of ideas.[7] Concrete examples can be found in the field of gender studies, where researchers working to expose and challenge sexual harassment have been subjected to violence and intimidation from male students and colleagues (Bennett et al. 2006; Phiri 2000), and women's career advancement is constrained by a resurgence of patriarchal values, expressed in restrictive dress codes and regulations, and the policing of all aspects of social behavior.

What are the ethical dilemmas facing researchers under such conditions? I will pursue this question by discussing concrete examples of the institutional and intellectual strategies that have enabled us to sustain independent scholarly research in contemporary African contexts.

Ethical Research in Postcolonial Africa

I have so far suggested an overall scenario in which African scholarship has faced a series of external and internal challenges to its integrity. The external challenges of colonialism and globalization have had negative economic, political, and paradigmatic impacts on the development of academic institutions and intellectual capacity in Africa. They have also stimulated a strong ethic of engagement allied to the cause of liberation, development, and democratization. This is reflected in the ethical commitments and intellectual agendas articulated by the independent institutions and networks that have emerged to counter the internationally driven incapacitation of public universities. These regional, subregional, and national networks have taken the lead in defining African scholarship.

As seen, the internal challenges have come from repressive regimes

implementing financial constraints to curtail both the autonomy of institutions and academic freedom, and from conservative forces within civil society, including the intellectual community itself, where all institutions continue to be male-dominated, numerically and culturally. The intolerance toward radical epistemologies and perspectives has taken the form of disciplinary concentrations (e.g., the concentration on "hard" disciplines like politics and economics to the neglect of "soft" fields like cultural studies, gender, and sexuality studies), self-censorship, refusal to engage, and dismissal of radical perspectives.

The case of feminist studies is illustrative, for here the scholarly community has responded much the same way as the state, namely with a willingness to include a few more women, but only to accept a partial and selective engagement with what women bring to scholarship. Thus far this has taken the form of a growing acceptance of the need to include mention of "gender" and "gender analysis," once these are defined in limited terms acceptable to the male majority. There has not been any acceptance of feminist epistemology or the methodological implications of feminist analyses, or any real support for gender analysis, women's studies, or feminist studies in the scholarly mainstream. The overall intellectual culture has therefore remained largely untouched by the potentially transformative insights of feminist scholarship, although there is more evidence of passing references to gender statistics as a technical asset. The implications of the selective and limited engagement with radical ideas come to the fore when it comes to translating radical ethics and epistemologies into research practice, or to embracing the challenges of developing transformative pedagogies and activist methodologies. Here it is clear that the scholarly mainstream has yet to move beyond the declarations on academic freedom and social responsibility, to put radical ethics into practice, both in the classroom and in research, in exciting new ways. The ongoing experimentation that Africa's feminist networks have been engaged in over the last five years offers valuable lessons in these areas, which seem to me to have implications for intellectual development more broadly (see Mama 2005). In the final section of this paper, I review the challenges of identity, institutions, and methodology, illustrating my discussion with examples from the emerging field of feminist studies in Africa.

Challenges of Identity

If indeed (as noted earlier), identities come with ethical demands, what does having an African identity—with particular gender, ethnic, class, and other dimensions to it—demand of our scholarly ethics? The foregoing consideration of ethics in the intellectual tradition I have discussed is premised on the assumption of a collective African identity that is understood within the scholarly community. The meaning of being African has, however, been the subject of much ongoing debate, as both the philo-

sophical literature and the ongoing struggles within the scholarly community indicate.

For example, feminists in the scholarly community have engaged with both the institutional and the intellectual terrain. In institutional terms, women have challenged both the inequitable numerical profile and the intellectual resistance to feminist theory and gender analysis within African social science (Feminist Africa 2002; Imam & Mama 1994; Mama 2003; Pereira 2002). In the last five years, a sense of excitement about the radical possibilities of feminist epistemologies has led some scholars, still mostly women, to set up and participate in new networks and independent spaces in which to proceed apace with strengthening African-grounded feminist theories and methodologies. They have also aimed to produce publications that go beyond the limited and selective uptake of gender in the male-dominated continental academic establishment and scholarly networks. The Feminist Studies Network and the scholarly journal *Feminist Africa,* both founded in 2002, reflect this development.

