

INTRODUCTION

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THIS VOLUME HAS BEEN designed to commemorate one hundred years of the Royal African Society of the United Kingdom, owner of the journal *African Affairs* and successor to the African Society which was founded in London in 1900. The African Society was originally founded in memory of Mary Kingsley, the redoubtable traveller in West and central Africa, whose books and lectures had attracted wide attention in the previous decade. Kingsley died of enteric fever in South Africa in 1900 while nursing sick Boer prisoners of war.

The journal too has changed its name over time, being first published under the title of *The Journal of the African Society* in October 1901, and changing its name to the present one in 1944. In any event, it can claim to be the oldest continuously published journal in the world which is devoted to the study of African affairs. Throughout the twentieth century, *African Affairs* in its various incarnations has appeared quarterly, providing a diet of information and comment, mainly, although not exclusively, on Africa south of the Sahara.

The editorial politics, contents and readers of the journal over the century serve as a mirror of Britain's changing interests in and relations with Africa. For more than half of the twentieth century, the journal often seemed to be a voice of the colonial system from which so many of its early contributors were drawn. The African Society in those days had its headquarters in the Colonial Institute, in London's Northumberland Avenue (where it stayed until the 1990s), and its Council was heavily weighted with titled and bemedalled colonial officials. This remained so throughout the colonial period, with officials and members of the Society also representing missionary and commercial interests. The pattern of the Society's membership, lectures, and the contents of *African Affairs*, however, had changed by the early 1960s to represent more a commercial and academic interest in Africa. From the 1970s onwards the activities of the Society and of the journal have reflected the preponderant role of scholars, but with a continued interest from the commercial world and an increasing role for representatives from non-governmental organizations.

With decolonization well under way by the early 1960s, and with the study of Africa being established in academies on both sides of the Atlantic and also in new universities in Africa itself, *African Affairs* became an academic journal carrying high quality articles which contributed to the study of Africa and often suggested new agendas.

As African studies became increasingly professionalized, an array of new journals appeared, to cater for the expanding scholarly interest and

activity. An earlier journal, for example, which continues to flourish, was the International Africa Institute's *Africa*, first published in 1929, which provided a forum mainly for anthropologists. Of the newer journals, some were specialist by region and discipline but one or two also mirrored the inter-disciplinary approach to the study of the continent which, over the years, increasingly became the hallmark of *African Affairs*.

Rule 24 of the original African Society stipulated that its Journal was to be edited by the Secretary or a Member of the Council, and all papers published had first to be approved by the Council. It is not clear how this rather extended process was actually carried out. The first editor of the Journal to 1906, was Alice Stopford Green (Mrs J. R. Green), a historian and close friend of Mary Kingsley. Her immediate successor for a mere year was an Oxford don, J. S. Redmayne. He was followed by Sir Harold d'Egville, very much an Empire man, who served as editor until the early 1930s, at times being assisted by the missionary linguist Alice Werner and also by the imperial administrator and writer Sir Harry Johnston. During the 1930s the Journal was in the hands of, first, Reginald Nicholson (to 1938), a follower of Lord Lugard, and then briefly Edwin Smith, the missionary anthropologist. Ernest Corbyn (1940–44), formerly of the Sudan Political Service, and Henry Swanzy (1944–54), also ex-colonial service, followed each other as editors of *African Affairs*. Alan Gray, a freelance journalist with mainly South African interests, sat in the editorial chair from 1954 to 1964 and imposed his mark on the Journal with his lengthy Quarterly Notes. Since the accession of Tom Soper and Alison Smith as editors in 1965, the position has remained firmly with university academics.

In the first issue, Count de Cardi, the chairman of the council, stated that 'it is our desire to make our Journal the best and most reliable book of reference on all African subjects'. To that end the Journal was exchanged with the major scientific societies of Europe with an interest in African questions, and also sent to appropriate government offices in France, Germany and the United States. Payment was made for a few articles, but from early on the practice of non-payment of published material was established. An occasional article in French appeared in the early volumes, and books and journals published in French, German and Italian were regularly reviewed or noted. In addition to articles, of varying length, there was correspondence, Literary Notes, and, from volume 3 onwards, a regular section entitled African Topics Reviewed, which later became Editor's Notes. Indeed, the first editors seem to have worked hard reading, organizing and writing a substantial part of the latter two sections.

