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Social Sciences and Democracy: Debates in Africa

I am honoured to be invited to deliver the Claude Ake lecture at this important event in the calendar of the African Social Sciences – the General Assembly of CODESRIA. As we have been reminded by several speakers, this is the last General Assembly of CODESRIA this millennium. I do not, however, intend to use this august occasion to induce in anyone a *fin de siècle* sense of doom or a new millennium exuberance. Instead I hope to evoke some of the connections with our past that we may find useful as we proceed into the next century. I notice quite a number of colleagues have become increasingly autobiographical in their writing. So I thought: why not me? I hope you will excuse this self-indulgence, and the avuncular tone of the lecture, which necessarily involves some name-dropping. The names I mention are the ones that came easily to my mind or were easy to pronounce. Claude Ake was President of CODESRIA when I became its Executive Secretary but he was also a friend. I consider this opportunity to pay tribute to him a great honour. I have chosen to reflect not on any particular research theme, but instead on our research community and institutions. My presentation will be a highly condensed account of an exciting and complex story. I hope it will stimulate some of us here to do more work on some of the themes I will touch upon only briefly and, I am afraid, superficially. I do all this safe in the knowledge that the format of the conference allows none of you the opportunity to challenge what I will say.

Social Sciences and Democracy in Africa

In a scathing article in the *CODESRIA Bulletin* in the 1980s, Jibril Ibrahim – then, in Mafeje's memorable characterisation, a neophyte – accused the 'icons' of the African Social Sciences of not taking democracy seriously. The reaction of some of the 'icons' suggested he had touched a raw nerve. The thrust of the published responses was that Jibril either failed to define democracy or was attached to a form of democracy that failed to address substantive issues of poverty and underdevelopment. The more muted (and oral) response suggested that Jibril had failed to spell out the context within which the 'icons' had 'not taken democracy seriously'. But what were these restraining factors?

'Developmentalism' and 'Nation Building'

The first of these was the African intellectuals' commitment, albeit critical, to these twin objectives of the nationalist project. From the many self-allotted 'historical tasks' of African nationalism, I believe five would stand out as the

most widely accepted at the time. These were *complete decolonisation of the continent, nation building, economic and social development, democratisation, Africa's position in the international order, and regional co-operation*. These were, if you like, the key constituent elements of the 'nation-state project' of African nationalism, a much abused and now badly tarnished ideology. Most of us thought that these were the significant issues, and I personally believe they still are. Developmentalist impulses were not confined to social scientists, however. One of the most eloquent statements of development was made by the Nigerian critic Abiola Irele, in a virulent attack on cultural nationalism. In a paper provocatively entitled 'In Praise of Alienation', Irele urged Africans to embrace development even if it entailed 'alienation' – a position that would drive many a post-modernist to the armoury, given their view that development is a child of the fatally flawed and alienating modernist 'enlightenment project'. The critics of 'development' see Africa's absorption of 'foreign' ways as an imposition or a sign of Africans' naiveté and ignorance about the dire consequences of learning from others. Comfortably ensconced in the material accoutrements of modernity, these preachers seemed to suggest that other mortal souls would simply go under were they to attain anything close to their own material life styles. They would somehow lose the virtues 'of simplicity and conviviality, of noble forms of poverty, of the wisdom of relying on each other, and of the arts of suffering' (Rahnema, 1997). This view seems to appreciate humanity only if it remains fragmented and fails to see that, while such processes of learning and adoption may indeed be products of domination and blind mimetism, they may also be testimony to our common humanity and mutual intelligibility. If scientific knowledge were possessed by monkeys, much of humanity would see it as 'monkey business' and leave it at that. It is not that scientific and technical progress will lead humanity to nirvana or utopia, but that it has the potential to address a large number of problems that unnecessarily haunt so much of humanity. Although we shared the 'developmentalis' aspirations, many of us maintained a critical distance from power, hoping we could, in some sense 'speak truth to it'. Much of the criticism of the ruling class was over the fact that they had either failed to break the chains of dependence that blocked their respective countries' development, or that their political practices – especially their 'playing tribal politics' and their self-aggrandisement – were divisive and likely to stoke the flames of tribalism and social conflict. The twin objectives of development and nation building were based on premises that most African intellectuals accepted, even if grudgingly. One of these was that the necessary political stability could only be ensured by national unity and a strong state. By the lights of the times, such a strong state would be authoritarian or a variant form of 'democracy' other than the liberal democracy identified with the West – perhaps 'one-party democracy' or 'people's democracy'. There were of course problems with the practices of actually existing 'people's' or 'one-party' democracies – they were

