

AFRICAN KNOWLEDGE IN CIRCULATION: NOTES FROM RESEARCH ON THE CIRCULATION OF PEOPLE, SYMBOLIC GOODS, AND IDEAS IN THE CONTEMPORARY PRODUCTION OF KNOWLEDGE ABOUT AFRICA

SABERES AFRICANOS EM CIRCULAÇÃO: NOTAS DE UMA PESQUISA SOBRE A CIRCULAÇÃO DE PESSOAS, BENS SIMBÓLICOS E IDEIAS NA PRODUÇÃO CONTEMPORÂNEA DE SABERES SOBRE A ÁFRICA

CONOCIMIENTOS AFRICANOS EN CIRCULACIÓN: NOTAS DE UNA INVESTIGACIÓN SOBRE LA CIRCULACIÓN DE PERSONAS, BIENES SIMBÓLICOS E IDEAS EN LA PRODUCCIÓN CONTEMPORÂNEA DE CONOCIMIENTOS SOBRE ÁFRICA

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ABSTRACT

This article, developed within the framework of a broader research project between Brazil and Germany (Barros, 2020), examines theoretical perspectives and methodological challenges involved in the study of knowledge production about Africa in the fields of Literature and the Social Sciences, emphasizing the international conditions that shape the circulation of individuals, ideas, and symbolic goods. Starting from the question of how the international trajectories of African students, writers, and researchers mold contemporary dynamics of knowledge production about Africa, the article articulates the circulation of people, works, and epistemological models within a framework marked by linguistic, political, and institutional asymmetries. The text adopts a descriptive and reflective approach structured around three interdependent axes: first, it explores the theoretical challenges inherent to defining the object when considering epistemic hierarchies and historical asymmetries that have shaped African Studies (Falola, 2007; Hountondji, 2010; Zeleza, 2016, 2020; Yanka, 2016). It then revisits the Bourdieusian contribution (2002) to the study of the international circulation of cultural goods, linking it to Claire Ducournau's (2017) research on the production of Francophone African literary consecration and to the generational dynamics examined by Abdoulaye Gueye (2001; 2006). Subsequently, it discusses the reconfiguration of African student mobilities, highlighting the case of students in the former Soviet bloc based on studies coordinated by Monique de Saint Martin, Grazia Scarfò Ghellab, and Kamal Mellakh (2015), revealing both the diversity of experiences and the varying effects of training in Eastern Europe. In conclusion, the article argues that analyzing the mobilities and circulations observed in these empirical studies—literary, scientific, or educational—offers a privileged avenue for understanding the reconfiguration of imaginaries, sensibilities, and modes of knowledge production about Africa on multiple scales, outlining a research agenda centered on Afro-diasporic trajectories as key operators in the global production of knowledge.

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Keywords: Africa. Knowledge Production. Social Sciences. Diaspora.

RESUMO

O presente texto, elaborado no âmbito de um projeto de pesquisa mais amplo entre Brasil e Alemanha (Barros, 2020), explora perspectivas teóricas e desafios metodológicos envolvidos no estudo da produção de conhecimento sobre a África nas áreas de Literatura e Ciências Sociais, enfatizando os condicionantes internacionais que regulam a circulação de indivíduos, ideias e bens simbólicos. Partindo da pergunta sobre como as trajetórias internacionais de estudantes, escritores e pesquisadores africanos moldam dinâmicas contemporâneas de produção de saberes sobre a África, o artigo articula a circulação de pessoas, obras e modelos epistemológicos em um quadro marcado por assimetrias linguísticas, políticas e institucionais. O texto propõe um registro descritivo e reflexivo, que se desdobra em três eixos considerados interdependentes: em um primeiro momento, explora os desafios teóricos inerentes à construção do objeto quando se consideram hierarquias epistêmicas e assimetrias históricas na moldagem dos estudos africanos (Falola, 2007; Hountondji, 2010; Zeleza, 2016, 2020; Yanka, 2016). Em seguida, retoma a contribuição bourdieusiana (2002) para o estudo da circulação internacional de bens culturais, articulando-a à pesquisa de Claire Ducournau (2017) sobre a fabricação da consagração literária francófona africana e às dinâmicas geracionais examinadas por Abdoulaye Gueye (2001; 2006). Posteriormente, discute as reconfigurações das mobilidades estudantis africanas, destacando o caso dos estudantes no ex-bloco soviético, com base nas pesquisas coordenadas por Monique de Saint Martin, Grazia Scarfò Ghellab e Kamal Mellakh (2015), evidenciando tanto a diversidade das experiências quanto os efeitos variáveis da formação no Leste europeu. Ao final, argumenta que a análise das mobilidades e circulações observadas nessas pesquisas empíricas, sejam elas literárias, científicas ou estudantis, constitui via privilegiada para apreender a reconfiguração do imaginário, das sensibilidades e dos modos de produção dos saberes sobre a África em múltiplas escalas, delineando um programa de investigação centrado nas trajetórias afro-diaspóricas como operadores-chave da produção global de conhecimento.

Palavras-chave: África. Produção de Conhecimento. Ciências Sociais. Diáspora.