From the first issue the Society indicated its broad 'scientific' interests in Africa by the following message which was carried in the Journal for the next 30 years:

NOTE: There are many subjects in Africa, such as Racial Characteristics, Labour, Disease, Currency, Banking, Education and so on, about which information is imperfect and opinion divided. In none of these complicated and difficult questions has Science said the last word. Under these circumstances it has been considered best to allow those competent to form an opinion to express freely in this Journal the conclusion to which they themselves have arrived. It must be clearly understood that the object of the Journal is to gather information, and that each writer must be held responsible for his own views.

In the first issue of the Journal the areas of interest of the Society were laid out with an invitation to 'members and others' to contribute papers on subjects such as 'native laws and customs; native systems of government; native forms of religion; polygamy; native wants and aspirations'. Sir Harry Johnston, who became a regular contributor to the Journal, also set out his agenda of 'African subjects of Special Interest for future investigation', which he saw as 'food products' to which he also added rubber and cattle diseases, though not human disease other than malaria (where he recognized the mosquito as the vector but asked whether this was the 'sole and only agent', while also referring to 'poisonous germs'!). Further to his lists were 'locusts, languages, African names and orthography', the 'study of native Races, Fossil remains, Rainfall and soil, Minerals'. During the first half century, articles varied in length and scholarship, some being little more than 'Notes on the something-or-other tribe', or reminiscences of leisure activities in African settings. Many articles were talks given to the Society's meetings by colonial officials; there can have been few African colonial governors who were not published in the Journal. Missionaries and businessmen also contributed articles. By the 1950s the small band of scholars interested in African affairs, and often teaching in the new African universities, were beginning to be published in the Journal. Authors in those days included Denis Austin, Roland Oliver, John Hargreaves, Jack Spence and Anthony Kirk-Greene.

Although the first editor was a woman, and the first article in the first issue was by a woman, Alice Stopford Green, there were only a handful of women who had articles published in the Journal until the early 1930s. Thereafter a steady stream of significant names appear—Margery Perham, Lucy Mair, Audrey Richards, Elspeth Huxley, Eva Meyerowitz and Sylvia Leith-Ross—all of whom contributed to the infant discipline of African studies. In setting out their 'native' African agenda in 1901, the Society's officials stated that the Society 'would be glad if Native gentlemen would write most fully on these subjects'. A number of distinguished Africans, and African Americans, were in fact among the Society's first members; for example, Edward Blyden, R. B. Blaize, the Lagos businessman, J. E. Casely Hayford, Dr R. A. Savage, Hendrick Vroom, Dr Orisadipe Obasa, F. Z. S. Peregrino, Theophilus Scholes from Jamaica and John E. Bruce of New

York. A handful of Africans contributed articles in the first few years of the Journal: the first was John Sarbah with articles on history and on West African palm oil. He was followed by Edward Blyden on 'The Koran and Africa', and Adebisi Tepowa who, in his article 'A Short History of Brass', stated that he wished 'to demonstrate that African nationalism is a good thing, and that it is not a welter of barbarism, cannibalism and cruelty'. Very few Africans had articles accepted for the Journal in the 1920s. In the next two decades African authors included Nnamdi Azikiwe writing on African education (1933), Tshekedi Khama on indirect rule (1936), Z. K. Matthews (1937) and K. A. Korsah (1944). African scholars regularly contributed from the 1960s onwards, with occasional talks or articles by world-renowned figures such as Julius Nyerere in 1985, and more recently the Nobel Prize winner Wole Soyinka in 1997.

For much of the century both the Society and the Journal claimed to be non-political and non-party, although, given the nature of the ruling body and the sympathies of some of the editors, it is difficult to see how the former could have been adhered to. Both Society and Journal supported Britain's imperial programme; rarely were serious questions raised as to the colonial presence in Africa. For example, editorial disclaimers accompanied an article by the Sierra Leonean Abdullar Quilliam in 1903-4, and in a review of Casely Hayford's *Gold Coast Native Institutions* it was noted that 'a good deal of this book is of a controversial nature as regards British Colonial policy, and is therefore not suited for discussion in the pages of this review'. Politics inevitably impinged on 'native questions', as they were often called. Viscount Buxton, the former Governor-General and High Commissioner in South Africa, wrote on 'South Africa and its Native Problem', stating that 'I rejoice that one of my last official acts was to give my assent to the Native Affairs Bill'.

Throughout the past one hundred years the pages of the Journal have carried lectures given to the Society, articles varying in length and also greatly in standard, and reports reprinted from official sources and newspapers. Editorial, later Quarterly, Notes appeared in each issue from the early 1930s and for the next twenty years, later accompanied by a section entitled 'Africa in Parliament'. From the first volume there was a book review section which has continued through the century. Predictably, many of the books reviewed in the first decades of the century have left no enduring mark on the scholarly landscape of African studies. A bibliography of Africa, begun in 1908, has also continued until the present and has proved to be of great value to readers. At times the early editors seem to have struggled to find sufficient material to fill the pages of their Journal. Short articles headed 'Notes on some aspects of X' and reminiscences about fishing and big game shooting sat uneasily with serious and scholarly descriptions of African languages,

ethnographic studies, and pleas for greater economic investment in the continent.

