

Research Africa Reviews Vol. 3 No. 3, December 2019

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Research Africa Reviews' Editorial Voice: Looking Back, Moving Forward

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Research Africa Reviews (RAR) has powered ahead over the past three years with the current issue being the final issue for the third volume. Though the RAR editorial team has so far succeeded in keeping the volumes alive with a reasonable number of contributions per issue, it still hopes that those interested in African Affairs or specializing in various aspects of African Studies, as well as those championing issues of research and development, would still consider contributing towards future issues.

Since its inception in 2017, RAR has published 99 articles: 83 book reviews, 6 film reviews, and 10 literature and essay reviews. Most published articles are in English with few in Arabic and French. Published articles are increasingly downloaded by several thousand people, which indicates a growing readership beyond the 1400 Research Africa Network subscribers. While the RAR team gently asks the current list of members to ponder how they can play a role in enriching and transforming this growing platform, the invite is extended to those who have not yet joined it. We – as the RAR team – therefore want to use this opportunity to repeat some of the points made in the first issue.

In the first issue, we stated that RAR could be viewed as ‘a critical academic platform’; one that is open to everyone associated with academic institutions and organizations inside and outside the continent. We indicated that this platform was set up with the purpose of creating an online academic space for anyone who wishes to review books, films, artwork, or any other works connected to African Affairs.

At that point, we welcomed anyone who desired to write reports on conferences, who wanted to offer critical reflections on issues of the day, on topics of research, on matters of concern to human flourishing. We welcomed those who longed to debate and to make inputs on a range of subjects that affect African societies. As a matter of top priority, we would like to hear from scholars and practitioners who have engaged with the notion of an African Renaissance, a topic that was dealt with and covered by a number of public intellectuals in the past. It is our view that we must return to this topic and revisit the thoughts of Cheikh Anta Diop, who articulated them during the 1960s, and of Thabo Mbeki, who popularized the idea of the African Renaissance during the 1990s.

We should not ignore the fact that ‘African Renaissance’ remained a critical concept throughout the post-colonial period and that it has continued to be a pivotal tool for mobilization during the current neoliberal age, an era in which policies have been devised and constructed to serve the interest of a few. At present, communities from the South, specifically in Africa, find themselves unpleasantly trapped and unkindly restricted because of these contrived policies, and knowledge production and academic institutions are no exceptions.

Scholarship is not free. Current global academic order does not provide incentive to faculty members to share their know-how freely or charitably. In pursuit of promotion and fame, scholars are increasingly toiling for large commercial publishers that are not interested in equitable development and are not accountable to academic values of equality and equity. They are interested in profit. This collusion between academic institutions and commercial publishers does disadvantage African scholars and universities. By virtue of their location and background history, Africans are disadvantaged in this politicized knowledge. Their universities have limited means to access or acquire this newly developed scholarship; and their scholars have to hustle to get their work published or disseminated globally. There is a West African-Wolof saying that “Waxi Jambour Du Wax.” If African stories and tales are not displayed in the global marketplace of ideas, then any talk about African Renaissance will remain hollow with unfulfilled promises.

The questions that we, inside and outside Africa, should ask are: to what extent have communities on the continent been granted fair and free economic freedom and mobility? Is democracy – as advocated by the neoliberal order – suitable to each African state? What does political cohesion mean to us as Africans? In addition, do we see the continent becoming ‘a significant player in the world’s geo-political affairs? In the same vein, how do we promote vigorous and excellent academic standard in African universities and colleges? How do we improve academic output and make it more aligned with the needs of societal development? How do we fuse a culture of tolerance, understanding and service across the different communities in continent? This, moreover, begs another important question: will Africans - through the African Union - ever unite to attain some form of political cohesion in order to deal with the various challenges that lay ahead?

Though we are not going to attempt to answer all these questions in one platform, we pose them here since we all know that African Renaissance continues to be a significant concept and concern for many scholars and more so for the future generations of intellectuals. Speaking of intellectuals and thought leaders, we expect them to articulate their ideas privately and publicly; they need to share them in platforms that crossover from the local to the global and vice versa. As Africans and people of African background start to lead the world in areas of sports, music, and entertainment industries, they must think about how to cash in and how to re-invest in community development. They should do so in order to engage critically with contemporary problems that have cropped up during this Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) phase of human development.

As editors of Research Africa Reviews Network, we cannot miss the recurring problems that must be tackled as Africa heads to a new decade. There is a need to tame the last vestige of insecurity in countries such as Congo, Somalia, Libya and in the Sahel region. There is a need to integrate African economies with lesser dependency on former colonial powers or China. And there is a need to imbue educational institutions with skills, not degrees, and to teach students how to domesticate technological and social changes. Since good practices matters in governance, we should cherish bold and reformist leadership in countries such as Ethiopia, Ghana, Rwanda and Morocco. With their evident limitations, these four models have recognized existing problems and proposed creative solutions.

And as Africa faces the unknown 4IR future, its intellectuals and thought leaders, who hail from different backgrounds across the continent and beyond, should step up and step out

of their comfort-zones to tackle problems. We are all reminded of W. E. B. Du Bois' words of wisdom in *The Souls of Black Folk* that progress in human affairs "is more often a pull than a push, a surging forward of the exceptional man, and the lifting of his duller brethren slowly and painfully to his vantage-ground."

African intellectuals and leaders should look back to and learn from the past, and move forward by using their positions to share know-how, promote best practices and show that they are transparent, accountable, bold and resilient in tackling the problems that lay ahead.

Acknowledgment

The Editor-in-Chief once again wishes to express his appreciation to each and every RART member for their inputs at different stages of the process. He wants to register his heartfelt gratitude and thanks to RA's team that includes the assistance of Duke University's Madison Cullinan, Wallace Peaslee, Zhuri Bryant and RA team members who assisted in editing and finalizing this issue. Elise Mueller of Duke OIT has been providing technical assistance to this publication. RART also wishes to record its thanks to Duke Research African Initiative and the African Books Collective for their unrestricted support.

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ISSN 2575-6990