

EDITORIAL

In his inaugural editorial in *Africa* in 1928, Sir Frederick Lugard observed that the new institution that was responsible for publishing the journal, the International Institute of African Languages and Cultures (it did not become the International African Institute until 1946) was entering a field already crowded with organizations dealing with Africa. His hope was that the IALC would carve out a distinctive role for itself as a hub or central clearing house, coordinating a disparate international array of institutions and bringing 'scientific study' into contact with 'practical affairs'. The core of scientific study would be anthropological and linguistic, and Lugard saw a useful future for research into African local law and custom, land tenure systems and changes in consumption patterns, among other topics (Lugard 1928).

The journal today can look back in the confidence that it has fulfilled Lugard's mandate. Abandoning fairly quickly the early emphasis on direct engagement in the 'practical affairs' of colonial education and governance, it expanded 'scientific study' far beyond what Lugard had envisaged. In the 1950s and 1960s it was the central platform and reference point for British Africanist anthropology, and there was hardly an issue of the journal that did not contain at least one major, classic study of the society and culture of an African people. More recently there has been a shift to a greater diversity of approaches, greater interdisciplinarity, more attention to history and environmental studies, and a focus not on self-contained ethnic/linguistic groups but on the relations between the local, national and global levels of organization. But the core of the journal has remained ethnographic in the sense of 'grasping... realities "on the ground", both in terms of concrete social relations and, through the concern with cultural form, with how they seem to the local participants' (Peel 1980: 245). The immensely distinguished past of the journal weighs heavily on the present, and it was with trepidation that I undertook the role of editor, and with it the responsibility to maintain the standards set by my illustrious predecessors: Diedrich Westermann; the war-time editorial team of Ida Ward, M. Green, Margaret Read and M. Wrong; Edwin W. Smith; Daryll Forde; John Middleton and his co-editors David Dalby and David Parkin; J. D. Y. Peel; Murray Last; and Richard Fardon.

Editorial challenges have multiplied and intensified in recent years. Lugard's consciousness of being crowded by other African-oriented outfits may have been prescient. Today, the concentration not only of institutions but also of periodicals concerned with Africa has greatly increased. To speak only of Britain, before *Africa* arrived on the scene in 1928, the main Africa-oriented scholarly periodical in the country was the *Journal of the Royal African Society*, later to become *African Affairs*. There was little overlap: *Africa* was much more focused on in-depth linguistic and ethnographic studies and, at that period, also much

more international – or European – in character, publishing articles in German and French as often as in English. Today, however, these two journals find themselves surrounded by a profusion of other successful Africanist journals covering the study of the continent from every angle. Some represent a single discipline or subject area – history, literature, religion, political economy – and have become required reading for specialists in those areas; others represent a single geographical area of Africa, and attract all the relevant regional specialists. This is obviously a good thing, but it is also a challenge for our journal, which has to keep its footing in a shifting sea of specialist competition. The study of Africa has grown, branched out and become too multiple and complex for a single institution or publication to have any chance of functioning as a hub connecting all the others. Nonetheless, *Africa*, I believe, does retain today a special place in the Africanist scholarly community. It is the main UK-based (but international) journal that publishes on the whole of Africa, and in all disciplines of the humanities, social sciences and environmental sciences, while retaining its historic core orientation to ethnographically rich, historically informed knowledge of life on the ground in Africa. It will be my endeavour to keep that place for the journal.

In addition to the proliferation of Africanist periodicals, however, anyone taking on the role of editor now faces another, more recent and possibly more pressing, challenge: the rise of electronic publishing. This is moving ahead with breathtaking rapidity, and seems likely to change the traditional basis of academic journal publishing in as yet unforeseeable ways. However, it also, paradoxically, offers *Africa* a chance to retrieve and further develop one of its historic commitments which, in the last forty years, has become somewhat eclipsed by the enormous successful growth of others.

In the editorial referred to above, Lugard announced that the IALC would instigate and maintain, funds permitting, two streams of publications: ‘African Studies’ – scholarly works by experts – and ‘African Documents’, which he described as follows:

brochures or texts written or dictated by Africans, preferably in their own language and translated into a European language. Such texts may include stories, songs, dramas, riddles, proverbs, historical and other traditions, descriptions of social institutions and customs, myths and religion in its every aspect (Lugard 1928: 4)

In the journal itself, this programme was followed mainly by means of a section headed ‘The Voice of Africa’, made up of short texts which included, during the first few years of the journal’s life, popular songs from Mombasa, Kikuyu proverbs, Xhosa *intsomi*, and a Chopi love-song. Outside the journal, the IALC planned longer publications, one of which was Akiga Sai’s history of the Tiv, translated and edited by Rupert East and published as *Akiga’s Story* (1939).

