Identity and Knowledge Production in the 4th Generation:
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This paper examines the linked themes of identity and knowledge production embedded within the notion of ‘insider scholarship’. Insider scholarship can be defined simply as producing knowledge about and within a group in which one identifies as a member. However, what constitutes membership and how groups are defined is not so simply determined. Rather, the concept of insider scholarship immediately evokes a series of questions about who produces what knowledge, about whom and for whom. In the context of scholarship about the continent, insider scholarship has most often been used in reference to racial, national and cultural identity. However, the idea of legitimising scholarship on the basis of these contested notions is what continues to be debated. In the paper, I explore the dimensions of this debate on location, identity and representation. I will give content to these abstractions by referencing my own research with low-income women in Ghana, and my location as a Ghanaian graduate student in a non-African academic and institutional setting.

The major ideas raised in the paper are as follows. First, I underscore that this topic, though long debated, has renewed relevance. Earlier generations of African scholars, in an effort to reclaim representations of Africa and Africans, developed narrow boundaries of legitimacy on essentialising notions of race and territory. From that historical point, we have come to a situation where ideas about 'cosmopolitanism' and 'universalism' appear to have gained ascendancy. As the fourth generation of scholars comes into its own, one of its defining tasks will be to negotiate this contested terrain. This paper represents such an attempt. I argue, on the one hand, that the concept of insider scholarship cannot simply be discarded as irrelevant. To do so would constitute an ill-advised neglect or woeful ignorance of the politics of representation about Africa, and of the power differentials in different spaces within the field of African studies. However, I acknowledge that there are multiple grounds for claiming ‘insidersness’, and that defining it by narrow parameters is not helpful. In light of this, I present 'shared struggle' as a strategic basis for insider scholarship. The paper concludes with an examination of the implication of this conceptual shift.