

Knowledge and Power: Perspectives on the Production and Decolonization of African/ist Knowledges

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Editor's note: This article is a revised version of the Presidential Address given at the 62nd Annual Meeting of the African Studies Association, November 2019, Boston, MA.

Abstract: African scholarship on epistemic decolonization and African self-determination has generated reflection and debate among African Studies scholars for several decades. The debate has gained new force in recent years and has resonated in African studies in new ways, prompted in part by political events and social activism around enduring racism. Grosz-Ngaté's 2019 Presidential Lecture provides an opportunity to reflect further on these issues. It explores questions related to the production and decolonization of knowledge in conversations with colleagues in Mali and Senegal and draws out the implications of these discussions for African Studies Association members and for the Association at large.

Résumé: Les études africaines sur la décolonisation épistémique et l'autodétermination africaine ont suscité une réflexion et un débat parmi les chercheurs en études africaines pendant plusieurs décennies. Le débat a gagné en force ces dernières années et a trouvé de nouvelles résonances dans les études africaines, en partie à la suite d'événements politiques et d'activisme social autour du racisme persistant. La conférence présidentielle de Grosz-Ngaté de 2019 offre l'occasion de réfléchir davantage sur ces questions. Cet article explore les questions liées à la production et à la décolonisation des savoirs à travers des conversations soutenues avec des collègues du

African Studies Review, Volume 63, Number 4 (December 2020), pp. 689–718

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doi:[10.1017/asr.2020.102](https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2020.102)

Mali et du Sénégal et en tire les conclusions pour les membres de l'Association d'études africaines et pour l'Association dans son ensemble.

Resumo: Em África, a produção académica em torno da descolonização epistémica e da autodeterminação africana gerou, entre os académicos dos departamentos de Estudos Africanos, uma reflexão e um debate que se estenderam ao longo de décadas. Nos últimos anos, esse debate ganhou novo fôlego, e assumiu novas configurações nos estudos africanos, em parte resultantes de acontecimentos políticos e do ativismo social de combate ao racismo sistémico. A lição proferida pela então presidente da ASA, Grosz-Ngaté, em 2019, abre a oportunidade de aprofundarmos a reflexão sobre estes temas. Nela, Grosz-Ngaté aborda as questões relacionadas com a produção e a descolonização do conhecimento que foram sendo levantadas em conversas com colegas do Mali e do Senegal, e retira algumas ilações sobre as consequências destas discussões para os membros da African Studies Association e para a Associação como um todo.

Keywords: knowledge production; power; epistemic decolonization; intellectual partnership; Mali; Senegal; African Studies Association

(Received 10 June 2020 – Revised 01 October 2020 – Accepted 01 October 2020)

Introduction

My topic for this Presidential Lecture grew out of the African Studies graduate methods seminar I taught at Indiana University, Bloomington, for ten years after the Program established its master's degree in African Studies in 2007. The first part of this seminar focused on what I termed the "The History and Politics of African Studies" (in the U.S.) and was intended to make students aware that African Studies also had a history to be critically examined. Methods had to be considered in this context, since they have an epistemological dimension and are not merely research techniques. The critical analyses and African Studies Association (ASA) presidential lectures we discussed over the years included Pearl Robinson's "Area Studies in Search of Africa" (2003), detailing the long-ignored history of African Studies in historically black colleges and universities; the film "Herskovits at the Heart of Blackness"; and African critiques of northern scholars who conduct their research with little or no consultation with Africa-based scholars. Today's lecture presents me with an opportunity to further explore the issues that arose in our seminar discussions and to place their implications before the larger African Studies community. In doing so, I will not revisit reflections and debates within the disciplinary subfields of African Studies that have questioned research practices and their conceptual underpinnings for several decades, nor any of their outcomes. I turn instead to the very question of knowledge production in relation to the decolonization of Africanist knowledge, a question that has been taken up by the wider scholarly community, as indicated by the number of panels and roundtables at the 2018 ASA meeting

and at the 2019 biennial European Conference on African Studies (ECAS). Rather than merely making a case based on the publications of known thinkers, I center my discussion on the dialogues around the decolonization of Euro-American knowledge and related research practices which I had with Senegalese and Malian colleagues in early 2019, and which built on years of anthropological research. Perspectives from francophone Africa make an important contribution to the predominantly anglophone-focused scholarship in U.S. African Studies, as I consider what a shared, collaborative, Africa-centered African Studies might look like. To begin tracing paths toward this goal, I draw out some implications for action by individual ASA members, institutions, and by the African Studies Association at large.

Conceptual Framework for the Decolonization of Knowledge

Epistemic decolonization has preoccupied African intellectuals since the 1950s, focused for some time on the question “is there an ‘African philosophy’”? This question has raised fundamental issues of relevance beyond the discipline of philosophy. Kwasi Wiredu (2002:59–60) has noted that he first participated in the debate on conceptual decolonization in philosophy in 1980 and that Ngugi wa Thiong’o joined the discussion in 1986 with his *Decolonizing the Mind*. Focusing on the relationship between knowledge and power, V. Y. Mudimbe sought to understand the dominant epistemological order that provided the categories and concepts used by Western as well as by African analysts (1988:x), which enabled particular types of discourse at particular points in time (1994:xiv). He approached the problem by examining Western images and discourses on African societies and peoples, showing how they contributed to the construction of Africa as a “paradigm of difference” and Otherness. His analyses led him to conclude that African discourses were silenced or transmuted by Western discourses and that local knowledges were subsumed by “scientific” disciplines (1994:xiv).

Mudimbe put forth the concept of the “colonial library” to designate the body of texts and representations that began to emerge from the writings of travelers and explorers by the end of the nineteenth century and came to encompass the Africanist knowledge produced during and after the colonial period, including that of the social sciences, especially anthropology. Although critiqued by some (see Wai 2015), the colonial library became an important conceptual tool for the decolonization of knowledge. The concept of the colonial library was revisited and debated in 2013 by a large cross-disciplinary group of academics during a conference in Dakar, co-organized by Point Sud and CODESRIA (Point Sud 2013). Furthermore, African writers, filmmakers, and artists have contributed to the construction of counter-archives to the colonial library. They, like the early generation of African historians whose research sought to demonstrate that African ethnicities and nations have their own histories, challenged the dominant discourses.¹

The debates have gained renewed force as new voices have joined in over the past two decades and engaged with the seminal work of Wiredu, Ngugi,

Mudimbe, and others to advance epistemic decolonization and African self-affirmation (Kodjo-Grandvaux 2016) in the twenty-first century world.² Building on two earlier volumes (2013a, 2013b), Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni expands the conceptual apparatus with which to envision epistemic decolonization. He argues that it is part of a triple process that entails “provincializing” Europe, evoking Dipesh Chakrabarty (2000), along with Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s (1993) “moving the centre,” and “deprovincializing” Africa. Deprovincializing Africa goes hand in hand with “de-Europeanizing” the world. However, this does not mean rejecting all European knowledge, but rather “centering Africa as a legitimate historical unit of analysis and epistemic site from which to interpret the world while at the same time globalizing knowledge from Africa” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018:4). The goal of the process is to achieve “epistemic freedom,” predicated on “cognitive justice,” that is, the “right to think, theorize, interpret the world, develop own methodologies and write from where one is located, unencumbered by Eurocentrism” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018:3). This would democratize knowledge so that the knowledge we now refer to in the singular would be only one of plural knowledges (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018:4).³