To modern eyes this initiative may look somewhat paternalist – the ‘African voice’ appearing as a brief interlude among the

more imposing disquisitions of the non-African 'experts', without acknowledgement that the owners of these voices were themselves interpreting, constructing and analysing their own history and society (Desai 2001). But it was progressive for its time. The transcription, presentation, translation and discussion of the African-language documents were taken very seriously and carried out to a high standard. The IALC pioneered the systematic documentation of African-language texts, devised a common alphabet which was adopted by, or influenced, the orthographies of upwards of sixty African languages, and sponsored African-language writing competitions which encouraged the composition of modern fiction reflecting on present-day conditions in Africa. Nor were the two strands—the scholarly studies and the collected 'documents'—kept separate. There were many scholarly studies of local texts (by 'experts') which clearly depended on respectful attention to translations, interpretations and explanations by local collaborators. Indeed, the very first issue of the journal featured a lengthy, serious academic article co-authored by a European and an African scholar. 'Le théâtre mandingue' by Henri Labouret and Moussa Travélé (1928) is undoubtedly a 'contribution by experts', but it also furthers the objectives of the 'African documents' strand of the journal by presenting many transcriptions of oral Mande texts with translations into French. The focus on locally produced texts could be seen as the 'red thread' of the journal's wider approach. It is about local intellectual production; it necessitates a close, collaborative relationship with and immersion in a local linguistic culture; and it is an approach to views and experiences on the ground—seen from within.

As the journal advanced and consolidated its reputation, however, and as African anthropology matured, the 'African Studies' strand gained increasing predominance until it became the only one. There was a similar development on the IAI's book publishing side. The series on local African texts did not materialize, whereas the IAI's African Studies series of monographs, including the International African Library, publishing original ethnographic and historical research on all parts of Africa, have been highly successful and influential.

Yet African intellectual production is central to the future (and past) of African Studies. This is true at all levels and in regard to all kinds of 'intellectual production'. It is hard to see the point, or the intellectual legitimacy, of the study of a continent conducted behind the backs, so to speak, of that continent's thinkers. The best work in African Studies has always been based on dialogue, whether this has been properly acknowledged or not. And with the current economic crisis in many African universities, it has become more urgent than ever that we keep the lines of communication open. We need to find ways to support Africa-based sister publications battling against closure. In addition, the new African diaspora in Europe, precipitated by the same economic crisis, offers both new possibilities of collaboration, and an important new topic on which we would want to publish research.

It has long been the policy of the editors of *Africa* to encourage contributions from African scholars, and to increase the journal's

availability and visibility in Africa. This will continue to be our highest priority. The IAI is working with our publishers, Edinburgh University Press, to extend the means by which both paper and electronic versions of the journal are made available to African universities and research institutions. To engage more directly with up-and-coming scholars based in Africa, the IAI has now undertaken to provide support for a series of research writing workshops to be run in conjunction with African Studies conferences taking place in Africa as well as in the UK and Europe. These workshops will aim to stimulate uptake of the journal, clarify its range of interests and advise potential contributors about defining and presenting material in the journal's format. We hope in future to build on this with half-day or one-day IAI workshops around specific research themes, the contributions to which would be solicited with a view to encouraging scholars to develop them for publication in the journal. Early career scholars in Africa will be particularly welcome, and we will link up with the various Visiting Scholar schemes that currently bring such scholars to the UK, in order to make our research writing workshops and thematic pre-publication workshops available to them during their stay.

This is a vital element in the journal's outlook. *Africa* can help stimulate intellectual engagement and collaboration on the ground by creating space for the products of such engagement. That there is an appetite for greater collaboration, in all disciplines and regions of Africa, is suggested by the enthusiastic response to a scheme recently launched by the British Academy, the UK–Africa Academic Partnerships scheme, which supports collaborative projects built around a research theme of common interest but also includes joint teaching, seminars, and capacity building on both sides. The journal will be interested in attracting articles arising from this scheme, and from other collaborative projects, and we will be working with the British Academy and other organizations to see how best to encourage and support their development.