undemocratic! Even closer to home, these 'democracies' suppressed academic freedom. No sooner had the quickly concocted democratic structures been demolished than a host of theories and justifications for authoritarian rule were advanced. As far as academic freedom was concerned the content of things to come was signalled by Kwame Nkrumah in the following words:

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

Although our corporate interests called for a rejection of these arguments, not only because of their speciousness but also because of their violation of academic freedom, the visceral populism of African intellectuals counselled otherwise by suggesting that the quest for academic freedom would be tantamount to privileging élite or bourgeois rights over the rights to life of impoverished millions. The 'right to development' morally overwhelmed the 'right to think'. African academics could only assert their rights if they were accompanied by a whole range of social responsibilities. This comes out quite clearly in the Kampala Declaration on academic freedom, which spells out in considerable detail the social responsibilities of African intellectuals. In the prevalent 'developmentalist' logic it always appeared immoral to ask for freedom to think and express oneself when elementary rights, such as the right to life, were denied. Claude Ake posed the dilemma quite sharply:

...why should we care about academic freedom in Africa? It is difficult enough to justify the demand for political freedom where limitation of poverty, illiteracy and poor health and the rigour of the daily struggle seem to demand entirely different priorities. It is difficult still to defend the demand for academic freedom which is a very special kind of bourgeois freedom limited to a very small group. Why do we think we are entitled to demand academic freedom and why do we think that our demand deserves to be upheld by the rest of society? (Ake, 1993)

This soul-searching had concrete implications. For example, at an Association of African Political Scientists (AAPS) conference in 1988 someone motioned to protest the deprivation by Idi Amin of Mahmood Mamdani's citizenship. The motion was defeated on the grounds that there were thousands who had lost more than their citizenship in Uganda. Why focus attention on the case of one academic? To be sure, personal vendettas and demagoguery played a role in all this. But if my memory serves me right, the position did not produce any obvious cognitive dissonance in the minds of the majority of the audience. It played on the deep-seated populist and essentially decent view that there was a trade-off between our rights as academics and the development rights of the

majority of people to a decent living. The notion of a trade-off between academic freedom and the 'right to development' was obviously false but that is another story. However, even when African academics did not believe such a trade-off existed, the repressive nature of African states meant that debate on anybody's rights was simply off-limits. The African social science community has grown under extremely repressive conditions. In considering what was written – and the deafening silence on a whole range of issues – the threat of censorship over African scholarship is evident. For years, many words were simply taboo in Africa. We could not speak or write about democracy, about the military, about corruption, about tribalism. We could not mention a head of state except to praise him. Individuals who had to obtain travel permits from their governments to attend our meetings would request that invitations be rephrased so that there was no suggestion the conferences would be dealing with anything offensive to their governments. Censorship applied not only to individual scholarship but to entire events as well. In 19xx, the start of a conference on militarism in Africa was held up in Accra when the government of Jerry Rawlings impounded the papers at the airport because they said something about the 'military'. In the 1980s, a CODESRIA national working group in Zaire managed to write an excellent book on the destiny of the country while mentioning Mobutu only twice – once to point out the date of his ascendance to power, once to explain how the decision by the *bureau politique* to reserve the insignia of the leopard skin and walking stick. (Apparently the 'political class' had taken on the habit of dressing like their master, thus obliterating the only significant difference between themselves and the Generalissimo).

Two further facts can be added to all this. First, a large number of Africa's leading scholars operated in exile and were constantly under the threat of deportation should they criticise the host governments. In the more tragic cases, exiled scholars were so grateful to the host government that they distanced themselves from domestic critics. Sometimes the host governments used these exiles as 'intellectual sticks' with which to silence local critics. Second, visiting foreign researchers rarely stood up to defend their local colleagues, even when they were incarcerated. One can understand their reasons for keeping silent: having invested so many of one's intellectual resources in studying one particular country, it would be foolhardy to invite deportation or denial of research permits by the host government. Caution called for silence. Only a few were bold enough to act and write in solidarity with their African colleagues, either openly or clandestinely.