The rethinking of interpretive paradigms has been accompanied by efforts to decolonize post-secondary institutions in Africa. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, for example, formed the Africa Decolonial Research Network (ADERN) in 2011. He also applies radical critiques of the Western episteme to his analysis of social movements such as the “Rhodes Must Fall” movements of 2015 and 2016. Analyzing them in the context of the decolonization of South African universities and of broader African anti-colonial and post-colonial protests, he argues that they were part of “resurgent decolonial struggles of the 21st century” (2018:222). His analysis complements Achille Mbembe’s reflections on the decolonization of the university in the wake of the same events, where Mbembe observed that there is growing support in favor of a decolonization of knowledge and of the university as an institution, because the hegemonic tradition not only makes it difficult to think outside its frame but also represses anything that is thought, expressed, and imagined outside it. While South African universities confront the additional challenge of overcoming their histories of racial segregation and unequal education that were enshrined in law during apartheid, Mbembe’s reconsideration of key ideas put forth by Ngugi wa Thiong’o is equally applicable to the decolonization process in other countries where the European heritage in higher education has not been overcome. Evoking Ngugi, Mbembe (2016:34) reminds his readers that decolonization is an ongoing process of “see[ing] ourselves clearly in relation to ourselves and to other selves with whom we share the universe,” i.e., a search for an African identity which, for Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018:115), is integral to the struggle for epistemic freedom. Decolonization of the university requires replacing the Eurocentric canon which “attributes truth only to the Western way of knowledge production” and remains hegemonic at African universities (Mbembe 2015:4). In contrast, Mbembe does not simply reject “the Western archive,” contending that it can be used critically and selectively because it is neither monolithic nor the

exclusive property of the West and contains within it its own refutation (Mbembe 2015:18). Africa and its diasporas contributed to its construction and can therefore lay claim to it. Participants in the Dakar conference on the colonial archive (Point Sud 2013) and several Senegalese colleagues with whom I spoke also favored using it critically as a resource in developing modes of self-representation. To help advance the decolonization of African universities, Mbembe, like Paul Zeleza (2007) before him, suggests that institutions invest in diasporic intellectual networks which are constituted through the mobility of transnational talent. In addition to engaging with this talent, it is equally important that universities reinforce and expand intra-African co-operations. Mbembe proposes setting up “study in Africa” programs for African students to nurture new intra-continental academic networks.

Since education is a path to the acquisition of knowledge about the self and the Other, it demands curriculum reforms which, for all these thinkers, includes the teaching and thus the refocusing on African languages. Souleymane Bachir Diagne adds an important dimension to the emphasis on the re-centering of African languages by demonstrating the value of translation to the decolonization project: by thinking “from language to language” one cultivates the capacity to decenter oneself and to see things from more than one perspective (2017:73), which also challenges one’s worldview. Translation is therefore also a path to self-knowledge and knowledge of the Other and entails introspection. Declaring (*dire*) the value of translation in spite of colonialism’s impact on African languages is, for Diagne, an epistemological issue more than an issue of language politics or of domination (2017:76). Evoking Ngugi as well as Wiredu, he points out that by thinking from language to language one aims for a “language of languages” which is nothing other than translation (2017:79). His emphasis on thinking in translation—in African languages as well as in the French, English, or Portuguese now spoken in Africa—does not mean that he is resigned to the fact that African languages are dominated by the former colonial languages. To the contrary, he asserts that African languages must become languages of creation, of science, and of philosophical production within the asymmetrical space of world languages. But for this to happen requires political will, as Mukoma wa Ngugi (2018 unpaginated) stressed in revisiting his father’s work: “Governments must change their policy toward the teaching of African languages and create economic opportunities in those languages. . . . African languages have to move from being primarily social languages to vehicles of political, cultural, and economic growth.”

Contextualizing West African Perspectives

Inspired by the scholarship on the topic before us, I decided to pursue the questions that arose in the graduate seminar at Indiana by turning to colleagues in Mali and Senegal for their perspectives from the standpoint of their personal histories and their participation in knowledge production. My

research in these countries has shaped me as an anthropologist, and the relationships I formed over the years have enriched my personal life. I owe a special debt to the women and men in the rural Malian village among whom I lived while conducting dissertation research and with whom I continue to maintain ties. Beyond these personal considerations, I chose this regional focus to highlight ideas, activities, and issues of concern to Francophone scholars who are, or have been, engaged in the education of the next generation. They belong to an epistemic community whose work is less well-known in the United States than that of Anglophone scholars, since most of their publications have not been translated into English. Although I have known some of these intellectuals for years, all conversations took place in February and March of 2019, when I approached them to explain my plan for the ASA presidential lecture, my interest in the topic, and our consideration of it in the graduate seminar.⁴ I had prepared a set of open-ended questions but treated the discussions as conversations (*causeuses*) rather than as interviews. Regrettably, I was able to speak with fewer women than I would have wished, in part because some were not available during my stays. It, however, also reflects the continuing gender imbalance in academia, particularly in Mali, notwithstanding such prominent women historians as Adame Ba Konaré and Bintou Sanankoua.

My interlocutors represent different disciplines and are at different stages in their lives and careers; some were educated in Europe and returned home, others were educated in Senegal and Mali, and two are in the process of completing their degrees. They thus evoked different aspects of the decolonization of knowledge. From our conversations, I have selected three prominent foci related to epistemic and structural issues for what they can tell us, and from which we can learn as we seek to transform existing northern practices in knowledge production. My presentation relies extensively on citations and summaries of the expressed points of view, because I did not consider them “research data” to be used for the development of my own theoretical propositions. I cannot capture the richness of our conversations here, nor can I convey these colleagues’ own voices to the extent that I would wish, but I am taking steps to make this lecture the beginning of a joint publication project.

While there is considerable convergence on the issues and concerns that were voiced, there are also differences, owing to the histories of the societies that were integrated into the nations we know as Mali and Senegal, their geographies and ecologies, and especially the incorporation of the two territories into the French West African Federation of colonies with Dakar as its capital. The institutions of higher education in these two countries reflect their respective colonial and post-independence histories and the corresponding differential access to resources and government support. Whereas Malian higher education institutions in Bamako date to the early years of independence, they were not brought together until 1993 and did not begin to function as the University of Bamako until 1996.

Conversely, the French heritage in Senegalese higher education has a longer history. Various institutions began to be established after World War I, and the *Institut des Hautes Etudes de Dakar* was first formed in 1950 as a branch of the University of Bordeaux. It became the eighteenth French university attached to Bordeaux and Paris in 1957 and was only renamed Université Cheikh Anta Diop in 1987. The Université Gaston Berger in Saint-Louis was established in 1992, and other regional universities have been added since then. The Université de Ségou in Mali opened only in 2012 and remains the only regional university in the country. Its development, like that of the University of Bamako which was split into four in 2011, has been impacted by a reduction in funding due to the armed conflict and the insecurity that have prevailed in Mali since 2012.⁵ The implications of the lack of funding, along with the insecurity, returned time and again in the course of discussion with Malian colleagues.⁶

Perspectives from Senegal and Mali

Reflections on the Epistemic Decolonization of Knowledge

It had been nearly sixty years since Senegal and Mali achieved political independence from France when I spoke with my colleagues. I began by asking who or what had inspired them in their professional trajectories and where they thought we were in the decolonization process, given the discussion of the topic during the intervening years. Below I incorporate the voices of several colleagues to highlight different perspectives on this ongoing process and the challenges it continues to present.

Moussa Sow of the *Institut des Sciences Humaines* in Bamako, who obtained his doctorate in France, evoked the power relations between the West and Africa as he recalled his post-doctoral research experience among French peasants in a program established for young “Third World” scholars.⁷ As a young African scholar, he was expected to learn in Europe and take his knowledge back home. For him, the position of African scholars is integral to the relationship that made Africa the “Other,” which had to be civilized, educated, and developed in an elder-junior relationship. He concluded that the Western gaze is overdetermining because it is linked to a significant power in relation to African societies. Changing this dynamic and accepting African autonomy continues to be difficult.

Sociologist Fatou Sow remembered her time as a student and junior scholar at the university in Dakar, when French professors set the order of the day as they directed dissertations and determined research topics and methodologies. The work of Cheikh Anta Diop represented a profound rupture in this context, despite the negative reactions of traditional Egyptologists and other researchers and the difficulties he encountered in his university career as a result. While much has changed, she noted that French power (*Françafrique*) remains a reality: the global North still dominates scientific

production, albeit in a different set of power relations, and concepts still need to be rethought, as I will highlight next.