During the first 30 years, most issues of the Journal contained articles on African languages and ethnography. These were invariably contributed by colonial officials and missionaries, people of the stature of Harry Johnston, R. S. Rattray and Isaac Schapera. One of the most prolific contributors was Alice Werner, a former missionary in central Africa, who was appointed Reader in Bantu languages and African studies at the School of Oriental Studies (the future School of Oriental and African Studies) in 1917. There were many articles on 'native affairs', a broad term encompassing colonial administration, labour policy and race relations. Tropical medicine was discussed in an article by Ronald Ross in 1905, sleeping sickness by Christie and by Bruce in 1903 and 1908, while Patrick Manson wrote on malaria in 1909. Most volumes contained an article on some aspect of African history. E. W. Bovill had his imagination 'deeply stirred by the teeming life of the great city' of Kano and the first fruits of his later *Caravans of the old Sahara* (1933) appeared in the pages of the *Journal of the African Society* during the 1920s. Archaeology was distinguished by Randall MacIver's assertion that Great Zimbabwe was indeed the work of Africans (1906), and nearly 25 years later Gertrude Caton-Thompson's recent excavations on that site were discussed in the Journal (1930). Winston Churchill had an article on 'The Development of Africa', which stressed the value of railways, accepted by the Journal in 1907, but few politicians wrote other than reports for the Society's publication.

Almost inevitably the articles appearing in the Journal reflected the current political concerns. This became pronounced during and immediately after the First World War, with articles on the German colonies, the conduct of the war, West African trade, the 'second partition' of Africa by the Allied powers, and schemes of international trusteeship. In the inter-war years the increased number of articles indicated the greater interest shown in the white settler colonies, Ethiopia and Liberia as the sole sovereign states on the continent, the Italian invasion of Ethiopia, and Germany's demand for the return of her former colonies. In the 1930s special issues of the Journal were devoted to such subjects as the incorporation of the High Commission Territories into South Africa, French West Africa, and soil erosion and the threats of increased desertification in West Africa, with contributions from E. P. Stebbing and Frank Stockdale. Altogether there were nineteen special issues or supplements between 1934 and 1939.

Likewise, the Second World War produced a steady flow of articles on the War in Africa and also the impact that it was likely to have on the peoples of the continent. As early as 1919–20 one or two contributors had warned of the threat of African nationalism, and this became a

recurrent theme in the years immediately after 1945. Contributors, including African observers, wrote on new colonial constitutions, African political parties, and the uneven and often uncomfortable process of decolonization. In the 1950s and 1960s contributors argued for and against the white settler colonies, those noisy and obdurate bastions of resistance to African political progress. South Africa's authoritarian racial system of apartheid also had supporters in the ranks of the Royal African Society, often from representatives of commerce who tended to see black people as little more than subjects of patronage or as cheap labour units of production. Such commentators were more nuisance than serious threat to the general tide of liberalism which pervaded the Council of the Society. The editors of the Journal were unequivocal in their opposition to racial tyranny, although not, perhaps, in the slowness with which they came to criticize authoritarian regimes in the newly independent African states. Chronicling the evils of apartheid was a constant theme in articles on South Africa from the 1960s to the 1980s. Some seminal ideas, later to be expanded into influential books, appeared first in the Journal, such as Colin Bundy's work on the South African peasantry. Few events of significance in sub-Saharan Africa went unrecorded in some way or other by contributors to the pages of *African Affairs* in the last three decades of the twentieth century.

All of which brings us to the present. The hundredth birthday of the Royal African Society and the near-centennial existence of its Journal seem to merit some sort of reflection on how Africa has changed over that period, and how views of it have changed also. It was with this in mind that the current editors of the Journal, with support from the Royal African Society, decided to publish a special issue which would consist of essays by a number of prominent scholars of Africa, each of whom would be invited to reflect on a particular aspect of Africa's experience over the last hundred years and on the manner in which it has been interpreted, with perhaps one or two hints about likely prospects for the near future. Needless to say, the resulting collection does not pretend to be comprehensive or even thorough. It is no more, and no less, than a series of essays which we may hope address at least some significant aspects of the last hundred years in Africa, particularly south of the Sahara.