Self-censorship was, of course, not only a problem for expatriates. It was widespread and not always tied to fear of the state. For example, it was politically incorrect to criticise intellectuals who, at the same time, were being hounded by the state. The case of Cheikh Anta Diop and Senegalese intellectuals provides an illustration. As Mamadou Diouf and Mohammed Mbodj note: 'To criticize Cheikh Anta Diop amounted to siding with the neo-colonial camp

of Negritude/servitude' (Diouf & Mbodj, 1992). The same applied to those countries that supported liberation movements – how could one attack the 'allies' of the liberation movements without, at the same time, undermining the liberation struggle? The self-restraint sometimes extended itself to research themes. For instance, our reluctance to take up ethnic conflict was not only, as is often assumed, because we privileged class analysis. It was also because we had to contend with discourses that essentialised our identities and provided alibis for domination, inequality and injustice through the fetishisation of difference, fragmentation and the obvious multiplicity of identities of most Africans. Maybe the reaction of intellectuals went too far, pushing some to attribute ethnic identities to neo-colonial manipulation or élite mischief. Similar claims can be made about the problematic tendencies of African scholars to harp on the pathology of the state. Although African scholars opposed the oppressive presence of the state in national politics, the economy and society in general, we found ourselves defending the state from those who sought its weakening either on the basis of laissez-faire arguments or as a part of an assault on national sovereignty. Our perception was that 'development' requires a strong state. Some of us explicitly suggested that such a state would have to be democratic.

In any community, unsavoury relationships can emerge. One of these is intellectual bullying, along gender, language, paradigmatic or thematic lines. Such bullying may reflect faulty institutional arrangements and highly hierarchical academic structures, some of it totally unconscious and some due to the presence of types who simply enjoy bullying. The Kampala Symposium addressed the growing concern among our African intellectuals about these dangers. Constant vigilance is necessary. The last few years have seen some relaxation of the authoritarian grip on freedom of expression in general. In some countries real gains in terms of academic freedoms have been registered. There are more newspapers, publishers and other outlets today than any time since independence. But we should not lose sight of the fact that virtually all these gains are reversible and that, consequently, we must maintain our vigilance. CODESRIA would do well to continue monitoring academic freedom and documenting and publicising cases of violation of academic freedom. This would be a direct contribution to the struggles for democratisation and human rights.

All this said, the social sciences in Africa have remained critical and amazingly vibrant, considering both the political and material circumstances. Achille is fond of reminding one that we created a veritable African library.

Problem Driven, or Driven by Methodology?

It has been suggested that African social science research has been methodology-driven, specifically the 'political economy approach', during much of the post-colonial period. The political economy of this, or the political economy of

that, became the standard refrain of every research rubric. This is, of course, a simplification. It obscures the many debates that went on around the pre-eminence of political economy, within CODESRIA circles, in particular as they have been at the centre of accusations. It also confuses personal intellectual histories with those of institutions. Some not-so-generous minds have suggested that 'political economy' was pre-eminent as a result of an executive fiat of political commissars in Dakar. This is patently false. The fact is that none of my colleagues at the CODESRIA Secretariat favoured that position. In addition, the director of our publications programme, Zene Tadesse, insisted on the autonomy of her section from any executive incursions, and was passionately devoted to intellectual freedom and debate. Many of the debates in the CODESRIA Bulletin were pushed by Zene. Indeed, one central preoccupation of those charged with publication was an apparent *absence* of debate among African scholars. Nonetheless, there were one or two attempts at intellectual regimentation and mobbing within CODESRIA. An incident before the Kampala Symposium illustrates some of the internal problems. I proposed to the Executive Committee that Ali Mazrui be a keynote speaker at the conference not only because of his stature but because he had consistently, and in his own inimitable way, defended academic freedom. There was some strong opposition to my idea, viewed by some as bordering on the scandalous. After rather heated debate, a compromise was reached: Archie Mafeje would also be a keynote speaker. I was quite unhappy with the solution, partly because I thought it confused academic freedom with an intellectual or ideological balancing act and partly because I thought it placed Mafeje in an awkward, reactive position. In the event, Archie Mafeje performed magnificently. But again that is another story. The demands for ideological uniformity were enormous and I think we eventually overcame that. The Kampala Symposium finally gave support to those of us who had wanted to keep CODESRIA open.