The need to critically examine theories came to the fore when I mentioned the importance of theory in northern institutions during my conversation with historian Rokhaya Fall-Sokhna. She was quick to tell me that theories elaborated in the north which she and her colleagues felt compelled to adopt (e.g., modes of production) often did them a disservice because they distracted them from their own priorities. Focusing on knowledge production in the context of north-south power relations, Fall-Sokhna's Malian colleague Doulaye Konaté pointed out that the conceptual apparatus in the humanities and social sciences has not changed much, and that it has been difficult to break out of colonial paradigms. Concepts such as "empire" and "kingdom," for example, are still used, although they do not reflect African realities and ought to be rethought. The validation of knowledge—who has the authority to validate—remains a concern as well, since that which does not come from the north is frequently thought to be questionable.

Two of his Segouian colleagues also raised this issue and drew attention to its psychological implications from different perspectives. Amadou Traoré observed that local production carries no value compared with what comes from France or the United States, producing a kind of inferiority complex. Taken to its logical conclusion, it means that "We pretend that we are free but in reality, we are not." Mamoutou Tounkara, who earned his doctorate in France, suggested that this inferiority complex had been overcome as Malians obtained degrees in France according to the same criteria as French students and proved that they are equally competent once they returned home.

Sociolinguist Hamidou Magassa took up the issue of paradigms from a different angle when he contended that they have not significantly changed, using language as an example. He pointed out that it is not possible to access "universal knowledge" in Mali without knowing French or English; although Arabic was introduced centuries before French without ever achieving equal status, it is spoken only by a small minority of the population today. In short, colonialism established a power relation that runs through (*qui passe par*) the languages and linguistic dynamics and hence the dynamics of concepts. His observation highlights the importance of language in epistemic decolonization, as Ngugi has shown in a different context and other colleagues pointed out as well. Seloua Luste Boulbina (2012:9) considers the question of language "the postcolonial question par excellence." Whereas English has become a global language, thus transcending its status as a local and colonial language, this is not the case with French (Boulbina 2015:81–82). The colonial heritage of French as the language of scientific production, education, and administration therefore weighs more heavily.

This cross-section of reflections illustrates the complexity of the ongoing process of decolonization. It also points to the power relations in which this endeavor is entangled and that those of us in the global north must continue to confront as we pursue the transformation of knowledge production. In

order to understand the challenges ahead, I discuss what would constitute decolonized knowledges for my interlocutors and what, in their view, is necessary to attain them.

Toward Epistemic Decolonization: The “Needs of Society”

Decolonized knowledge is knowledge that responds to the needs of (African) societies, historian Babacar Fall told me when I inquired what such knowledge would be. His view found deep resonance among the other colleagues in both Senegal and Mali. Their responses converged on the point that research ought to contribute to social, economic, and political transformation rather than to knowledge production in and of itself, “for the academic community” as Daouda Keita put it. This emphasis does not preclude intellectual and creative production in philosophy or the arts. And it does not mean that research ought to be only practical or applied, or that it must be directly translatable to development projects. But it should be relevant to the issues of the day and it should also help members of society understand the forces of the wider world that impinge on them. This is the very foundation of academic knowledge production for filmmaker Joseph Gaï Ramaka when he says: “What we should expect from intellectuals is that they at least develop concepts that will help the masses of Africans to understand what is happening to them. If not this, then what are they here for?” (Martin 2009:213).

Producing knowledge that assists members of different social communities to understand the challenges of the contemporary world as a basis for acting on it is, however, only one dimension of advancing social and economic transformation. A singular focus on intellectuals would ignore the capacity of the population to contribute. There are endogenous knowledges yet to be recovered and analyzed—in oral form, in Arabic and Ajaami documents, and through archeology and linguistics. These knowledges are not only important for analysis and for theorizing, but they are also of interest and relevance to the communities themselves. Historians in Mali and Senegal emphasized that people “are thirsty for their history,” a “thirst” that is an expression of their desire for self-knowledge. Importantly, meaningful research in the social sciences and humanities consists of engaging with people, listening to their concerns and to the solutions they themselves devise, including in the rural areas. “Villagers too are creative, they think and can contribute, but their creativity often does not rise to the surface. Research can ensure that it does,” said Moussa Sow. Research oriented by the social and material life of African societies would then not only contribute to social and economic transformation but also further epistemic freedom by leading to the development of theories and analytical tools that grow out of and speak to African realities. It would thus help open up the “autonomous space” imagined by Paulin Hountondji, “where the themes explored would no longer be a distant echo of those developed by Western knowledge” (2002:139). For Mudimbe too, Africans’ material life and sociopolitical context ought to be the starting point of scientific production (Bisanswa 2000:9).

To re-orient scientific production toward these objectives requires a close relationship with the society and its lived realities. Research should be shared with the communities among whom it is conducted as a matter of course. Knowledge, these colleagues argued, must therefore be accessible, and concepts must speak to people and be comprehensible to them. Historian Konaté illustrated this by pointing out that human rights are only meaningful to Malians if one relates them to the *Kurukan Fuga*, the Mande Charter, because Malians recognize themselves in its ethics.⁸ Accessibility and comprehensibility also raise the issue of language again; the language of scientific production and communication, which remains the former colonial language, is inaccessible to many. The path toward a truly decolonized knowledge would include academic production in African languages alongside production in other languages, as Souleymane Bachir Diagne (2017:29) has contended.

How, then, is the expressed vision of a decolonized knowledge to be realized? What must happen to transform knowledge production and theories so that they reflect African realities and the needs of societies? The different perspectives brought to bear on these questions showed that my Senegalese and Malian colleagues analyze the problems surrounding decolonization of the mind in relation not only to academic concerns but also to an existential perspective of what it means to be African and to be an African scholar.

Thus, the decolonization of knowledge extends beyond the academy, beyond the conventional boundaries between inside and outside, to encompass a different way of seeing as well as a decentering and re-centering of knowledge. It means that Africans have to “reinvent” Africa, to “think” Africa as Africans, and to say to others “this is what we are.” They must use available conceptual and theoretical tools to understand African societies and explain them to others from the standpoint of their own culture, as emerging scholar Fousseyné Touré told me, evoking Felwine Sarr (2016). Writer Louis Camara took this still further, saying that decolonization has to be initiated from an “endogenous African interior” and that it entails a decentering so that “streams of thought” don’t continue to move from a (Western) center to an (African) periphery. African universities ought to take charge of this process and be much more combative in the production of knowledge and in education while also relying increasingly on endogenous and local sources. For Camara, this means that universities must open up to producers of knowledge and to intellectuals who are not academics and work with them as part of the effort to decolonize the mind. A re-appropriation of languages and cultures must be integral to this. Communications scholar Yacine Diagne, who, like Camara and others, emphasized the importance of endogenous production, draws her inspiration from the poet and novelist Amadou Elimane Kane, who “deconstructs in order to reconstruct how to see” and engages in “a discourse on humanity and on ourselves.” This provides her with a basis for an appropriation and re-appropriation of African knowledges.⁹

Realizing these moves entails an epistemological break without, however, essentializing African traditions and values. Alpha Amadou Sy and others noted that African esoteric knowledges were often restricted to the initiated rather than being accessible to everyone. These structures need to be re-evaluated so that knowledge can be disseminated and delocalized. This demands individual as well as collective introspection, which Magassa considered to be central to the decolonization process. To attain decolonized knowledge, for him, also returns us to the issue of power: since colonization involved the imposition of a power on knowledge, decolonization means re-appropriating it and ridding oneself of the effects of this imposition.

Babacar Fall evoked the historian Joseph Ki-Zerbo when he emphasized the long road still ahead in the re-centering of knowledge:

I think that the decolonization of knowledge is an ambition, a challenge, a wish that is as yet rarely realized. We might recall the invitation of Joseph Ki-Zerbo in his "La natte des autres" (The mat of others). For me, Ki-Zerbo was saying that African intellectuals have thus far refused to sit on the mat of the Other; they have refused to use the concepts forged by the colonial library in order to apprehend African reality. (Fall conversation)

He added that engaged individuals require institutional backing if their work is to have an impact. While recognizing that the ability to effect change is constrained by the fact that the academic world is part of larger power structures, he stressed that the decolonization of knowledge will be difficult to realize without the constitution of communities of scholars in Africa who connect their intellectual work to a collective project, an institution in other words.