Another key arena has involved the contestations over linguistic representation, both in terms of African languages and over the representation of English, French, Arabic, and Portuguese speakers in continental networks and projects. This matter is complicated by the different intellectual legacies arising within these linguistic zones. CODESRIA, together with its partners in the various language zones, has played a key role in ensuring the translation of texts and creating dialogue across them. Yet for most networks, the need to be continentally inclusive is a recognized and accepted ethical principle that is considered too costly to be honored.

There is a rising awareness over the neglect of the non-Anglophone intellectual traditions within continental scholarship, which is in breach of the pan-African ethic. While there has been some work on indigenous knowledges (Hountoundji 1997), it is the vast legacy of the Islamic tradition that is receiving renewed attention. This is especially exciting where it challenges the colonial separation of the continent into blocks, as indicated by the interest provoked by the extensive excavations of the Malian intellectual legacy that are currently under way. There are also ongoing generational, disciplinary, and ideological debates, all of which can be taken as reflecting the complexity, richness, and fluidity of identities in postcolonial Africa. Resource scarcity and competition curtail the creative potential of these differences, leading to their becoming politicized instead of productive.

While there are still those who would seek to define an essential unitary African identity characterized by a definable set of attributes, there is a growing acceptance of more sophisticated postcolonial theorizations of African identity in the scholarly community (Appiah 1992; Diagne 2001). Africans now understand "African-ness" as multiple, fluid, historically and institutionally constructed along various dimensions of difference, and as continuously contested and redefined in the social processes and struggles.

They take it to be at once the product of "internal" cultural divisions and dynamics (of gender, sexuality, class, ethnicity, religion, and other differentials), and of "external" influences of a global cultural arena which, however problematically it constructs Africans, has ensured that they have a history of cosmopolitanism (Appiah 2005).

There are grounds for suggesting that questions of identity have been especially vexed in African contexts, by the colonial experience as well as by the postcolonial conditions of cultural underdevelopment. Even at the national level, identities have never developed the singularity that North American and European identities did for a time, mainly because Africa never developed the cultural institutions and systems of social regulation that have been key to the production of relatively homogenized national and cultural identities in the industrialized nations (Mama 2001). The applicability of Benedict Anderson's famous theorization of nationalism (Anderson 1983) is questionable in contexts in which the apparatus producing national identities has remained relatively underdeveloped. In much of Africa, national identities have remained poorly established, continuously contested, and less successfully hegemonic in the face of the multiethnic, multilingual, and multireligious clamor of life on the continent. In short, national identities have remained very much in the making, less homogenous, less *clearly imagined*, more precarious than, say, "Englishness" or "German-ness." Pan-African identities have in this sense been imagined for longer than national identities, as have many of Africa's more indigenous communal identities. However, as neither of these has had institutional edifices or cultural institutions that might have enabled them to consolidate better in the modern world, these too have gained and lost currency with the changing political fortunes of the region. There is renewed interest in continental integration, but the infrastructure promoting this—for instance, the African Union Secretariat, the Commission, and the Parliament—is still weak. Africa's intellectuals, most of whom are multiply identified, have by and large retained a commitment to regionalism and nationalism, but they have been reluctant to take on a more proactive engagement with the cross-cutting divisions of class, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, religion, and other communal formations, perhaps still finding them too perilous in the context of their own precariousness. Yet the recent history of the region—dogged with poverty, violence and conflict, gender-based oppressions, and a sexually transmitted pandemic—compels us to take these more seriously as key aspects of social realities that need to be radically transformed if we are to move forward.

