



7. An unequivocal sign thereof is the weakening, in France, of highly specialized disciplines that welcomed orientalist and Africanist to more general political science positions that were more in line with the immediate needs of politicians and the media.
8. Terry Shinn Pascal Ragouet, *Controverses sur la science. Raison d'agir*, Paris 2005, p. 148.
9. Au mieux, ils adopteront, comme ils le firent dans les années quatre-vingt-dix dans les pays arabes et en Afrique, certaines 'modes' intellectuelles venues des USA comme le 'post-modernisme' qui est une voie facile d'accès à une sorte 'd'humanitas' au rabais. [They will at best adopt, as they did in the 1990s in the Arab countries and in Africa, certain intellectual 'fashions' imported from the US, such as 'post-modernism', a pathway that gives easy access to a kind of 'third-rate humanitas'].
10. Jacques Bouveresse, *Le philosophe chez les autophages*, Éditions de Minuit, Paris 2001, p.9.

Research and the Challenge of Expertise in Africa

The positioning of Africa's scientific communities in international research circles is repeatedly being questioned. This is because, even in this continent, the link between research and development is considered to be obvious. As a matter of fact, research covers various activities thereby producing goods of a different kind at the centre of which is the mission of knowledge development. The issue here is notably to know where these communities really situate themselves in the identification and improvement of new «paradigms» that seem to be the most suitable to influence the evolution of societies, development and to reflect its effects: for instance, governance, globalisation, poverty, sustainable development, etc. These issues constitute a blend of legitimate worries and many doses of cynicism expressed by their authors: how many scientific works carried out by researchers in African universities have been indexed or referenced by scientific communities in the North? These research works, are not valued, attract little interest¹ from partners in the North, except in the case of 'orders' through which the researcher becomes an instrument and accomplice of his marginalisation.

Expertise as a challenge for research

Expertise is one of the current forms of these 'orders'. Insofar as it mobilises those whose essential, if not primary, activity is to develop knowledge, expertise is equivalent to one of the multiple

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forms of research assessment and upgrading. In itself, it is not research, even if it contributes to the latter: as a matter of fact, it observes phenomena and specific objects within limited time frames with the sole objective of enlightening decision-makers with regard to the actions to be taken in the short term. It differs from the scientific activity which, by nature as well as by vocation, needs time to determine its aims, develop its subjects and polish up these issues. There is need to deplore the tendency of many university dons and researchers to reduce the scientific activity without any other form of extension or broadening of observation, questioning and knowledge. This is a dangerous departure for research and scientific communities.

This orientation has its own consequences for research activity itself, the researchers and the 'diagnosed' society. It exposes scientific research to the risk of the deconstruction of group dynamics to the advantage of the individualisation process. Furthermore, in terms of training or construction of a scientific process for research institutions, the results are most often nil. This can be deduced from these statements made by the researchers I have had the opportunity to talk to. Speaking about his research activities and the life of the university centre where he has been

studying for the past twenty years, a professional researcher in Geography gleefully maintained: 'In the university centre, yes, everything is going on smoothly, I am still there... As far as activities are concerned, no, everything is dead and everyone is concerned with his little contracts. Personally, I have a few of them with British organisations. In addition to my salary, which also enables me to travel widely in the sub region [...] and, from time to time, in Europe'. No allusion is made to publications. The services of another researcher, an economist by training and assistant lecturer by profession, are 'occasionally sought for' by international organisations and associations as a consultant, and he is impatient to be fully integrated into one of these organisations, so as to be well-off like his fellow researchers and colleagues who are already working there and receiving attractive remunerations. This is a legitimate ambition! In the waiting room at the Leopold Sédar Senghor airport, where we worked with university dons and scientists who were the distinguished guests of the CODESRIA at the seminar commemorating the 30th anniversary of the assassination of the fundamentalist leader, Amilcar Cabral, my neighbour who was in his late thirties, whispered to me about his exasperation with regard to the event. 'I do not understand how so much money can be spent to finance a seminar on Amilcar Cabral. This gentleman did nothing extraordinary as compared to the current leaders. He might have pillaged his country and, for that, he might have committed murders just like the others

and ushered in dictatorship....' My economist friend did not care about the ideas and hopes nursed by this leader of the anti-colonialist struggle, his visions of development, freedom, independence and links and relations between peoples and nations...

Expertise at the service of research

The cupidity of the researcher and the misery of the scientist and of the university don, are ills that lead each and everyone to this limited vision or to this negation of their primary responsibility in the development process. Can one expect researchers who subscribe to this pot-boiler vision of expertise to find in it the means with which to ask society's questions and to interrogate the society in an approach which makes them act as a mirror? Can researchers of this calibre advocate for research as support for development though they have clearly missed out on the very vision of development?

Had these actors been the only ones to be lost in this simplistic reading of development and their own indignation faced with the investment necessitated by the requirements of knowledge, which constitute the precondition for development support, we would be satisfied with making good these lapses. But it is paradoxically turning out that the people themselves are challenging research especially when the latter does not belong to techno sciences or medical sciences...

To be a means for knowledge capitalisation and upgrading, expertise presupposes, on the part of the expert consultant, at least an accomplished scientific and professional profile. For the latter, the objects observed, therefore, increase the sources of his investigations and the data collected and exploited in orientating his reflections.

Some see in the resources mobilised by expertise, an alternative research financing method especially in a context of the scarcity of government resources. A more positive and pleasant vision of expertise would instead make it a useful comple-

ment to government and institutional financing methods. The stake of such complement is the maintenance and sustenance of a government scientific research system that enables the State to master complex objectives and underpinnings of development. This pattern only slightly characterizes the prevailing situations in multiple African contexts. Here, researchers have ended up deserting their organisations and laboratories in quest for quick cash, thus responding to the calls of UN agencies and NGOs, which are becoming more and more active in the research field.

Such research, which could otherwise have been capitalised, is only carried out in rare cases and when it is actually carried out, the capitalisation bears the audacity of the authors concerned and their sense of responsibility toward the national society considered. For the others who constitute the vast majority of researchers, one expertise leads to the other, with researchers parading the corridors of specialised organisations in a bid to place an order with the 'local authorities'. This constitutes a mercenary aberration and a threat to knowledge development and thinking and, consequently, to science in Africa. This drift compromises research in one of its missions, namely that of 'training and cooperation', to enable countries to acquire indigenous scientific capacity, not only to give their full effect to the transfer of technologies but to respond to the specific needs of knowledge which are linked to their ecosystems and societies... Thus, research ceases to be not only a means but also a condition and indicator of development.

Potential research avenues worth exploring

Research and expertise owe their legitimacy to resource needs, the demands of the society or, more globally, to the environment and the actions to respond to them. Some institutional logic that ties in squarely with its missions, objectives and organisational and functional methods underlies these activities, which are carried out by workers with comparable profiles. That notwithstanding, the objects

and subjects it studies would be enough to bring together those who carried them out, as if to stigmatise the complementarity of the researcher and the expert consultant! This topical issue is premised on the innovations to be introduced in government research systems so as to prevent them from dying slowly in the face of expertise competition. Such a prospect requires that researchers be mobilised within the framework of their research structures, which would thus produce results and benefit from additional resources to finance research. Within this hypothesis, research institutions become potentially eligible for tenders with the obligation to co-finance operations. Thus, training in research can be provided through research and the government system rendered sustainable.

Note

1. And yet, expressing it would constitute the beginning of a partnership with research institutions such as the IRD [Research Institute for Development], the CIRAD [International Research Cooperation Centre for Agronomic Research for Development] as well as others which are not exclusively situated in the area of knowledge development and reflection.

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