Boubacar Haidara approached the issue from the perspective of a young scholar when he suggested that decolonization will remain merely a slogan unless young Africans are encouraged to conduct research and write in order to augment the production of their elders, which still represents only a small part of what might be written about Africa. More and more of his peers are ready to do this, but they lack the resources that ensure their autonomy in developing their own concepts and theories. South-south dialogue between intellectuals and institutions is essential as a means of learning from one another, but north-south collaborations and the thinking and paradigms they generate continue to dominate because African universities privilege them out of necessity. Fousseyné Touré also pointed to the limited means universities have to make this happen. Because of this, he looks to the contribution of the African academic diasporas and their ability to influence initiatives. He went on to point out that prominent intellectuals of these diasporas have a large echo in Africa and that the theories they produce resonate with and orient the positions of Africans.

Fatou Sow is more sanguine than most, as she emphasized the considerable progress that has been made in the Africanization of knowledge production, perhaps because she was a junior scholar during a key period of transition. She contended that one ought to be more positive and forward-looking. But she connected this assessment directly to a call for active

engagement: “It is up to us to negotiate the system and take charge of our future if we want to leave the colonial heritage behind.”

Before discussing how those of us in the academies of the global north might participate in producing knowledge that responds to the needs of society, I lay out the structural issues my colleagues identified and the challenges they represent.

Universities, Curricula, and Research in National and International Context

Knowledge and theories are constructed and validated in institutions, so institutional development and transformation must be an integral part of the decolonization project. How universities and research institutions facilitate or constrain the work of scholars is a major preoccupation of the colleagues with whom I spoke; a concern that emerged directly and indirectly throughout our discussions. This brought to the fore the role played by the state and the power relations that shape the connections between higher education establishments and the state, as well as the global networks of power in which both are embedded. University structures and curricula in Mali and Senegal are modeled on the French system. While they have been modified over time, there was a consensus that they had not been transformed in accordance with a vision for the future that corresponds to local realities, a fact widely attributed to a lack of political will. Some scholars point to the absence of a link between the spaces where knowledge is produced and where decisions are made as one of the problems.

The continued adherence to French hierarchical structures means that at the University of Segou, for example, certain disciplines still need to bring in professors from France or from neighboring countries to offer a lecture course (*cours magistral*) because no one in the department has the required rank. This is demeaning to local faculty, especially if they are asked to assist even if they obtained their PhDs abroad. While more curricular innovation is needed, some point out that the introduction of the L-M-D (bachelor-master-doctorate) system has been an important step, because it may better serve the large numbers of students by facilitating the adaptation of education to local needs and realities. The low value accorded the development of teaching materials in the system of evaluation impedes instruction not only in the universities but also in public schools. Schools often continue to rely on texts produced in France to meet their needs, since education faculty have no incentive to research and write school books and manuals, which do not count in the *CAMES* evaluations that are key to advancement in the university system.¹⁰

Moreover, national languages are currently neither prioritized nor taught systematically in either of the two countries. This impedes their development as languages of education and scientific production so that they can take their place alongside other world languages in the context of a multi-lingual university, as envisioned by thinkers such as Ngugi, Mbembe, and Diagne. It is also a paradox because majority languages as, for example, Wolof

in Senegal and Bamanankan in Mali, are commonly spoken on university campuses and in public offices. It poses a more fundamental problem in higher education mentioned by a Senegalese colleague, namely, that many of today's students no longer master French the way earlier generations of university students did when their numbers were much smaller.

Khadimou Rassoul Thiam (2016) traces a possible path to self-affirmation through language while French remains the only official language in Senegal. His point of departure is the fact that French is spoken by only about a third of Senegalese while Wolof has seen much innovation and is used in communication by some 80 percent of the population. Yet, after decades of experimentation, it has not become the language of instruction, administration, and law for various reasons.¹¹ He therefore proposes to move away from French linguistic purism that stereotypes those who use it "badly" and adapt its norms to incorporate local specificities and popular use.

Many academics work under difficult conditions because universities in Mali and Senegal have high enrollments but are underfunded, a problem that is more acute in Mali than in Senegal. There is no secular private funding that complements state support as in the United States. Libraries can often not be updated, or do not exist at all on some newly established campuses; internet bandwidth is limited; and computer access on campuses is inadequate, especially for students. Although American philanthropy is unequalled and has supported higher education since the end of the nineteenth century (Jaumont 2018:7), neither Mali nor Senegal has benefitted from investments by the American Partnership for Higher Education in Africa and only very little from higher education funding by a range of other U.S. foundations.¹² The consortium of universities which formed the Partnership contributed in a major way to the development of select universities in nine countries across the continent, none of them in Francophone Africa.¹³ Limited resources restrict the recruitment of junior scholars and researchers which, in turn, impacts teaching loads, supervision of doctoral students, and research capacity. This is discouraging for young scholars who manage to complete their degrees, particularly for those who decide to return home with PhDs from abroad. Moussa Sow expressed great concern about the effects of limited recruitment on intergenerational continuity. Not only do research and scholarship not advance without continuity between succeeding generations of researchers, but institutions are fragile as a result. The education and training of the next generation is a widely shared concern in Mali that I have been hearing regularly in conversations for some time.

Few established in-country publishing venues and the continued value placed on international publishing were noted as obstacles to a significant increase in local scholarship, but the predominant preoccupation of my colleagues was the insufficient resources for research. Universities have few resources, and faculty members have only a small margin for maneuvering, observed Touré. Limited government funding diminishes Malian faculty members' incentive to conduct research, so that many concentrate on teaching instead and may even take on heavier course loads to increase their

incomes. Some scholars in both Mali and Senegal linked the resource problem to the lack of a national policy that would frame and prioritize research. Among other things, research units developed by faculty members and approved by the university hierarchy with official decrees may only exist on paper, because they are not allocated a space, nor do they receive funds for equipment and operational expenses.¹⁴ The social sciences and humanities are particularly affected by the dearth of resources, since the applied sciences are more highly valued. Funds available for projects on a competitive basis go largely to agriculture and medicine, ignoring the fact that these fields have social and historical dimensions that require research by specialists (M. Sow). Politicians and funding agencies typically want answers, applicability, and certitude, said Doulaye Konaté, adding rhetorically: “What should we do? The humanities and the social sciences are there to pose questions, not to provide answers to everything.” Without the necessary support, even the oral and other materials in history, linguistics, and the arts that have been collected by the national research institute cannot be adequately preserved, published, and disseminated so that the public has access to them.

Some types of research are not valued and supported within the university system, so that faculty who develop initiatives they deem important have to obtain external funding in order to carry them out.¹⁵ This and the lack of government appropriations lead scholars to orient their projects to priorities established elsewhere. It perpetuates extraverted scientific production that “meets the theoretical needs of our Western counterparts and answers the questions they pose” (Hountondji 2009:8). People will apply when northern foundations or other funders offer research money for projects on, say, governance, because it permits them to do research, although they are well aware that external funders, regardless of country, are not disinterested. Apart from the orientation toward specific topics, funders may impose other conditions, for example, that their own nationals direct the project. This prevents researchers from concentrating on topics they deem important (Oulalé), although some continent-based researchers may find the means to work on issues that do not particularly interest or are not known by northern scholars and try to produce socially relevant knowledge (Fall-Sokhna). While needed more than ever, research in Mali is stagnating at present because northern funders do not finance projects due to the insecurity in large parts of the country, observed Boubacar Haidara. He is convinced that he could still do research in many locations that are off limits to northern scholars.