The expanding encroachment of the GATT into higher education casts new doubt on whether Africa's academic institutions will ever be able to recover and sustain enough institutional integrity to be able to define and pursue national and regional intellectual agendas. Perhaps this is why Africa's more committed intellectuals continue to invest their hopes and energies in the establishment of alternative structures and networks. The

hope is that these might be better able to keep freedom alive by sustaining an African-focused, independent, socially responsible intellectual culture at local, national, and continental levels. But to what extent are these independent scholarly institutions and networks themselves drawing the connections between external and internal manifestations of power and injustice, and engaging with the internal challenges of Africa's diverse identities and domestic oppressions?

Institutional Challenges

Without institutional support, scholarly ethics have little possibility of being upheld. National universities declare grand and global missions and visions, but the implementation of these remains parochial by design, reflecting the machinations of national-bureaucratic administrative structures and systems that are preoccupied with institutional survival and financial exigencies rather than with scholarship or freedom.

Since the 1970s, African scholars have responded to the crisis in higher education by establishing independent organizations and networks at local, national, and continental levels.[8] These have held open collective spaces that have to some extent buffered scholars from direct subjection to governmental and donor agendas, as well as from the hegemonic pressures of civil society. As such, they have enhanced intellectual freedom and created space within which a continental intellectual ethic has flourished. These have enabled the survival of an identifiable continental intellectual culture that might otherwise have died with the invention of the nation states and the subsequent development crises. CODESRIA has been a leading player in this effort, joined by a proliferation of independent research centers and networks, most of which have remained linked to it through membership over the years. CODESRIA generates a continental research agenda at its General Assembly held every three years, through a democratic process of collective debate and discussion. This has wide influence among scholars working in universities and networks that extend far beyond the Council's own projects.

The research agenda of CODESRIA over the last twenty years reflects the changing fortunes of the continent, indicating a continued commitment to critical engagement with African contexts, realities, and concerns. Key themes pursued during the 1990s thus included: social movements; state, authoritarian rule, and militarism; conflict; structural adjustment and economic reform; academic freedom and social responsibility; democratization and governance; gender; identity, ethnicity, and race; agrarian change, the informal sector, and land reform; higher education; and globalization.

Over the last decade and a half, several capacity-building training institutes have been established in a worthy attempt to respond to the decline of research training in the universities. There has also been a shift from

national and multinational working groups that generate collections of national case studies toward the development of more conceptually ambitious interdisciplinary comparative frameworks, and into promising new South-South collaborations.

The scholarly ethic of social responsibility and relevance to African realities and aspirations is expressed in the vision statements, strategic plans, and declarations of most of the networks that can be taken as representing the scholarly community; but these, like the publications being produced, generally fall short of addressing the paradigmatic and methodological implications of the ethical commitment to Africa. For instance, the Kampala Declaration, while comprehensively addressing the freedoms and social responsibilities of both academics and the state, refers only to the need for African academics to be "subject only to universally recognised principles of scientific enquiry and ethical and professional standards" (cited in Mamdani & Diouf 1994:350).

A reiteration of the activist commitment of African intellectuals can be found in the CODESRIA-TWN Declaration on African Development (2002), issued at a workshop convened out of a sense of outrage at the exclusion of Africa's intellectual community from the NEPAD process:

> In support of our broader commitment to contribute to addressing Africa's development challenges, we undertake to work both collectively and individually, in line with our capacities, skills and institutional location, to promote a renewed continent-wide engagement on Africa's own development initiatives. To this end, we shall deploy our research, training and advocacy skills and capacities to contribute to the generation and dissemination of knowledge of the issues at stake; engage with and participate in the mobilization of social groups around their interests and appropriate strategies of development; and engage with governments and policy institutions at local, national, regional and continental levels. (TWN-CODESRIA 2002)

These examples offer general commitments to universal professional ethics in the social sciences, but they do not address the ethical challenges that arise for Africans working on the African continent—the challenges of our diverse and contestable identities and locations, or the methodologies that we use. Elaborating the idea of ethical research in Africa requires that we consider how social responsibilities to the freedoms and aspirations of African people are operationalized in the course of our work. African scholars and the people we live among and study have vast epistemological and intellectual resources that we are still largely failing to activate and engage. This poses a methodological challenge. Addressing this will enable Africa's scholarly community to proceed beyond declaring an ethical commitment to freedom, to actually working to contribute to it in the course of our professional lives and our knowledge-building and teaching practices.

