Young African Scholars Symposium

Call for Papers

Saint-Louis (Senegal)

From 3 to 7 June 2024

Topic:

(Re)thinking Africa's image for the development of the continent

Africa has the youngest population in the world. It is estimated that there are more than 400 million young people between the ages of 15 and 35[1] . According to projections of the United Nations, the number of Africans is expected to reach 2.7 billion by 2050 and 4.5 billion by 2100. Better still, "one out of every two humans expected to come into existence on Earth by 2050 will be born in Africa"[2] . This reality does not, however, allow us to speak of a demographic dividend. The same can be said about natural resources as a significant proportion of minerals used in industrial production is extracted from Africa's subsoil. In official discourse, that many assets make Africa the continent of the future. However, why should Africa be framed as the continent of the future and not of the present? After more than six decades of independence, what could be the explanation for Africa's staggering socio-economic lag when compared to other continents? There are numerous answers: from enslavement, to present-day neo-colonialism by way of a century of colonialism. If outcomes of this long period of domination are mainly economic, it remains that they were solidified by prejudices and clichés that branded Africa as a continent with religious beliefs and customs "incapable of raising their followers to a higher level of civilization and morality" (Dakar, ANS, O516 (31)). This ideology, which served to legitimize the so-called "civilizing mission" of western colonialism, was developed, and disseminated by reluctant authors. From their writings stemmed racist discourses which have fuelled a subjective debate, validated *La pensée blanche* (L. Thuram, 2020) and underpinned discriminatory policies against the African diaspora, as well as painted a falsified image of an Africa "badly off" (see R. Dumont, 1962) and incapable of development (see A. Kabou, 1991). The impression that Africa is a "cursed" continent however contrasts largely with the realities it has undergone and experienced. Both sides of the above paradox strongly explains the Afro-scepticism/Afro-pessimism that has reached the less informed and popular masses. The need to change this overall dynamic is acute and requires more

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[1] https://au.int/fr/developpement-de-la-jeunesse. Accessed February 22, 2023.
[2] https://reporterre.net/L-Afrique-confrontee-au-boom-de-sa-population. Accessed February 22, 2023.

than a redefinition of priorities, public policies, and development programs. It is necessary to adopt a posture based on an Afro-optimism that could reposition Africa as "*a hopeful continent*". While it is true that Africa has a strong need to rethink its own development models and systematically correct the tendentious and racist falsifications of its history, it is no less true that the imperative to rethink and reinvent its development is becoming categorical. It is important to learn from history by taking ownership of the new challenges and issues facing the African continent.

This symposium, conceived and led by young African scholars, is part of an agenda for a revisionist perspective on Africa. It aims to engage debates in Africanist intellectual circles around the revision of the image of the African continent in a planet marked by the race for development where the great powers are engaged in an asymmetrical promotion of their culture, which they implicitly bait the rest of the world with.

Prospective participants wishing to present papers at the symposium are requested to organize their contributions, as far as feasible, within the following advisory conceptual and research guidelines:

- Women and development in Africa.
- Culture and Development in Africa.
- Religion, Spirituality and Development in Africa.
- Africa through the African lens.
- Education and training in the Africa of the future.
- Entrepreneurship and ICT.
- Languages and African integration.
- African Diaspora and development.
- Africa and the world: what new relationships?
- African sports and athletes: Showcase of Africa.

These themes raise 4 major axes. We invite scholars from all disciplines to provide answers to these questions:

Axis 1 – (Re)thinking the image of Africa: How do we think about the image of Africa today?

Given that the image of Africa, as an instrument of propaganda, is also a factor of development, developing Africa means first (re)thinking its image, and decolonizing it. It means attempting to dismantle prejudices, changing the imaginary, building self-esteem and confidence (L. Thuram, 2009). The image has, indeed, a power of persuasion (H. Joffe, 2007). It acts in the apprehensions and conceptions of the individual. In addition to acting as a showcase, an image contributes to the (re)positioning of a space, a region, and a continent through set directions and objectives. If we are interested in the power of the image, we can understand how a country like the United States has used Hollywood as a tool to conquer and promote the ideology of *the American way of life*. Thus, this axis of reflection proposes to reflect on what strategic image of Africa to promote in a century of plural competitions?