Now back to the much dreaded 'political economy approach'. I believe the approach gained prominence due to the nature of the problems we thought we had to address which, crudely stated, centred around unfulfilled promises of African nationalism. There was a strong sense that post-independence régimes had failed to deliver on these promises. Indeed, the tribute paid was in their breach more often than in their observance. We were, of course, scandalised by the structural endurance of colonial structures. Colonialism and its neo-colonial aftermath required conceptualisation and theorisation. Adhesion to theories that pointed to this dependence came naturally, as it were. Such concerns were not entertained exclusively by social scientists. A whole generation of African novelists, film-makers, musicians and painters have grappled with the same issues, and African novels, plays, poetry, film and music are replete with accounts of the 'betrayal' of the leadership, its inadequacy to the demands and emancipatory potential of independence. In the words of Ayi Kwe Armah, 'the beautiful ones are not yet born'. Once you take these issues seriously a

number of things begin to loom large – the state, ‘civil society’, the international system, culture, social relations and institutions, etc. One has only to read the works of an ideologically diverse range of scholars such as, to name a few, Samir Amin, Claude Ake, Boubacar Barry, Abdoulaye Bathily, Cheikh Anta Diop, Peter Ekeh, Michere Mugo, Anthony Rweyemamu, Okwudiba Nnoli, Memel Forte, Paulin Hountondji, Kwesi Prah, Joseph Kizerbo, Akin Mabogunje, Archie Mafeje, Fatou Sow, Ali Mazrui, Issa Shivji (and many, many more), to see these shared concerns and that it was widely believed that some form of ‘political economy’ was necessary. But there were sharp differences of opinion about political economy’s constitutive elements – were they nation states, ethnic groups, classes, interest groups? Thus, while many of us were convinced that nation building merited both political and scientific attention, there was serious disagreement about the architecture of the ‘building’, the builders and even the building blocks themselves. Matters were made worse by the claims of too many African leaders to be the architect, the builder and even the only building block, as well as the penchant of some of them to recruit academics willing to write on the merits and unbounded wisdom of such mad claims. Such treatises can be found on the deep commitment of Babangida to democracy, on the authenticity of Mobutu’s cultural accoutrements, on the foresight of Banda, on the humanism of Kaunda, on the serenity and wisdom of Houphouët-Boigny. Some African academics succumbed to the financial temptations, but these were mercifully few.

The radical turn of political economy in CODESRIA circles was largely accounted for by the fact that pan-African institutions (such as CODESRIA, AAWORD and AAPS) were created and led by pan-Africanists, and pan-Africanism had a strong radical component stemming, in part, from its association with anti-imperialism. These issues will apparently not go away. Some of the revisionist literature positing a dichotomy between social and nationalist movements goes back to the issue of betrayal by suggesting how the nationalists hijacked what were essentially popular and democratic struggles and reduced them to state projects. Mahmood Mamdani’s *Citizens and Subjects* (Mamdani, 1996) points in the same direction, that is, how African independence failed to dispense with decentralised despotism and how the basic governance structures of rural Africa were ‘deracialised but not democratised’, trapping the African peasantry almost everywhere ‘in a non-racial version of apartheid’. In our preoccupation with the incompleteness of decolonisation, we probably failed to capture the new and unexpected in post-colonial Africa. We definitely seemed poorly informed about the political landscape of the new Africa, if the misadventures of many academics who dabbled in politics are anything to go by. Perhaps our fixation on the dog that didn’t bark led us to overlook other evidence. A number of significant events caught us by surprise although, judging by what others missed as well, we didn’t do too badly. The failure of the ‘developmentalist’ project and the capture and desecration of the

'nation building' project by a collection of kleptocrats, tribalists, neo-colonial agents and dictators has led many to question the whole developmental and nation building enterprise.