What does it mean to take the radical and people-centered ethic beyond the declarations and resolutions of Kampala and Accra, into our classrooms and research projects? Reflection on matters of pedagogy and research methodology has not been extensive. Sall's (2003) review of African social science includes a brief discussion of paradigms in which he observes that there has been debate over whether African social science is "methodology driven" or "problem driven," but here methodology merely refers to the disciplinary question—the domination of a political economy approach. Although it is clear that political economy—notably attention to the state, social movements, and economic policies—dominated African social science throughout the first decades of the postcolonial period, there has been some diversification of approaches since then. There is ample evidence of interdisciplinarity both within the main networks and within the work of discipline-based associations like the Association of African Political Science, which is reported to include scholars from a range of fields in its work. New transdisciplinary fields have opened up in the last decade and a half, notably gender studies, democratization, human rights, and environmental and cultural studies, all of which face daunting challenges of methodology. However there appears to have been minimal engagement with research methodology beyond the grander levels of epistemology thus far.[9]

It is therefore easy to get the impression that African scholars continue to regard methodology as empty of cultural and contextual specificity—as universally applicable "scientific" tools that are empty of social relations, cultural content, and meaning. However, this is not entirely the case, as discussed below.

Ethical Methodologies

In the field of feminist studies, for example, there have been some concerted efforts to address the methodological challenges that arise from the social and contextual characteristics of social research in Africa. In so doing, researchers draw on three foundations. The first is their location within a progressive intellectual community committed to liberatory scholarship. The second is their affiliation to the international field of feminist studies, now reasonably established, within which there is ongoing engagement with the methodological implications of feminist epistemology and the challenges of connecting academic work to movement activism. Third, feminist researchers draw on existing examples of socially engaged research carried out within liberation movements, democratization movements, and women's movements, as well as from the applied disciplines— education, development studies, social work, community work, development anthropology.

What this means can be seen in some examples of research projects that have set out to develop ethical methodologies in terms of the

researcher identities and methodologies that are alert to the challenges of applying liberatory ethics in research work. The two projects informing the methodological principles outlined here were both conceptualized by the African Gender Institute and carried out by researchers drawn from the feminist scholarly network participating in a continental initiative to strengthen transformative teaching and research in gender and women's studies, more fully reported elsewhere (Mama 2003, 2006). The projects are the Mapping African Sexualities (MAS) project, executed in collaboration with the Institute of African Studies at the University of Ghana, and the Gender and Institutional Culture in African Universities (GICAU) project, supported by the Association of African Universities.[10]

Both projects address the basics of identity, institution, and location, quite simply by being African projects. The host institutions were located on the continent and stood to benefit from the publications and capacity development that would result from the projects, and the research teams comprised African-identified researchers based in their national contexts and connected to local research institutions. The researchers were also all feminist-identified scholars whose personal histories showed a combination of women's movement activism and familiarity with continental scholarly networks and ethics.

The Mapping African Sexualities (MAS) project was conceptualized in the context of a broader continental exercise that set out to strengthen feminist pedagogy in African institutions. This process reviewed existing literature and engaged in collective reflection on the contemporary conditions and issues being taken up by women's movements. It aimed to explore main areas of activism and assess whether there is a knowledge deficit, in light of the activist priorities and strategies. Sexuality was identified as a field in which there has long been a high level of activism (e.g., campaigns against traditional practices, gender-based violence, and abuse, and for reproductive health and rights), but a low level of local research informing activism. The HIV/AIDS pandemic has resulted in a rise in the availability of research funding and much demand for public education, but there has been very little local research to inform this, and much local sensitivity regarding the intrusions of expatriate researchers. The field is dominated by survey methods and by biomedical, epidemiological, colonial anthropological, or social pathology discourses. There was very little published work focusing on local understandings, on positive or life-affirming manifestations of sexuality, or simply on how ordinary people think about sexuality.