But university staff are not the only intellectuals in Africa. We would also like to revive part of the IAI's historic agenda, which was to pay attention to the productions of 'local intellectuals' outside the formal academic domain. Teachers, clerks, clergy, businessmen, town councillors and a host of others have engaged for over a century in the production of knowledge about African culture. They have written and published local histories, disquisitions on theology and philosophy, and studies of local oral genres such as riddles, proverbs and divination poetry. They have written memoirs and biographies. They have contributed huge quantities of poetry, in English and African languages, to the local newspapers. This rich seam of local intellectual production is becoming an increasing focus of attention by historians, anthropologists and literary scholars. Historians are increasingly studying the writings of local intellectuals not merely as somewhat dubious recensions of oral historical traditions, but as forms of writing which themselves need to be understood historically and which can shed much light on the politics and culture of the time in which they were written.

In some cases they have collaborated, edited and helped bring local autobiographical and historical writing to publication (Kareri 2003; Maddox and Kongola 2006; Miescher 2006). Anthropologists are beginning to recognize the role of local 'field assistants' in shaping the direction of anthropological inquiry, and conversely the stimulus that anthropology gave to the production of local ethnographic accounts of culture and traditions produced for local purposes (Schumaker 2001). And this form of collaboration goes back beyond the institution of formal anthropology to very early encounters between explorers and local communities – witness Heinrich Barth's interactions with his travelling companion Dorugu and with a network of West African scholars (von Oppen 2006). Literary scholars are beginning to move away from the post-colonial canon, to look at local print culture, ephemeral publications, and unpublished personal writing (Newell 2006).

In keeping with the IAI's traditions, our plan is to take advantage of the new possibilities of electronic publication to retrieve and re-publish a selection of such works. The obstacle hitherto has been that such texts take up a lot of space. In themselves they are often much longer than an average journal article. In addition, as local texts written with local agendas in mind, they often need contextualization and commentary to bring out their interest and value for a different audience. The new EUP website launched in January this year allows us to have our cake and eat it. In the present issue, we inaugurate, or perhaps reactivate, a 'thread' in the journal (if you can think of a better term, please let me know) devoted to the productions of local African intellectuals. In the paper version of the journal, what will be presented is an excerpt from a local text – whether a book, newspaper serial, handwritten diary, or transcribed oral text – plus, in many cases, a contextualizing and interpretative essay by a scholar who has studied, edited and annotated it. In the on-line version of the journal, this essay-plus-excerpt will have a link to the complete text. In this way we will be complementing and extending the range of existing, predominantly historical, book series such as Brill's *African Sources for African History*, the British Academy's *Fontes Historiae Africae*, and the publications of the Van Riebeeck Society for the Publication of South African Historical Documents. Our series will include contemporary texts as well as those from the past, and the focus will be ethnographic and literary as well as historical.

The first example of this thread appears in the current issue. Stephanie Newell has retrieved a unique personal narrative by a Gold Coast clerk, who recounts his adventures in Cameroon during the First World War. This text was serialized in the *Gold Coast Leader* in 1916–19, and Newell, in her introductory essay, points out the many fascinating and puzzling features of his story. It seems appropriate to start the thread with the writings of an ordinary clerk, who is also an enigma, reminding us that these texts are much more than 'data' to be absorbed into our own projects.

Other pieces in the present issue contribute further to the theme of local production, intellectual and otherwise. Vinay Kamat and Tom Yarrow discuss personal narratives of nostalgia and social

critique in Tanzania and Ghana. Tom McCaskie and Gregor Dobler investigate local production, consumption and exchange in a more material vein, in looking at gun culture in Kumasi and the trade in Scotch whisky and Chinese sneakers—among other things—in Oshikango, Namibia.

In future issues, we will also feature occasional shorter appreciations of the lives and creations of individual local intellectuals who may have been well known in their own communities, but invisible to the academic establishment both at home and abroad.

This initiative coincides with the parallel project of the African Studies Association of the UK which has identified African intellectual production and local knowledge as its key focus for research and practical engagement. We are very pleased that, at this auspicious moment, we can forge closer links with the ASAUK. Initially, this will take the form of special subscription rates to members. In future, the ASAUK and IAI hope to launch joint workshops and other activities. The partnership is appropriate. The ASAUK is a centrally important association for Africanist scholars – and policy makers and development workers – in all disciplines, working on all regions of Africa. Its broad base and inclusive approach make it a natural partner for *Africa*, similarly broad church, multi- and inter-disciplinary, pan-African, and committed to engagement with realities on the ground in Africa.

In a similar vein, *Africa* – in keeping with its origins – will be interested in exploring the possibility of forging closer links with other international institutions dedicated to the study of African societies and cultures.

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