The expropriation of the mantle of African nationalism by unsavoury characters and the falsification of our history so that it ineluctably led, somehow, to a Banda, Mobutu or Kenyatta, led African scholars to distance themselves from much of the nationalist rhetoric. The disengagement of Senegalese scholars from Negritude is one outstanding example of this phenomenon. Following heated debate at the CODESRIA General Assembly in 1988, 'development' was removed from our research agenda (which had hitherto read 'technology and development', 'women and development', 'education and development', etc.). This was not because we thought 'development' and the issues it purported to address no longer mattered (as is suggested in some of the 'post-development' literature). Rather, it was because we thought it narrowed the range of our concerns and induced the type of 'developmentalist' thinking that imposed silence on us. The 'developmentalist discourse' usually had an instrumentalist view of rights, for example, viewing their exercise as a luxury that poor countries could not afford, as it would overload the national agenda with all kinds of claims. The guiding political slogan was '*Silence, on développe*' ('Silence, Development in Progress'), as Kizerbo pithily observed. There are many ways of dealing with the problem as we understood it. One is to declare the problem too idiosyncratic to matter for social science, which seeks to address 'global' questions, or *passé* and no longer relevant to our post-modern sensibilities. As global citizens we are urged to partake more actively in reflections that victims of an '*embarras des riches*' have identified as the human condition. We ought to transcend our particularistic and provincial concerns. Another way is to declare in a solipsistic manner that the problems have somehow been solved – to literally wish them away. A third approach would be to argue that these should not be the preoccupations of social science *qua* social science. For those of post-modernist persuasion, developmentalism and nation building are totalising and repressive ideologies in the case of the former or, in the case of the latter, antiquated and ultimately quixotic tasks in this age of globalisation. Those attracted by the universalising ideologies of neo-liberalism and post-modernism find these concerns as embarrassingly provincial and *passé*. Add on to this the foretold death of the nation state. It may indeed be that for all other societies affluence has undermined some essential values and has not produced the expected Nirvana. We have enough problems of our own without having to subscribe to the angst of every culture on earth or to provide comic relief to those in whom affluence has produced boredom. If the crisis of the West is somehow the result of '*l'embarras des richesses*', it would be silly for us to be disarmed by that self-inflicted angst. It would be even more ridiculous if we accepted the role of hired mourners who wail loudly at the death of simplicity while the bereaved

wine and dine during the funeral proceedings. I understand where the universalism that drives some of these calls comes from, but I am disturbed by the fact that the transcendence so demanded is actually an evasion of our lived reality – of external impositions (so-called conditionalities), bloody conflicts displacing millions of our fellow Africans, poverty and human degradation, authoritarian rule, corruption, endangered transitions to democracy, and truncated democratic practices. Faced with the daunting tasks our societies have to address, it is easy to fall back on some kind of sanctimonious passivity or engage in intellectual dandyism that nurtures indifference and moral irresponsibility among intellectuals – but the issues facing African societies are serious and insist on being addressed. While I understand why we may, from time to time, engage in some levity or seek ‘comic relief’ from the headaches inflicted upon us by the gravity of our conditions, our situation is too serious to allow us to centre our research and intellectual preoccupation around such a posture of gross social irresponsibility. True, the ponderous gravity of some of our work in the past may have been exaggerated and ritually scholastic, but there can be little doubt it reflected the seriousness with which we took our task.

There were three key assumptions whose truth was self-evident in our eyes. One was that the scourges of poverty and exploitation could be defeated by social action. Another was that such action could only be facilitated by social science knowledge which, in turn, was based on the assumption that some reasonably systematic knowledge of society was possible. I remain convinced of this view. It would have made our personal sacrifices and commitment to CODESRIA meaningless if we had believed otherwise. I am, of course, aware that these assumptions are now fiercely challenged in some quarters. I must confess and perhaps warn some of you that I still tenaciously adhere to them. I remain convinced that good social science can cast useful light on these issues, especially if research is conducted on the fundamental questions and not tethered to some fashionable and transient concern of funders or self-appointed intellectual mentors. No social science worthy of its name can conjure away or avoid these serious social issues that our societies must address. Indeed, it is impossible to understand society without understanding its the central pre-occupations of society as a whole as well as its central constituent elements. Agreement on the nature of the problem does not necessarily lead to agreement on methodology or approaches. The ‘political economy’ approach in Africa was characterised by incredible eclecticism and eventually led to considerable dissatisfaction with the use of the method as an excuse for sloppy work. In a paper I presented at the 1986 CODESRIA General Assembly, I spoke against a variant of political economy.