The specific problems and challenges outlined above are shaped by the dynamics of the international context in which African institutions and states are embedded and that have only become more acute since Adebayo Olu-koshi and Paul Tiyambe Zeleza (2004) detailed the implications of neoliberal globalization and the emergence of a “new knowledge economy.” While many of our conversations focused on the ways in which university structures and administrations hold back the production of knowledge, some colleagues also linked institutional problems to geopolitics. The high value accorded to the policy-oriented research of the natural and applied sciences

is, of course, not unique to Mali, Senegal, or to Africa, but it, like the general lack of resources, must be seen in the broader geopolitical context. Sociologist Oumar Diop and other colleagues emphasized that the major world powers defend their political and economic interests, but that paradigms for relations between northern and African nations and for development policies must change if there is to be real change in Africa. The problem with development is that donors want to construct it for those “to be developed,” but a decolonized knowledge would not take this approach, Magassa noted.

In short, not only academics but also the decision makers of northern powers must decolonize their minds and support locally conceived projects rather than predetermining areas of investment, needs, and how these needs should be addressed. Mali and neighboring countries in the western Sahel suffer particularly, since Islamist extremism-related violence in the subregion has increased; development funding has considerably narrowed and now focuses largely on security and migration to Europe. France especially remains a key force for Mali and Senegal, as it does for other former colonies. Africa’s importance to French geo-political strategy was evidenced by this year’s G-7 Summit in Biarritz, where a Sahel Partnership Action Plan and the development of a new framework for cooperation with Africa were on the agenda, and key African partners were invited.¹⁶ Although the Biarritz Declaration on the partnership with Africa outlines a broad set of goals, reporting at the end of the summit stressed the security situation in the Sahel rather than any broader discussion of a transformation in relations with the continent. The absence of a coherent U.S. foreign policy and stance vis-à-vis Africa (Pitcher 2018), China’s pursuit of its own interests, and Russia’s renewed entry as an international actor in Africa also complicate the geopolitical context.

Against the weight of the geopolitical forces and institutional weaknesses outlined, it is important not to lose sight of the scholarship that colleagues continue to produce, nor of the creative projects initiated by scholars, artists, and public intellectuals. I would like to highlight selected institutional initiatives of African self-apprehension despite the odds. We all know that the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) was founded in the 1970s “to support research in the social sciences and produce knowledge about our continent from the continent,” as Rokhaya Fall-Sokhna described it. The *Dak’Art Biennale* and its *Off!* are also well-known and can be considered a platform for global arts, as well as for local arts and performances.¹⁷ Some more recent and perhaps less widely known initiatives include:

- o The *Institute for Advanced Study* in Saint-Louis, Senegal, founded by Babacar Fall and colleagues, based on the premise that it takes a collective project to advance the decolonization of knowledge. While fully aware that developing the Institute is an uphill battle that may not succeed, Fall is willing to try and to be innovative, saying “I remain a Fanon-ist: we have to invent a new Africa.”

- o The *School of Civilizations, Religions, Arts and Communication* at the Université Gaston Berger, established in 2010 to advance the Africanization of the university.¹⁸
- o The *Ateliers de la Pensée* launched by Felwine Sarr and Achille Mbembe in 2016 as a space where scholars, artists, and writers from across Africa and the diasporas reflect on critical issues and debate ideas. In January 2019, the Ateliers held its first doctoral workshop for young researchers, artists, and curators.¹⁹
- o The imprint *Cétyu - Littérature en Wolof / Literature in Wolof*, published by *Zulma* (France) and *Mémoire d'encrier* (Quebec). Founded and directed by Boubacar Boris Diop, its objective is to publish major works of francophone literature in Wolof for Wolof speakers worldwide. Diop, who taught Wolof language literature at Gaston Berger for several years, has translated Aimé Césaire's *A Season in the Congo* into Wolof.

The insecurity and violent conflict in Mali since 2012 have not brought creative activities to a standstill, even though one may get this impression from international reporting on the country:

- o The *Biennale Africaine de la Photographie* whose twelfth edition is being celebrated in Bamako (November 30, 2019–January 30, 2020) under the theme “Streams of Consciousness,” referencing the album of Abdulla Ibrahim and Max Roache (1977). It showcases the work of amateur and professional photographers and video artists.
- o The *Ségou'Art Festival sur le Niger*, launched in 2005 as an annual music festival in this regional capital. Although its location has had to be moved away from the banks of the Niger, it has continued with precautionary measures and has even expanded its scope in recent years to include the visual and other arts, making it stand out as a festival that crosses artistic genres.
- o *Éditions Tombouctou*, a publishing house started by writers Ibrahima Aya and Aida Mady Diallo in 2007 to offer quality fiction and non-fiction to a Malian and African public at affordable prices.
- o The *Rentrée Littéraire du Mali*, a literature festival initiated by Aya in 2008 to encourage reading. It brings together writers from around the world working in different genres and engaging with the public in various forums. Since 2018, *Rentrée* events, including interactions with students, have also been held in the regional cities of Sikasso, Djenné, Mopti, and Timbuktu. The motto on the 2018 website makes the impetus clear: *L'Afrique se raconte à elle-même et au monde* (“Africa tells its story to itself and to the world”).

Against the background of these manifestations of creativity and dynamism, I turn to north-south relations of knowledge production and their transformation in relation to the epistemological and structural issues laid out. It should be evident by now that the decolonization of knowledge is a slow, multi-faceted process that requires self-reflection and humility, especially by those of us whose origins are in the historically dominant center and who have benefitted from its privileges. My goal here is to show how my interlocutors perceive the scholarly practices of their northern colleagues, how they envision relationships, and how ASA members in their diversity might participate in advancing the transformation of practices and relationships.

“Decolonization is a Double Adventure”: Toward Intellectual Partnerships

The decolonization of knowledge is a long-term dialectical process which entails the transformation of power relations, paradigms, and institutional structures. Historian Boubacar Barry takes us to the heart of the issue:

... the decolonization of the mind is a long process that has to be taken up by both those in the south who have decolonized and those in the north ... who colonized. It is a double adventure where people are never at the same level of decolonization. This creates distortions, because as those in the south decolonized the theoretical apparatus put in place to justify or re-enforce colonization, as they effectively deconstructed the entire system, those in the north also had to undergo the decolonization process to enable them to deconstruct all that colonization had generated as knowledge and as justification for colonization. ... this process can be slow on the side of those in the south and slow on the part of the other side. (Barry, conversation)

Colleagues in Mali and Senegal generally agreed with the critiques by Anglophone African scholars that my students and I had read, namely, that northern scholars set the research agenda and drive theory, often with little or no input from scholars on the continent. This returns us to questions posed in the reflections on where we are with epistemic decolonization: Whose concepts and whose ideas prevail? Whose are valorized? And how do those with power use their power? The days when colleagues on the continent felt that they were treated as if they were assistants of their northern counterparts and may not even have been mentioned in publications are fortunately behind us—at least in the humanities and social sciences—but there is still a sense that “the north” does not seriously engage Africa-based scholars in discussions of research by seeking their input beyond advice on local details that are critical to a project’s success. Whether due to habit, pressures within the academy, or to blockages in the circulation of knowledge, many of us tend to rely largely on northern sources rather than do our utmost to learn from and engage with the scholarship of our Africa-based colleagues, to cite it, and to contribute to its dissemination.²⁰ We also tend to arrive with fully formed research agendas, when we ought to enter into a dialogue to find out what topics our counterparts work on and to seek their perspectives on our topics and theoretical frameworks at the time we formulate our projects. While we are trained to read widely and to develop research projects that are informed by current theories in order to obtain funding and become successful scholars, this does not necessarily mean that these projects capture local realities and that they produce the socially relevant knowledge discussed earlier. And while we may generally “translate” our research questions into terms that we think make sense to the people among whom we conduct research, we often “re-translate” what we learn into theories that are removed from those realities because it is those that are valued in the academy.

