

From the Editors

Dear Colleagues,

When we began editing the *African Studies Review* back in 1997, the paucity of manuscripts the journal received from colleagues in African universities was striking. At that point, providing a venue for African voices on the continent became one of our central goals as editors. Some of our concerns were noted in the “Editors’ Note” in the September 2001 issue; we will briefly elaborate on these in relation to this special issue focused on the structural and systemic problems currently plaguing African universities.

In addition to the more pragmatic goal of encouraging our colleagues in Africa to submit manuscripts to the *ASR* and providing a venue for scholarly work conceived and written from an African context, there are serious intellectual issues at play in our editorial decision. Without the voices of our colleagues in Africa, without the interaction, interchange, and mutual support between academics on a global scale this encourages, there is no dialectic, no synthesis, no on-going theorizing of local–global issues and thus no voices in the production of knowledge that are distinctly informed by African context and experience. The point here is not to essentialize Africa, or to argue that there is something inherently “more African” or more “authentic” about the work being produced in Africa. Of course there is no single lens, no one way of seeing or knowing or interpreting shared by those who live and work on the African continent. However, as Achille Mbembe argued in his introduction to the September 2001 issue of the *ASR*, there is a “relatively distinct sensitivity” and way of “writing Africa” found in the work of African scholars who have chosen to “remain behind,” a way of seeing and knowing that derives at least in part from living the complex and diverse realities of African daily life. In order to achieve our editorial goal of securing a venue for these African voices in the global production of knowledge (and encouraging more in the future), we turned to our African colleagues for help.

This is the second guest-edited special issue we have solicited from our colleagues in Africa. “Beyond the New Nativism,” edited by Achille Mbembe, was published in September 2001 (vol. 44, no. 2). Our goal—and Achille’s—in producing that issue was to give voice to those who have “remained in Africa,” and thus to present current modes of theorizing Africa from within, and to use these to initiate a broader conversation on constructing theoretical understandings for the twenty-first century. The overall topic for this current issue—the problems confronting African universities—grew out of general concerns addressed in the Mbembe issue

coupled with widespread dismay at the current disintegration of institutions of higher education on the continent

Nantang Jua and Frances Nyamnjoh are respected colleagues who have taught in African universities in Cameroon and Botswana. Both have long experience as researchers, as writers, and as active participants in political discourse, and both have held prestigious fellowships in Europe, and in Ben Jua's case, the United States. Because of their various experiences in and around the academy, as well as their wide-ranging global networks of fellow academicians built up over the years and the astute wisdom about these issues they have collectively acquired, we charged these two dynamic scholars to put together a special issue on African universities and higher education in Africa. The essays that follow are thus the result of a long collaboration and a process in which manuscripts were solicited and chosen by Jua and Nyamnjoh. We feel they have assembled a coherent set of excellent papers which, while critical of African universities as places of learning, and often scathing in their critique of the overall structure of higher education and knowledge production in Africa, do not fail to provide keen insight and support for these arguments by locating them historically and then contextualizing the discussion locally, nationally, and globally. The result is a consistent set of themes, structures, and categories that give knowing insights both into shared, ubiquitous, primarily structural national and global problems and the diversity of the relationship of these to local histories. The guest editors have provided a provocative and challenging introduction that speaks eloquently and more directly to illuminate issues we have only touched on here.

We are immensely pleased to see this eagerly anticipated issue in print. We anticipate that the questions raised here will provide the focus for many on-going debates and constructive discussions. The astute reader will note that these articles are virtually all focused on English-speaking or formerly Anglophone countries. This is a product of both the editors' networks and of the ways in which solicitations in English for manuscripts through the Internet tend to attract submissions from people who write in English. We hope to be able to solicit some articles on higher education in Francophone Africa in the near future.

Many thanks to Nantang Jua and Frances Nyamnjoh for so successfully taking on and bringing to fruition this special issue. Once again, it is a pleasure to see our colleagues in Africa lay claim so eloquently to the *African Studies Review* as their journal, and we hope this is a trend that will continue with an increase in the number of manuscripts sent to the *ASR* to be considered for future publication. Finally, but certainly not least, many thanks to our brilliant copy editor, Ella Kusnetz for her keen eye and deft editing. We continue to marvel at the elegance of her expertise.

Ralph Faulkingham
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