There is a wide consensus that development has to adopt a ‘political economy approach,’ and there is a tendency in Africa to assume that such an approach is in some sense progressive. However, there is nothing intrinsically progressive about ‘the political economy ap-

proach' nor does it have any methodological connotations'. 'The political economy approach' can encompass a wide range of ideological positions. (Mkandawire, 1990)

I concluded my paper by warning against a variant of 'the political economy approach', that entailed 'bad economics, bad political sociology and little history'. In addition, female colleagues finally convinced us that social science that failed to address gender issues was impoverished social science. For years a tacit division of labour had existed between CODESRIA and AAWORD which suggested that women's issues were to be addressed exclusively by women – although people like Marie-Angelique Savanné conducted what was tantamount to guerrilla warfare in male-dominated research institutions. The growing and vocal dissatisfaction with women in development approaches and the ascendance of gender and development meant that such an arrangement was scientifically untenable. Colleagues such as Zene Tadesse, Ayesha Imam, Fatou Sow, to mention only a few, were unrelenting in their efforts to sensitise CODESRIA to gender issues. Their pressures led to a major symposium on the gendering of the social sciences in Africa and, subsequently, to the establishment of CODESRIA's Gender Institute.

Many of us were uncomfortable with the diminishing empirical base of our debates. This was one of the arguments for setting up national working groups and small grants programmes – to expand our empirical capital. Some of us were concerned that the 'political economy' approach was killing the disciplines and wreaking havoc on whatever interdisciplinarity we may have aspired to – one which was not merely the lowest common denominator but one that brought together in common endeavour the specialised skills possessed by each of us. One solution was to encourage disciplinary journals and hold symposia on various disciplines. We helped revive *Afrika Zamani*, supported professional associations, and took initiatives towards the publication of the new *African Sociological Review* and an *African Review of International Relations*. We felt that in areas where professional associations were strong and had their own journals, we would only confine our activities to the promotion of their journals through such things as the *Index of African Journals*. We envisaged specialised institutes on culture and the humanities, and some of our efforts eventually bore fruit. I recount all this to remind us that much thinking and soul searching has informed CODESRIA over the years, and to caution against repeating the errors of the past. Today, there is a new threat to true interdisciplinarity, which can be seen in individual contributions that show questionable disciplinary origins. Every paradigm comes along with its language, jargon, and, at times, with its 'fashionable nonsense' to borrow an apt phrase from Alan Sokal and Jean Bricmont (Sokal & Bricmont, 1998). In the 1970s there were modernisation, articulation, disarticulation, compradorisation, transnationalisation, etc. Some scholars became quite adept at deploying these terms, but they eventually went under because of their failure to transcend the jargon. One witnesses some of the same unfortunate habits

emerging in African writing. There is a new scholarship whose rhetorical excesses lead to the confusion of obscurity with profundity. The emphasis is on form and not content, on paradoxes that are often false, on anecdotes enlisted to carry more than they can bear. The verdant verbiage usually conceals the basic social emptiness of the analysis, focused as it is on anecdotes without ever indicating their social weight or context. The tendency to attribute social weight to passing anecdotes defeats the whole purpose of social science research and will eventually reduce us to educated informants who supply peripatetic visiting scholars with spicy African titbits. It may be true, as is often suggested, that some dominant paradigms are in deep crisis and their key icons have conceded defeat. But we must avoid the dogmatism of new converts to whatever is touted as the 'new' paradigm. During one of this week's sessions, someone proudly announced the momentous shift from a 'deterministic discourse' to one recognising social agency and contingency. I would argue that social science has sought to untangle the problems of agency, structure and contingency ever since its birth, and anyone who declares that he or she has finally resolved the riddle is, I believe, claiming too much. If we are entering new intellectual terrain, we will do ourselves well to insist on rigour and free intellectual contestation. Indeed, it is morally incumbent upon those who suggest that we take new directions to do their homework and mapping thoroughly before they demand that we take the directions they indicate.