The challenge is therefore two-fold: engage with our African colleagues during the design of a research project and fight for acceptance in the northern academy of concepts and theories that are anchored in the realities of our interlocutors, in other words, “the needs of society.”²¹ We might point out to the leaders of our institutions that this is imperative if we want to remain relevant as south-south networks gradually increase and interest in collaboration with the north decreases, decentering knowledge production in the global north in the process (Diouf 2016; Machado 2016).

My colleagues readily acknowledged economics as a fundamental component in the power dynamics between Africa-based and northern scholars, alongside race and other forms of difference. Our unequal professional relationships make it difficult for African colleagues to take the lead in initiating research on topics that they consider important and that may contribute to conceptual and paradigm shifts. Yet Malian and Senegalese colleagues also assume responsibility for dealing with the challenges they encounter, saying that one should not rely solely on others in order to produce knowledge. The writing of Malian history, for example, ought not depend only on outside funding (Konaté); local scholars and institutions themselves have to emphasize research in addition to teaching, develop their own agendas and research policies in order to be autonomous (Haidara); and this necessarily entails introspection and a redefinition of working conditions on the part of the state (M. Sow).

Boubacar Barry put the economic imbalance in historical context by recalling the years after independence when the first generations of historians—pioneers such as Cheikh Anta Diop, Abdoulaye Ly, and Joseph Ki-Zerbo—wrote the history of Africa and worked to Africanize the educational system, as Fatou Sow also reminded me. His own generation continued this work side by side with northern scholars such as Martin Klein, David Robinson, and Lucy Colvin, until the economic crisis of the 1970s that severely affected education and created an imbalance. Then structural adjustment policies directed development funding away from higher education, deepening the gap. Although support has recently increased somewhat, at least in Senegal, the volume of northern research and publications is now significantly greater—particularly in the United States—than what is produced in the south.

Rather than spending time criticizing northern colleagues, Moussa Sow considered it more important to explore how to remedy the situation and work toward research paradigms that reflect the preoccupations of African populations. While his experience in France highlighted earlier really marked him, he does not regret it. It convinced him that doing research outside of one’s own society sharpens one’s eye and has made him a strong advocate of research that entails multiple perspectives.²² The idea of transverse gazes (*regards croisés*) was brought up in other discussions, too, as a way of transforming extraverted research, by which colleagues meant research commissioned by northern agencies as well as participation in projects formulated entirely by northern scholars. “Polyglot” and multi-disciplinary

collaboration can help avoid errors of interpretation and produce decolonized knowledge, noted Soumaïla Oulalé. Evocation of the benefits of multi-lingual collaboration reminds us that translation may lead to new insights and help move us toward decentering ourselves, as Souleymane Bachir Diagne (2017) has argued. Both sides need to be open and reach out to each other to make decolonization a reality.

“Research has no borders,” said Yacine Diagne, who, like everyone else, wants to see us work together, share ideas, and jointly reflect on research that could be done. It is through exchange and discussion that we arrive at new concepts and theories that are contextually meaningful while also responding to the need to be up to date within northern institutional and funding frameworks. This emphasis converges on the key point made by Boubacar Barry, namely, that the decolonization of knowledge is a “double adventure” which requires an effort on both sides. It also is the way that those of us based outside the continent, and especially those of us of Euro-American background, can conduct socially relevant research. Collaboration is “inevitable,” Malian and Senegalese colleagues all agreed, but it must be “honest,” and it should be structured by “complementarity,” i.e., based on partnerships, with the understanding that our continent-based colleagues are disciplinary experts and that they have knowledge and sensibilities that are essential to productive research, as well as having things to teach us. Even if northern scholars know the context well, there may be nuances that escape them, but that local scholars are attuned to. Joint research could reveal these. Moreover, our colleagues are familiar with publications or unpublished work that may otherwise not come to our attention. New technologies can facilitate continued collaborative research in contexts of insecurity, provided that the Africa-based colleague is a full research partner and co-author.²³ Developing sustainable partnerships is not altruism but rather good practice, because it is only through such partnerships that we are able to understand the complexity of phenomena, to get closer to the truth, and to arrive at new paradigms.

This ought to begin with students preparing to conduct research. To enable this, thesis and dissertation directors will have to have their mentees consult with colleagues on the continent for feedback during the proposal development phase. An African faculty member might have a student with similar interests who could work with her/his northern counterpart and exchange ideas while each is doing his/her own project. It would benefit both sides and might lead to long-term collaborations and joint thesis supervision. Reciprocity by the thesis director based in the north would be a “must” from the outset, so that African faculty members are supported in their research instead of simply taking on more work on behalf of northern students.

Daouda Keïta pointed out that working in partnership means that ideas no longer come from either the north or the south but belong to both sides. They are thus bound to lead to joint publications, which would help to remedy the existing imbalance. As we move toward this goal, we must also actively work on increasing the circulation of knowledge from north to south

and vice versa in a reciprocal move so that scholars on both sides can engage, debate, and criticize each other's work. Increasing the south-north circulation of scholarship will also contribute to the decentering and destabilizing of dominant northern narratives, as Feierman (2019:41) has powerfully argued with respect to history.²⁴ Democratizing access to knowledge entails improving the dissemination of northern publications, publishing more scholarship of our continent-based colleagues, and supporting them as they seek to augment and strengthen their publication capacity.

Much work lies ahead if we are to realize this “double adventure,” but faculty members and institutions in North America and Europe have already begun using new technologies to engage with African partners, even as limited bandwidth or available equipment in African universities may constrain their options. Individual faculty members, the ASA, and its coordinate and affiliate organizations are also mobilizing to seek funding for various initiatives to democratize the exchange of knowledge and to enhance networking. Some universities have established programs to reinforce African higher education through mentorship programs for emerging scholars and to promote north-south and south-south collaboration, and some institutions in Europe are developing new approaches to the study of Africa.²⁵

African scholars teaching in North American and European institutions, such as African American and Caribbean scholars, approach knowledge production and engage colleagues on the continent with different legacies and sensibilities than those of us who are of Euro-American origin. They have diversified intellectual production in the global north and challenged our thinking and prevalent epistemologies. Yet when it comes to research, some Senegalese and Malian colleagues suggested that their location and economic position in the global north means that their sensibilities and perspectives are no longer the same as the sensibilities and perspectives of those who are immersed in the realities of daily life. These scholars were, however, quick to underline the continued commitment of those who have left or remained in the global north upon completion of their studies. Many maintain connections with colleagues on the continent, mentor emerging scholars, give lectures, teach short courses,²⁵ and participate in various educational initiatives.²⁶ Some of these initiatives foster trans-national and trans-regional connections within Africa.²⁷ Zeleza (2007:104–5) suggested more than ten years ago that the challenge and opportunity for diasporan scholars and for African institutions is to transform individual engagements into more structured arrangements that can facilitate the rebuilding of the historic pan-African project.

New models of engagement and ideas are not lacking within the African studies community. But how can we move from exemplary initiatives—at both the personal and institutional levels—to make partnerships with colleagues on the continent integral to academic practice? Developing new forms of collaboration for both emerging and established scholars requires first of all an institutional environment where research and publication partnerships are valued; second, official recognition that theoretical

frameworks developed in the global north may not resonate in different African contexts; and finally, that it is *jointly* produced theory that will be “cutting-edge.” We must therefore convince our universities that partnerships in the humanities and social sciences are as productive as in the natural sciences. What is possible and how best to achieve it will vary between institutions across the United States, in Canada, or in Europe, given differences in terms of mission, governance, financial resources, and so on, but we can share successful strategies through our networks. High-profile scholars and ASA Advocacy Travel Award winners could take the lead in pressing for change in their home institutions to be emulated by others.

I would like to end by outlining how our Association can support its members and help to advance more effective and valuable knowledge production.

An ASA Agenda for Action

Like numerous individual members, the African Studies Association and its journals have taken important steps toward advancing the decolonization of the production and dissemination of knowledge (e.g., *African Studies Review* 2018; Lawrance 2019). Rereading earlier presidential lectures however, I was struck by how some of the calls for action overlapped with action items that emerged from the conversations I had in Mali and Senegal. What this tells me, and I hope you will agree, is that Board members, as elected representatives of the ASA membership, need to translate suggestions into concrete steps to be discussed, developed, and implemented.

