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EDITORIAL

As explained by Paul Tiyambe Zeleza, the development of post-independence African universities – and therefore also the progress of African Studies in Africa – went through three phases. The “golden era”, which lasted from the 1950s to the 1970s, saw the triumph of African nationalism, the building of new universities and the expansion of existing ones, and “vigorous efforts [...] to decolonize the disciplines”.¹ The centre of knowledge production concerning Africa was, in fact, in Africa. The austerity, neo-liberal economic restructuring and authoritarianism of the 1980s and 1990s led to a crisis in African universities, which caused African academics to move to universities in the global North. This, Zeleza maintains, “shifted the primacy of knowledge production in African studies—which had belonged to African institutions for a brief, exciting period during the golden era—to universities in the global North”.² According to Thandika Mkandawire, this brain drain resulted in the growing “dependency” of Africa-based scholars “on ideas and paradigms advanced by the countries of the North” to the extent that “even ideas from other parts of the South only reach[ed]

1 PT Zeleza, “African studies and universities since independence”, *Transition* 101, 2009, p. 112. Not every scholar, of course, agrees with Zeleza’s periodisation and, especially, his glowing depiction of the 1950s-1960s. Thandika Mkandawire, for instance, has described this period as one in which Africa-based social scientists have been subjected to the “ideological straitjacket” imposed by nationalist governments. “In many ways”, writes Mkandawire, “African universities, for all the joyous celebration at their birth, were born in chains”; “The social sciences in Africa: Breaking local barriers and negotiating international presence. The Bashorun M. K. O. Abiola Distinguished Lecture presented to the 1996 African Studies Association annual meeting”, *African Studies Review* 40 (2), 1997, p. 17.

2 Zeleza, “African studies and universities”, p. 117.

the African shores after repackaging in the North”.³ The 1990s, both Zeleza and Mkandawire agree, witnessed the beginning of a “recovery era”. Since the 1990s, as suggested by John Lonsdale, the need has been recognised to “challenge the monopoly on what passes for useful Africanist knowledge now held by westerners”.⁴ “Only when universities on the continent fully recover and take their rightful—and leading—role in the production of African scholarly knowledges”, Zeleza concludes, “will African studies in the rest of the world become a truly strong field”.⁵

We agree that we live in a “recovery era”, but we also believe that, despite relevant advances in the development of African Studies in Africa,⁶ much remains to be done. This is especially the case in the sphere of publishing, where the tools available to African scholars to make their scholarship internationally known remain inadequate. We contend that improving the quality of journals published in Africa and managed by scholars working in African institutions is critical. In this, we believe that the *Southern Journal for Contemporary History*, a journal published in Africa, has an essential duty to support African knowledge production.

We are also very aware of the challenges that African scholars, especially early career researchers, are confronted with on a daily basis. The research funds provided by African institutions are often scarce, libraries are often outdated, and access to online publishing resources is also limited. African scholars are also often heavily loaded with teaching and administrative duties, which severely limit their time to conduct research, especially outside the boundaries of their countries. In light of these circumstances, we are persuaded that our journal should offer as much support as possible to African scholars, while at the same time ensuring the highest quality standards that can be achieved internationally. This is why the editorial board of the journal undertakes to provide tutoring throughout the whole publication process, from the first submission through to the final publication. These additional responsibilities – which in some instances might involve helping prospective authors access specific sources or improve the quality of their writing – are our small contribution to quickening the pace of the “recovery” heralded by Zeleza.

3 Mkandawire, “The social sciences in Africa”, p. 26.

4 J Lonsdale, “African Studies, Europe & Africa”, *Africa Spectrum* 40 (3), 2005, p. 394.

5 Zeleza, “African studies and universities”, p. 133.

6 One example is the establishment, in 2013, of the African Studies Association of Africa. And see also media reports, such as Kgaogelo Letsebe and Linda Nordling, “Africa’s research universities are rising”, *Research Professional News*, 10 November 2022, <https://www.researchprofessionalnews.com/rr-news-africa-pan-african-2022-11-africa-s-research-universities-are-rising/>, accessed 15 December 2022.

The *Southern Journal for Contemporary History* will continue to be published in open access. This choice, too, has been made to enhance the accessibility and full circulation of scholarship within Africa. We hope that our journal will become increasingly relevant for African studies at a continental and global level, contributing to creating bridges between the global North and the global South.