Here, it will help to know where we are. It will not be enough to proclaim your age. The massive brain drain over the years has dislocated many of us from Africa. We have been driven to engage scholarship in our new places of residence and to evolve modes of thought and argumentation that reflect this dislocation. Although these styles are bound to reflect the peculiarities of the countries of residence, some African scholars have responded by engaging in heightened forms of cultural nationalism whose blinding force can only be attributed to nostalgia and homesickness. Others have chosen their personal condition of dislocation as the universal condition. And still others have simply escaped into technique. One understands all these responses by Third World scholars (or is it post-colonial émigrés) but such scholarship should not be made the referent for our understanding of Africa. Indeed, CODESRIA can assist those of us abroad by rooting us in the African intellectual terrain.

On the Autonomy of our Research

A major preoccupation of CODESRIA has been to create an autonomous space where African intellectuals can reflect on the continent's social development processes. It was part of the struggle for liberation – this time extended to the intellectual sphere. Africa's quest for intellectual autonomy has been going on for years. The search for an authentic African presence, the Negritude School or Nkrumah's 'African personality', are examples of the pre-independence struggles for such an autonomy. In the post-colonial (I use this expression only

in a temporal sense) period, African intellectuals have struggled against repression of their voices at home and their marginalisation abroad. There was a kind of division of labour that some sought to impose on us. Such a division of labour would have reduced us to what Hountoudji referred to as 'informed natives' or captive audiences to visiting scholars. It would have reduced our institutions to intellectual safari offices. We rejected such a division of labour.

The quest for such an African presence has been misconstrued by some as being evidence of closed-mindedness, an unforgivable crime in the brave new world of globalisation. Some have accused us of being defensive even as they launch the next assault on our intellectual integrity. This accusation is extremely unfair. By force of circumstances, African scholarship has always been wide open to the world in an asymmetrical relationship. While scholars in the North can afford not to know our scholarship, we cannot afford to be unaware of theirs. They can afford to have anecdotal knowledge about us, but we cannot afford to be unfamiliar with them. Indeed, as citation demonstrates, they can publish vast amounts of material without reference to our scholarship, but we cannot. Issa Shivji once observed at a meeting that there was no point in ardently and generously opening doors to a house that has no walls. Earlier, Aimé Césaire, one of the handful of the illustrious poets of Negritude, observed

There are two ways of losing oneself: by a walled segregation into the particular or by dilution in the universal (cited in Cooper, 1996).

We should avoid an isolationist nativism on the one hand, and on the other, the creation of 'enclaves' that are well-connected globally but disconnected locally. We should encourage relations built on mutual respect and a genuine interest in the mutually enriching process of intellectual exchange. Our institutions can facilitate both individual and collective encounters with outside scholarship, but only if they serve not merely as conduits for monologues of self-selected gurus. Those who fear that insistence on intellectual autonomy will lead to our isolation may be consoled in noting that those who seek genuine dialogues and exchange of ideas with us will be supportive of our efforts to create autonomous spaces for reflection. It surely would not be in their interest if all we did was mimic them. There is a new breed of Africanists who take African scholarship seriously and who wish to hear African voices, and not simply tropicalised renditions of His Masters' Voice, and are willing to challenge our scholarship openly without some of the paternalism of the past.

Let me turn to my final point – on the institutional affairs of CODESRIA.

Integrity of Our Institutions

In the quest for autonomy, self-organisation is extremely important. Claude Ake, in whose name we have come together for this lecture, was deeply engaged in creating African social science institutions. His name appears in the annals of CODESRIA, the AAPS, and the Nigerian Political Science Associa-

tion, to name but a few of his affiliations. He died in the course of serving the Centre for Advanced Social Studies which he had founded. As we honour his memory, we must endeavour to ensure that the integrity of our organisations is maintained. The few of us who have access to CODESRIA's governing bodies – General Assembly, Executive Committees, Secretariat, etc – must exercise the utmost responsibility in dealing with the matters of our institution.

