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## Introduction

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A debate is taking place about post-colonial literature and society in Africa in which writing in English about writing in English or French is pursued without any acknowledgement that a whole world of debate has been going on vigorously and at length in African languages (Graham Furniss, *Poetry, Prose and Popular Culture in Hausa*, p. ix).

For many important cultural purposes, most African intellectuals south of the Sahara are what we can call 'europhone' (Kwame Appiah, *In my Father's House*, p. 4).

In the early 1990s, two books deeply influenced the intellectual debate on the production of knowledge on Africa, on Africanism and Pan-Africanism (Mudimbe 1988 and Appiah 1992), so much so that their authors received, in 1989 and 1993 respectively, the Melville Herskovits Prize from the African Studies Association of North America, which is awarded annually to the best book on Africa written in English. Both authors come from a Christian background, had attended top Western universities (Louvain and Cambridge), teach in two prestigious US universities (Stanford and Princeton) and represented the two dominant intellectual traditions of post-colonial Africa (Anglophone and Francophone). While Appiah's book was based on an in-depth analysis of a limited body of work, mainly Pan-Africanist authors, that of Mudimbe made use of an impressive range of books.

What was more striking as a common denominator between the two authors (which they share with African intellectuals trained in the Western languages) was their very Eurocentric approach to the production of knowledge in Africa and on Africa. Mudimbe argues that the writings that have contributed to the invention and the idea of Africa were, for the most part, produced by Europeans during the colonial period: they formed what he called the colonial library.<sup>1</sup>

As for Appiah, he stated that most of the writings produced in sub-Saharan Africa were in Portuguese, French and English and that consequently most of the intellectuals of sub-Saharan Africa were Europhones (Appiah 1992:4). He added that, historically, the intellectuals of the Third World (including sub-Saharan Africa) were the product of the encounter with the West (Appiah 1992:68).

The 'colonial library' can be traced to the formation of modernity and the Western identity which dates back to the end of the medieval period. In medieval Europe, Latin was the scholarly language par excellence and Christianity the main identity reference. Thanks to the growth of the printing industry and the enormous production of books in vernacular languages (German, English, Polish, Spanish), the European communities gradually acquired a national identity that supplanted the religious one (Anderson, *passim*). As they acquired these new identities, which were an important dimension of Western modernity, they also constructed the identity of 'savages': people who were not Western (Hall 1996). The accounts of travellers and the testimonies of explorers and missionaries, as well as writings by the thinkers of the Enlightenment, contributed to the idea that there was a relationship of radical otherness between the West and the Rest.

In the case of Africa, Mudimbe (1994, *passim*) tried to question the very idea of the continent that the social sciences<sup>2</sup> had developed. To illustrate the controversial nature of the term 'Africa' which originally designated a Roman province of Northern Africa, Mudimbe analyzed works of art and Greek texts about the black people, as well as accounts by European travellers, missionaries and explorers. He stated that the writings constituted the nucleus of a 'library' that has created extremely simplistic, if not racist, representations of a mosaic of peoples and places in Africa, whose culture, ecology, modes of social organization and political economy differ so greatly that one wonders whether, apart from its geographical location, the term Africa makes any sense at all.<sup>3</sup>

During the colonial period, this embryo of a library was reinforced by anthropologists and other colonial writers whose aim was to help create governable subjects (Mudimbe 1994:xii). Later, the library was enriched by the writings of Africanists (non-African researchers working on Africa). This expanded library shaped, according to Mudimbe, an epistemological territory inhabited by concepts and worldviews inherited from the West. Even during the post-colonial period, neither the Africanists nor the Africans who were preaching the authenticity of Africa, and still less the Afrocentrists, were able to break out of the extremely schematic and simplistic representation of Africa that the Western epistemological order had invented (Mudimbe 1988:x; 1994:xv). According to Mudimbe, 'the European interpreters, like the African analysts, used categories and conceptual systems that stemmed from the Western epistemological order' (1988:x).

This is very much the case for Appiah who makes a powerful critique of Pan-Africanist thinking by deconstructing the myth that was at its heart: the illusion that the Africans constituted a race, the black race, whose members had common biological and cultural characteristics that distinguished them from members of other races. This illusion, and here we come to the Western epistemological order proposed by Mudimbe, is the effect of racist ideologies that were deeply rooted in the nineteenth century West, during which most of the Pan-African thinkers were born. And Appiah added that Africans who were to become future leaders like Senghor, Kenyatta and Nkrumah, although born in a context of less conflictual race relations, embraced the notion that race was a reality and must consequently be ‘an organizing principle of political solidarity’. Numerous intellectuals among the most erudite have not been able to question this idea of a monolithic, homogenous Africa created by the colonial library. The categorization of Africa into ethnic and racial identities is another legacy of the colonial library that the anthropologists have taken some time to overcome and its absurdity is evident in recent works on the ethnogenesis of African populations.

It is time to rethink the quasi-monopoly claimed by Western languages and epistemological order in the process of making African reality intelligible (Copans 1993). This is not only because of the numerous recent works that shed light on the vigorous written and oral debates in non-Western languages, but also because there is a common post-colonial space of meaning shared by Europhone intellectuals and non-Europhone intellectuals, as well as intellectuals who result from a mixture of the two.

Moreover, apart from the colonial library, there are other libraries, including the Islamic one, to which numerous intellectuals have contributed, who cannot be described as Europhones. There is not only one epistemological order, but several ‘spaces of meaning’ in Africa, as Zaki Laidi (1998) would say. The Islamic space of meaning (Kepel 2000:74) is structured by Islamic beliefs and practices (esoteric and exoteric Islamic knowledge and religious practices such as praying, fasting, proselytizing, pilgrimages to the tombs of saints). This space of meaning has had considerable influence on populations, especially those in African areas that have been strongly Islamized. The formation of this space of meaning took place over a thousand years of slow Islamization, during which Arabic language and culture acquired currency in numerous parts of sub-Saharan Africa.

The aim of this book is to provide a framework for the creation of a CODESRIA Pan-African research group on intellectuals whom I label ‘non-Europhone’. It addresses the intellectual contribution of scholars whom I consider as intellectuals because they come from a scholarly tradition and formulate claims couched in Islamic political terms. These are the two major themes of this book.

First, I shall consider the research that has been carried out on the Islamic library to show that a substantial number of intellectuals in sub-Saharan Africa have written in Arabic or in *djami* (African languages written with the Arabic script). This sub-Saharan African Islamic library is made up of personal accounts about Africa by Arab authors that go back to the medieval period, classical works on Islamic knowledge written by Arab authors but which have circulated in sub-Saharan Africa, and texts produced by African scholars. A large proportion consists of manuscripts to whose collection I devote an important part of this paper. I also deal with the networks for training intellectuals in the Arab-Islamic tradition, as well as the language used by these intellectuals to criticize the African pre-colonial political and social order and successfully to mobilize support in the larger society in order to transform that order.

I also consider the ‘mixing process’ which created intellectuals drawing on different traditions, while maintaining their allegiance to Islam. To conclude, I identify certain fields of research on non-Europhone intellectuals and knowledge outside the Islamic tradition, as well as the phenomenon of intellectual cross-fertilization.