Revisiting Professional Ethics: We must broaden our definition of ethics beyond individual research practices to include active engagement and partnerships with continental scholars in research, publications, and teaching.²⁸ While the ASA cannot enforce changes in research practices or the kind of partnerships suggested, it can include them among its principles, outline standards for established scholars and for students exploring research for dissertations or master’s degrees, and encourage its coordinate and affiliate organizations to do the same. Since the Association’s ethical guidelines for conduct date from 2005, I ask our Board to establish an ad hoc committee to revisit and revise them so as to better reflect current thinking on knowledge production.

Advocacy with Foundations and Other Funding Bodies: In addition to creating a platform for sharing ongoing exemplary individual and institutional initiatives, our Association needs to support individual members in their efforts to transform practices by engaging with funders along three fronts: 1) Building financial components for partnerships into research grants at all levels and prioritizing the allocation of resources to those grant proposals that are conceptualized with the full involvement of Africa-based colleagues. 2) Creating programs for doctoral candidates and junior scholars across the continent to conduct research at home and in other African countries in order to promote research and the development of intellectual

networks across national boundaries. While much available external funding has shifted to post-doctoral scholars, support for doctoral students is still sorely needed, as some of my interlocutors pointed out. The American Council of Learned Societies African Humanities Program (AHP), funded by the Carnegie Corporation, has done exemplary work but has been limited to five Anglophone countries in accordance with Andrew Carnegie's will. Advocacy here and in other domains must therefore emphasize a broader distribution of funds. 3) Advocating that the Fulbright program and other agencies not cut off funding to countries deemed insecure, since experienced scholars may be able to continue doing research with proper precautions by adapting methodologies and by allocating part of a grant to a local partner.

Advocacy in International Aid and Development: Changing the balance of power in the production of knowledge also requires us to become active beyond the academic world and related funding organizations. I therefore echo Sandra Greene (1999:12) when she urged the Association to engage with the policy world both inside and outside the U.S. government. To support our Africa-based colleagues in striving for greater autonomy and to strengthen their ability to initiate and conduct research, we must draw on the expertise of our advocacy committee and task force to discuss how best to lobby for international aid to be directed to higher education and research in the social sciences and humanities. We might involve current and former ASA Advocacy Travel Award winners, some of whose training sessions have included meetings with congressional staffers on Capitol Hill.

Cooperation with Associations and Networks in Africa and in North America: ASA coordinate and affiliate organizations have taken the lead in developing trans-Atlantic and transregional connections to facilitate and strengthen intellectual exchange. The ASA itself has taken important steps in recent years to expand participation of Africa-based scholars in the annual meeting and to bring continental perspectives into the development of the annual meeting theme and into its governance. For the transformation of knowledge production to be effective and sustainable, however, we must also forge or reinforce connections with organizations that share our goals, such as the African Studies Association of Africa (ASAA), various disciplinary associations, and CODESRIA. Our African and diasporic members will be able to facilitate connections and provide advice on how we might best work together to advance common objectives. What forms cooperation ought to take will vary and will have to emerge through dialogue.

These steps require dedication and resources, but we need to do more. The decolonization of knowledge production must also entail recognition of the intellectual production by black scholars, both the historic communities of African Americans and more recent migrant communities from other diasporic locations (Zezele 2007:90). They, too, are still fighting against racism and for the (re)construction of their own histories, as are Africans on the continent vis-à-vis the former colonial powers. An integral aspect of demonstrating solidarity is to build, or re-build, and further develop relations

with African American associations and institutions whose members have historic connections with Africa and whose production of knowledge pre-dates that in traditionally white institutions, an issue addressed by Jean Allman in her presidential lecture last year. Before her, my predecessors Sandra Greene and James Pritchett both called for the development of exchanges and connections in 1998 and 2014, respectively. The need to build bridges and develop mutual interests would seem to be self-evident by the mere fact that an increasing number of ASA members conduct research in the African diasporas of the United States. Establishing a connection with the Association for the Study of the World-Wide African Diaspora (ASWAD) is thus another logical step to take.

Akosua Adomako Ampofo expanded on the calls of Greene and Pritchett in her *African Studies Review* Distinguished Lecture (2016:16), saying “I believe the times we live in call for us to consider paying more attention to the politics of Blackness and the connected experiences of people on the continent and in the diasporas.” To translate these action items into strategic initiatives, I appeal to the ASA Board to constitute a special committee, composed of Board and non-Board members, to propose a first set of concrete steps that can be discussed at the 2020 Board meetings with recommendations for further action.

Conclusion

The decolonization of knowledge is a pressing issue at a time when we confront renascent nationalism, right-wing extremism, xenophobia, and increased racism and anti-Semitism in Europe and North America. Not only have a larger number of thinkers engaged with the production and decolonization of knowledge, but the renewed emphasis has also resonated in professional associations such as ours. Let us seize the momentum that has developed and join forces to work together with the African Studies Association of Africa (ASAA) and other associations and institutions in realizing a common vision.

While our primary focus will be on the terms and content of intellectual production, it cannot be confined to it, as two highly significant anniversaries remind us this year: the fiftieth anniversary of the 1969 ASA annual meeting in Montreal where the continued intransigence of the ASA leadership to the demands of black members led to ruptures that came to shape the Association (Africa Retort 1970; Allman 2019; Clarke 1976; Gutkind 1976; Skinner 1976) and the 400-year anniversary of the arrival of enslaved Africans in Virginia.

Amit Chaudhuri identified the challenge clearly in the context of #RhodesMustFall in Britain by saying:

Decolonization has to be a complex business when global privilege has so many platforms, including nations that comprised the erstwhile empire ... One must, today, take on the legacies of empire; one must also take on the

legacies of global privilege. ... Institutional racism, however, is not specific to certain nations or institutions, but characterizes the parameters of the world in which we live, work, and travel. (2016:10–11)

Changing the narrative entails imagining a new framework that makes it impossible for anyone to ignore that Africa has a history, endogenous knowledges that helped produce not only the “New World,” but also the “modern” world, that black people around the world won political independence through struggle, and that Africans have their own aspirations for economic independence and liberation from externally generated models of development. They are dedicated to realizing them.

Acknowledgments

My lecture and this article were made possible by the colleagues in Mali and Senegal who so generously shared their perspectives with me. I thank them for it and hope that this article will be a tribute to their thought and commitment:

In Bamako: Daouda Keïta, Doulaye Konaté, Hamidou Magassa, Moussa Sow, Fousseyné Touré. In Ségou: Boubacar Haidara, Soumaïla Oulalé, Amadou Traoré, Mamoutou Tounkara. In Dakar: Boubacar Barry, Yacine Diagne, Daddy Dibanga, Babacar Fall, Rokhaya Fall-Sokhna, Fatou Sow. In Saint-Louis: Louis Camara, Oumar Diop, Cheikh Tidiane Fall, Alpha Amadou Sy.

I also thank my Indiana University colleagues Akin Adesokan, Tavy Ahearne, Beth Buggenhagen, John Hanson, Eileen Julien, Patrick O’Meara, and Daniel Reed for offering feedback on my outline for the lecture. I am particularly indebted to Akin Adesokan, Sandra Greene, Marissa Moorman, and Luise Tanner for their comments and suggestions on preliminary versions of the lecture; to Eileen Julien who also commented on revisions of the lecture for this article; and to Rosa DeJorio who offered advice in the final phase of manuscript preparation.

Lastly, I thank the anonymous *ASR* reviewers whose comments helped me clarify and refine certain points.