Finally, it was apparent that despite the obvious importance to young Africans growing up in the current context, efforts to teach about sexuality are encumbered by the dearth of appropriate or suitable materials. The need for independent studies of contemporary sexual cultures carried out by Africans within a national and continental perspective alert to the centrality of sexuality in gender relations, rather than an ethnic or biomedical

frame of reference, was clear. This exercise led to the design of a research project that would involve locally based, in-depth studies of selected examples that illustrated the challenges of contemporary sexual cultures with regard to liberatory perspectives on African cultures. The studies were therefore basic and educative, rather than policy-directed.[11]

The GICAU project responds to the history of persisting gender inequality in African universities, as evidenced by the limited effectiveness of prior gender policy interventions and gender mainstreaming. Supported by the continental Association of African Universities, and approved by the leadership of the institutions targeted for study, the project comprises a set of in-depth institutional case studies seeking to explore the implications of gender for intellectual culture. The research team members were given the freedom to design questions that took full cognizance of their particular institutional context and adopted a transdisciplinary approach that used a combination of archival work, statistical profiling, and in-depth field studies to document gender dynamics in the various national and institutional contexts under study.

The research methodologies for both projects were designed to be grounded in, and responsive to, the local histories, contemporary cultures, and the reflections and aspirations of the research participants. In concrete terms this required researchers to make full use of local, oral, historical, and archival knowledge, as well as their own knowledge and experience and that of local informants, to develop a good overall picture and analysis situated in the social and historical context. While the prevailing institutional and policy conditions were recorded, the research focused on eliciting and exploring material that may have eluded more conventional methods, namely the subjugated knowledges and perspectives, as contained in the accounts and narratives of the research participants. In this respect, researchers were encouraged to utilize local styles of interaction. In practice this meant using local languages and holding dialogues, or encouraging the telling of narratives that would give voice to participants and encourage the participants' own subjective perspectives on their lives and experiences, so that the process would enhance rather than diminish their sense of selfhood and agency.

With regard to dissemination, the strategy prioritizes rapid sharing of the research outputs with the targeted local and continental scholarly community, with advocates and personnel in the institutions involved, and with African students and the broader public.

Conclusion

The rapid expansion of higher education that began with the end of colonial rule has ensured the production of a large and diverse postcolonial intelligentsia which has articulated new intellectual agendas, extended the

scope and richness of world scholarship, and added new epistemologies, perspectives, fields of study, and methods.

The postcolonial rise and decline of higher education have meant that despite the initial public support and investment in the sector that saw the establishment of hundreds of universities, subsequent divestment, coupled with massive increases in enrollment, has ensured that Africa continues to have the most impoverished higher education system in the world. At the same time, the continent suffers a severe capacity deficit that looks set to intensify with globalization, through the digital divide as much as through the growing economic inequality between Africa and the rest of the world. Africa is home to most of the poor, who are getting poorer. Resource starvation and the various cost-saving remedies currently being experimented with under the rubric of higher education reform have created an institutional context that can barely support research at all, let alone research that affords African scholars the integrity to honor their well-developed ethical sensibilities. The global institutional and policy landscape also has major implications for the feasibility of ethical research by Africans. There are very limited opportunities for African scholars to come together and carry out independent research that responds to the collective agendas and aspirations of Africans and the social movements pushing for the democratization and development of the region.

The independent scholarly networks that have been formed offer some opportunities, but these cannot be compared to universities in terms of scope or scale. In any case, these rely on the existing community of mostly university-based scholars, and their efforts are increasingly affected by the fact that the universities are less and less able to turn out skilled researchers. The inclusion of methodology workshops at the beginning of research projects has become a routine practice that seeks to mitigate the declining level of capacity across the region, but as the situation has continued to deteriorate, it has become clear that this cannot compensate for the lack of the years of basic training that only large public institutions can hope to offer.