Axis 2- Africa and its culture: How can the African culture reflect the power of the continent?

It is indisputable that culture can contribute to the radiance of the continent and its diaspora. There are many examples that illustrate moments when Africa has been at the top of the world, from soccer to music and multiple other forms of art and cultural production. When we talk about France, we think of romanticism, joie de vivre, gastronomy, wine, the French Riviera, etc. In the same way, do African countries think and reflect their image, or why do African countries fail to diversify their image, yet each country is a cultural reservoir with potential to be developed. With statement like "we are not just war, hunger, or crisis", scholars and authors should write about the impact of today's negative image of the continent's people and the need for a new narrative.

How can these aspects drive the continent's development? How do Africans write about their continent? How do they define themselves? What image do they convey of their culture?

Axis 3- Between modernism, feminism, and traditionalism: How does the image of women impact development?

At the centre and at the margin of society, the image of the African woman is at the intersection of several notions. while the image of the African woman is the pillar of society and guardian of tradition, it is at the same time modern, feminist, and somehow lost within all the notions that serve to define her. Even though women are recognized as being of great importance to society as mothers, daughters, and wives, with the invasion of alienating foreign media, the objective and positive image of the African woman is often questioned on the continent and elsewhere. The works of authors such as Nwando Achebe or Oyéwumi show that the African woman needs to reconcile herself with her history to contribute to the radiance of the continental community at every level.

Axis 4- Youth and development: How to build Africa by/with its youth?

Developing Africa by (re)thinking its image means putting African youth at the centre of the process. This means considering that young people, who make up 60-70% of the African population, have a key role to play in the continent's development. Among other things, it is important to seize this opportunity and to provide objective convincing answers based on scientific research and mature thinking.

It is also important to understand that due to the hope they carry, young people are ambassadors of a positive ideal and, therefore, of a bright image of a continent long painted with a dark accent. For Africa to stop being "a museum of the population", its young people must be called upon to, through their capacity for initiative and productive reflection, position themselves as promoters of another vision of Africa, one that is at the antipodes of negationist ideas long conveyed by the colonial library and maintained by the collective imagery.

Evaluation and Selection

Contributions will be evaluated and selected by a scientific committee, composed of scientists and young researchers from all disciplines. Evaluators will pay particular attention to the following criteria:

- **Relevance**: Each contribution must fit into one of the axis and answer pertaining questions.
- **Realism of the proposals**: Each proposal must integrate a realistic dimension that is implementable at the end of the symposium.
- **Added value**: Each proposal must advance the debate in society.
- **Quality of the approach**: The methodology used must be fitting and must allow for the evolution of research in Africa.
- **Inclusion**: Each proposal must speak to everyone and must give place to the public in its scientific production.

Submission instructions

Researchers are encouraged to submit papers that address 1 or more of the 4 key issues specified. Based on the format adopted, presentations will last 20 minutes and will be followed by a discussion with the audience.

To participate, please send a proposal including a title, a short presentation of the envisaged contribution (350 words maximum), 5 keywords and a short biobibliographical note.

Please submit here

Contact

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Timeline

- Launching call: June 30, 2023
- Deadline for abstracts: September 30, 2023
- Selection of contributions by the scientific committee: October 15, 2023
- Deadline for submission of final papers: 30 March, 2024
- Symposium: June 3-7, 2024

Scientific Committee

Hamadou Adama (Université de N'Gaoundéré, Cameroun)

Ansouma Bodian (Gaston Berger University, Senegal)

Mohamed S. Camara (Howard University, USA)

Chambi Chechaga (Howard University, USA)

Mamadou Drame (Cheikh Anta Diop University, Senegal)

Abdouraman Halirou (Université de N'Gaoundéré, Cameroun)

Babacar Fall (IEA Of Saint Louis, Senegal)

Jude Fokwang (Regis University, USA)

Christian Fouelefack (Dschang University, Cameroun)

Marwa Ghazali (Houston University, USA)

Mouhamadou El Hady Ba (Cheikh Anta Diop University, Senegal)

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Marie-Claude Jipguep (Howard University, USA)

Krista Johnson (Howard University, USA)

Benjamin Maiangwa (Lakehead University, Canada)

Yvan Megaptche (Hubei University of Automotive Technology, China)

Vivien Meli Meli (Dschang University, Cameroun)

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