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Notes:

1. It is therefore not surprising that African historians reacted very strongly to French President Nicolas Sarkozy’s assertion in a 2007 lecture at the University Cheikh Anta Diop of Dakar “that Africa had not sufficiently entered history” (Annexe 2008, 2009). Several colleagues evoked this lecture in our conversations, an indication that Sarkozy’s uninformed and insulting remarks have not been forgotten in Senegal and Mali.
2. Continuing the initiative *Afrika N’Ko—Africa in the World*, begun with the 2013 conference on the “colonial library,” the Point Sud Centre de Recherche sur le Savoir Local held two follow-up conferences: “Translation: Disputing the Sense of Social Realities” (Dakar 2017) and “Speaking of Africa in the World and Redefining the Social Sciences and the Humanities: Words and Validation of Knowledge” (Bamako 2017).
3. Ndlovu-Gatsheni offered the African Studies Association’s 2019 Hormuud Lecture at the annual meeting in Boston: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MyySH6T1Ong>. He has since moved to the University of Bayreuth (Germany) as the newly created Chair for “Epistemologies of the Global South” in the Africa

- Multiple Cluster of Excellence. Ndlovu-Gatsheni's use of "cognitive justice" relies on the definition of Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2014), with whose work he engages. Although not referenced, Rajeev Bhargava (2013) discussed "epistemic injustice" in the context of India.
4. Although "intellectual," "colleague," "academic," and "interlocutor" have different connotations in everyday use, I use them interchangeably in the discussion that follows.
 5. Following the 2011 split, the four universities in Bamako now include: Université des lettres et des sciences humaines de Bamako (ULSHB); Université des sciences juridiques et politiques de Bamako (USJPB); Université des sciences sociales et de gestion de Bamako (USSGB); Université des sciences, des techniques et des technologies de Bamako (USSTB).
 6. This issue was the focus of a conference I co-organized with Malian colleagues at the Institut des Sciences Humaines, Bamako, in October 2019.
 7. The late Shaka Bagayogo, who participated in the same program, analyzed his experience in a 1977 article published in the *Cahiers d'Études Africaines*.
 8. The Mande Charter was proclaimed by Sunjata Keita in 1236 during a meeting with his allies after a major military victory. Named after the clearing of Kurukan Fuga near the village of Kangaba where the meeting was held, the Charter outlines the principles that were to govern life in the Mali Empire. One of the versions reconstructed by traditionists was deposited with UNESCO when the Charter became an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2009.
 9. Diagne specifically referenced Kane's *L'ami dont l'aventure n'est pas ambiguë* (2013) and *Les soleils de nos libertés* (2014).
 10. GAMES, the *Conseil Africain et Malgache pour l'Enseignement Supérieur* was formed in the second half of the 1960s by sixteen francophone African and Indian Ocean states to develop joint policies and standards in higher education and research.
 11. The reasons he lists on page 194 include: the sensitivity of language in relation to identity in a country where a number of languages are spoken, as in many African countries; the problem of normalization; the problem of terminology; and the problem of connection to the international space that national languages cannot guarantee at the moment.
 12. The available data covers the years 2003–2013. See especially Annexes D, p. 187, and F, pp. 193–203, Jaumont 2017.
 13. I refer here only to American financial support because I am addressing an audience in the United States and because of the important role played by U.S. private funding in higher education. Consideration of government funding by the United States or the former colonial powers, France in this case, is beyond the scope of my discussion.
 14. For example, a *laboratoire de recherche* established at the University of Segou to serve both students and faculty. The colleague who told me about it concluded: "We have good ideas, we want to move things forward, we have the necessary motivation, but there is no support."
 15. An example of this is the *Groupe Pour l'Étude et l'Enseignement de la Population* (GEEP), a research unit within the UCAD School of Education focused on action research around youth sexual and reproductive health. The group of faculty members who established and run GEEP was unable to obtain institutional support for the initiative but deemed the topic so important that they pursued outside funding.

16. See <https://www.elysee.fr/g7/2019/08/26/official-documents.en>. The Partnership declaration included the promotion of women's entrepreneurship, digital transformation, transparency in procurement, and the fight against corruption, in addition to the recurring goals such as the fight against poverty, the right to education, improved health care, and access to clean water. Invited were African Union Chairman Moussa Faki; Rwanda and South Africa as AU past and future chairs respectively; Senegal as chair of NEPAD; and Burkina Faso as chair of the Sahel G-5.
17. I owe this observation to Beth Buggenhagen, who adds: "Dak'art is a platform for contemporary art, not just African contemporary art (although it is mainly the latter that is shown there)." For an overview of the Biennale's development in a discussion of African art in a global world, see Diop (2016).
18. See the CRAC mission statement: <https://www.ugb.sn/crac/index.php/a-propos/presentation-de-l-ufr>.
19. The volumes *Écrire l'Afrique-Monde* (2017) and *Politique des Temps* (2019), edited by Achille Mbembe and Felwine Sarr, are based on the 2016 and 2017 workshops, respectively. The third Atelier took place in Dakar from October 30 to November 2, 2019.
20. My references to "we" and "us" here and in subsequent paragraphs of this section designate Euro-American and European academics such as myself.
21. See Celine-Marie Pascale's argument for the need of an epistemological shift in research methodologies in "Epistemology and the Politics of Knowledge" (*The Sociological Review*, 2011).
22. Mamadou Diawara (1983) also recommends multiple perspectives in a reflection on oral history research conducted in his own society. He returns to it and develops it further in "The Osmosis of the Gazes" (2011), first published in 2010 as "L'Osmose de regards: Anthropologues et historiens au prisme du terrain." (*Cahiers d'Études Africaines* L 1, 197: 471–505).
23. Malian colleagues stressed that the current security situation in the country and across the western Sahel makes collaboration more important than ever in order to respond to the new challenges and to find solutions to problems together. The terms of research have already changed, since northern researchers may not want to expose themselves to the security risks and/or are prevented by their funders from conducting field research. Those who wish to continue are therefore compelled by circumstances to collaborate with local colleagues. In some instances, these exigencies have transformed research collaborations into real partnerships.
24. My thinking on these issues has benefitted from Steven Feierman's keynote address at the University of Dar es Salaam and the rejoinders by Frederick Kaijage, Oswald Masebo, and Innocent Pikirayi, published in the *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 37 (1), 2019.
25. The University of Michigan African Presidential Scholars (UMAPS) program and the African Social Research Initiative (ASRI) are two outstanding examples of this, commendable also because of the long-term commitment the university has made to the programs. The African Studies Institute at the University of Bayreuth in Germany has initiated a new approach to African Studies by establishing the "Africa Multiple Cluster of Excellence," funded for seven years by the German Research Foundation (DFG) Excellence Strategy. Its objective is to pursue research and theory-building with partner universities in Africa as well as in other

- parts of the world. In an effort to alter the power balance, each of the four African institutions that are part of the Cluster has its own budget.
26. The TOKTEN (Transfer of Knowledge through Expatriate Nationals) program established by PNUD supports expatriate scholars who offer short courses in their home countries. Abdoulaye Gueye (2018) notes that studies show that an increasing number of Malian expatriates seek to participate in it. Hamidou Dia and Luc Ngwé (2018) highlight the commitment of Diasporan scholars in a review of the existing literature. Contending that African academic mobility has been understudied, they call for the development of a research agenda that addresses unanswered questions. In a related study, Gueye (2018) analyzes how and with whom North American diaspora academics in the social sciences and humanities engage on the continent in order to understand the unequal circulation of resources from the north. He concludes that despite their underlying commitment, the activities in which they participate and the colleagues with whom they work are oriented by the demands of the North American academy.
 27. Mamadou Diawara (Johann Wolfgang Goethe Universität Frankfurt) and Elisio Macamo (Universität Basel) are launching a new multi-year mentorship program at Point Sud, the research center in Bamako founded by Diawara, which brings together senior researchers and early career Africa-based scholars. The program expands on and enhances the workshops and conferences on a range of topics conducted by Point Sud in Bamako and in various other cities in Africa over a number of years.
 28. Ibrahim Abdullah's discussion on ethics in academic / professional history in his preface to *Silences in African History: Between the Syndromes of Discovery and Abolition* (edited by Jacques Depelchin, Dar Es Salaam: Mkuki na Nyota Publishers, 2005: xi–xiii), can be extended to ethics in African studies.