Ethical questions, and the reflection needed to translate and develop declarations on liberatory scholarly ethics into ethical methodologies, get buried under the intense tidal pressure of timely reporting on donor contracts that require rapid turnover and outputs, no matter what. Researchers clamor and compete for even these limited opportunities because the modest honoraria have become necessary for their survival, given their paltry salaries. The larger scale, long-term, multiyear team projects essential to theoretical development are rare.

My discussion of the African context suggests that intellectual ethics here are not necessarily universal because they are so profoundly shaped by the regional and historical context and struggles. In Africa, these are the circumstances of colonialism and anti-imperialism, nationalism, and pan-Africanism. There are also newer, radical epistemologies that are yet to

make a more substantial mark on an academic mainstream that has yet to realize the liberatory mandate afforded to it by the people of Africa who have typically embraced and supported the continent's universities. African scholarly traditions have consistently rejected the liberal philosophical assumption that demands disengagement and distance from social context rather than engagement and action. For Africans, ethical scholarship is socially responsible scholarship that supports freedom, not scholarship that is free from social responsibility.

Acknowledgments

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Notes

1. Paul Zeleza's work provides an exception (Zeleza 2003) to the general omission of Africa in works on globalization. For examples of rigorous analyses of globalization, see Held (1999), Stiglitz (2001), and Ferguson (2006).
2. The African scholarship on neoliberal economics is illustrative; see Mkandawire and Soludo (1996); Mkandawire (1999).
3. Earlier critics include Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986), Hountondji (1983), Mudimbe (1988), and Appiah (1992).
4. In this sense it is not "interdisciplinary" in the manner of African studies in the United State either, because that term assumes the prior existence of disciplines, which the liberation thinkers did not confine themselves to.
5. See, for example, the scholarship of the likes of Samir Amin and Claude Ake, and the many studies on militarism. *The Transition to Democracy in Nigeria* by Olagunju et al. (1993), dedicated to Babangida himself, was roundly condemned and its arguments discredited by other Nigerian scholars.
6. Sawyerr (2004) provides a review of the current scenario.
7. Publication of the findings from the project "Gender and Institutional Culture in Selected African Universities," carried out by the African Gender Institute at the University of Cape Town, with support from the Association of African Universities, is forthcoming.
8. For instance, the Association of African Women for Research and Development; the Organisation for Social Science in Research in East and Southern Africa; the African Institute for Agrarian Studies in Harare; the Association of African Political Scientists. National research centers—including the Centre for Basic Research in Uganda, the Centre for Advanced Social Studies in Port Harcourt, the Centre for Research and Documentation in Kano, the Forum for Social Studies in Addis Ababa, and a number of new gender studies groupings, including the Abuja-based Network for Women's Studies in Nigeria and the Feminist Studies Network convened by the African Gender Institute—have joined a plethora of African women's movement organizations and networks pursuing activist information and training work.
9. Sall (2002) briefly refers to the Senegalese initiative to indigenize sociology and the discussion of interview methods that are closer to local styles of communication.
10. With the support of the Ford Foundation.
11. The Mapping African Sexualities researchers identified the following research subjects:
    Urban Sexual Initiation Institutions in Uganda: A Case Study of the Ssenga in Kampala, Uganda (Sylvia Tamale);
    The Witches of Gambaga: What It Means to Be a Witch in the Northern Region of Ghana (Yaba Badoe);
    The Views of Young People in the Limpopo Province of South Africa concerning Sexuality (Thelma Maluleke);

(A)sexualising the Youth in Modern Ghana? A Case Study of Virgin Clubs
   (Akosua Darkwah and Alexina Arthur);
The Sexual Politics of Zina under Shari'a in Northern Nigeria: The Strug-
   gles surrounding Amina Lawal (Charmaine Pereira et al.);
Sexualities of First Year Students at the University of the Cape Peninsula
   (Elaine Salo et al.);
The Gender and Institutional Culture Studies at the Universities of Addis
   Ababa, Ibadan, Ghana, Chiekh Anta Diop, and Zimbabwe.