A second point I would like to make is that the General Assembly is supposed to debate institutional structures and governance – the charters and issues of representativeness – to elect the Executive Committee, and to determine research priorities. These are weighty topics and we have only limited time to deal with them. It is not the business of the General Assembly to discuss the micro-administrative issues of the Secretariat. That is the task of the Executive Committee. Even on the matter of the structure of CODESRIA, which falls within its attention, it is unlikely that the General Assembly can produce a coherent and institutionally viable instrument of governance during this sitting. It is evident we need to look seriously at CODESRIA as an institution. Structural inconsistencies and grey areas that have emerged over the years must be addressed. One of these is the historical origin of CODESRIA as a network of faculties and research institutes, and the possibility of individual membership. It is here that potentially dangerous conflicts of interest may arise. Many of the individual beneficiaries of CODESRIA's resources – in the form of grants, fellowships, publications, tickets to conferences, etc – are, at the same time, empowered to decide on who disburses these resources, i.e. the Executive Committee. In the early years, there was a separation – representatives of institutions selected the Executive Committee, but participation in research activities was on an individual basis. Over the years this arrangement has been eroded, partly because of the penury of the institutions. At the Eighth General Assembly someone actually proposed that institutions be barred from voting during the General Assembly. An autonomous body appointed by the General Assembly to look at these issues and to seek expert advice on institutional design may be appropriate and save time.

Third, to the third and fourth generation: The reproduction of our community has always been a major preoccupation of CODESRIA. No programme in CODESRIA has absorbed as many resources as the small grants programmes and the thematic institutes run by CODESRIA. So rest assured: The 'dinosaurs' are not out to devour you. But it is important for the young generation to insist that opening CODESRIA to them is transparent and to insist that quality and merit play a key role. You want to be proud that you got your grant on merit, or that you were published in a refereed journal and that the paper you presented at the General Assembly met academic standards and was well received.

Fourth, it should be obvious to everyone that the representativeness of this conference has been severely compromised. The reasons given range from problems of communication, lack of responsiveness to invitations, manipula-

tion – and I do not know what else. Whatever the reason, it is clear that some countries or institutions are over represented and the absence of many others borders on the scandalous. I would urge those who have, as a result, gained numerical advantage to exercise restraint.

Finally, tempers have been unusually high at this General Assembly, and an almost conspiratorial atmosphere has reigned. Part of this is induced by disinformation and part by misunderstanding about what the General Assembly can and cannot do. As people debated the nature and appropriateness of the current president's speech, I was reminded of a similar incident when Claude Ake, as outgoing president, warned against the growing power of the Secretariat and the tendency for researchers to forget that all the money CODESRIA received was given in their name and that they should therefore treat it as their money and not as gifts doled out by the Secretariat. As Executive Secretary I, of course, did not like Claude's pronouncement. Taladio Thiombiano made a similar warning to the incoming Executive Committee. So if tradition is anything to go by, CODESRIA Presidents will tend to make statements like that and one should not read anything sinister behind the comments. I urge all of us to help do away with the tense atmosphere surrounding this gathering and to concentrate on the real issues of the General Assembly. It is our duty to see to it that by the end of this gathering, CODESRIA is strong and that the new Executive Committee and Secretariat enjoy our trust and have an agenda and the instruments that can move CODESRIA forward. Many of the intellectual and institutional problems faced by CODESRIA are not entirely new. Many old men and women scratched their heads, bald or grey, trying to solve them. What is needed is a critical sense of history of what was attempted, what lessons are to be learned and how to go forward. One says all this not to encourage a fetishisation of old texts but to contribute to the growth of our community. A nihilistic and ahistorical criticism of the past will only leave us poorer and will probably engender considerable waste of resources while we reinvent the proverbial wheel. Eboe Hutchful has suggested in the *CODESRIA Bulletin* that we take stock of our intellectual history and the lessons learned from institution building. I strongly support that initiative. As this century comes to an end, I feel it is still appropriate to be reminded of the uncompleted tasks of African countries, nations and people. The social sciences cannot turn their back on these tasks. I thank you for your patience.

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