RESUMEN

Este texto, elaborado en el marco de un proyecto de investigación más amplio entre Brasil y Alemania (Barros, 2020), explora perspectivas teóricas y desafíos metodológicos implicados en el estudio de la producción de conocimiento sobre África en las áreas de Literatura y Ciencias Sociales, destacando los condicionantes internacionales que regulan la circulación de individuos, ideas y bienes simbólicos. Partiendo de la pregunta sobre cómo las trayectorias internacionales de estudiantes, escritores e investigadores africanos moldean las dinámicas contemporáneas de producción de saberes sobre África, el artículo articula la circulación de personas, obras y modelos epistemológicos en un contexto marcado por asimetrías lingüísticas, políticas e institucionales. El texto propone un enfoque descriptivo y reflexivo que se despliega en tres ejes interdependientes: en primer lugar, examina los desafíos teóricos inherentes a la construcción del objeto cuando se consideran jerarquías epistémicas y asimetrías históricas en la configuración de los estudios africanos (Falola, 2007; Hountondji, 2010; Zeleza, 2016, 2020; Yanka, 2016). En seguida, retoma la contribución bourdieusiana (2002) al estudio de la circulación internacional de bienes culturales, articulándola con la investigación de Claire Ducournau (2017) sobre la fabricación de la consagración literaria africana francófona y con las dinámicas generacionales



analizadas por Abdoulaye Gueye (2001; 2006). Posteriormente, discute las reconfiguraciones de las movildades estudiantiles africanas, destacando el caso de los estudiantes en el antiguo bloque soviético, a partir de las investigaciones coordinadas por Monique de Saint Martin, Grazia Scarfò Ghellab y Kamal Mellakh (2015), que evidencian tanto la diversidad de experiencias como los efectos variables de la formación en Europa del Este. Finalmente, el artículo sostiene que el análisis de las movildades y circulaciones observadas en estos estudios empíricos —literarias, científicas o estudiantiles— constituye una vía privilegiada para comprender la reconfiguración del imaginario, de las sensibilidades y de los modos de producción de saberes sobre África en múltiples escalas, delineando un programa de investigación centrado en las trayectorias afro-diaspóricas como operadores clave de la producción global de conocimiento.

Palabras clave: África. Producción de Conocimiento. Ciencias Sociales. Diáspora.



1 INTRODUCTION

The objective of this text is to explore some of the theoretical perspectives and methodological challenges faced by researchers in the context of a research focused on the issue of the production of knowledge about Africa, Literature and Social Sciences contemporaneously. As part of a broader research project that aimed to reflect on the spheres of knowledge production about and for Africa, sewn together in a partnership between universities in Brazil and Germany³ (Barros, 2020), in this text we return to the issue of the international constraints on the circulation of individuals, ideas, and symbolic goods in the international space, trying to outline the contours of a fertile field of studies on student careers, African researchers, intellectuals and literati from the mid-twentieth century onwards.

At its starting point, the guiding question of the research was to understand how the international trajectories of African students, writers, and researchers contributed to shaping contemporary patterns of knowledge production about Africa and the African diasporas in the fields of literature and social sciences. In our perspective, this way of formulating the question would allow us to articulate three distinct and interdependent levels of analysis, combining the circulation of individuals, works and epistemological models. In other words, these modalities of international circulation would dynamize both the literary repertoires and the schemes of interpretation and production of knowledge about Africa, in a framework marked by linguistic, epistemological and institutional hierarchies.

For the present text, however, we intend to offer a more descriptive and reflective record of this ongoing research, striving to build useful tools for researchers and students who wish to venture into the study of a field as broad and challenging as the one that permeates the categories and uses of the international, transnational, globalization and/or globalization (Sapiro, 2021); Africa and African diasporas (Sansone, 2002; Silvério et al., 2020; Gueye, 2006; Zeleza, 2020) and, finally, of the specific forms of internationality in the field of Social Sciences (Gingras, 2002; Siméant, 2015). The focus here is therefore on the forms of articulation between these different axes of problems.

³ Briefly, the aforementioned project, *Producing knowledge about and for Africa in Germany and Brazil*, focused mainly on the careers of Anglophone and Francophone scholars from West Africa and African scholars from countries that have Portuguese as their official language. In the end, the project was interested in addressing the perspectives and motivations of African students and scholars about their priority destinations and exchanges and how this would have contributed to their later professional careers and the construction of African knowledge societies. In the alternative, the interest was also focused on professionals who had passed through Brazil, encompassing both those who returned and those who chose to remain in the national territory (Barros, 2020).

In the perspective adopted in this study, the exploration of the modes of circulation and the trajectories of individuals allows us to reflect in a very refined way on the theme of cultural mediation in asymmetrical conditions, bringing together the problems concerning the circulation of literary goods, epistemological models and which, in the end, refers to the circulation of agents beyond the geographical and institutional boundaries within which we traditionally think of the forms of consecration and literary, intellectual and scientific recognition. All the analytical efforts undertaken here to explore an investigative agenda derive from this attempt to delineate an analytical framework that allows circumscribing this terrain of inquiry, evidencing both its tensions and its potentialities, and indicating paths for future research that deal with African intellectual mobilities as central operators in the global production of knowledge.

Objectively, the text is structured in three axes of discussion considered interdependent. In the first, we raise some of the theoretical challenges implied in the study of the production of knowledge from/in Africa, literature and the social sciences when thinking about the weight of structures of domination over scientific, literary and artistic representations. Next, we return to this issue of the conditioning factors of the international circulation of symbolic goods from the seminal perspective of Pierre Bourdieu (Sapiro; Pacoutet, 2015) exploring a research on the processes of fabrication of the literary consecration of writers and works from sub-Saharan Africa in the French linguistic area (Ducournau, 2017). In the third part, we present some suggestive propositions from the research coordinated by Monique de Saint Martin, Grazia Scarfò Ghellab and Kamal Mellakh (2015) on the experience of African graduates in the USSR and in the countries of the Soviet bloc from the second half of the twentieth century onwards. internationally notable for their inseparably scientific, literary, and political investments (for an inspiring study, see: Ducournau, 2013; Zeleza, 2013).

2 THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE OBJECT AND SOME THEORETICAL CHALLENGES

In fact, the choice to analyze the experiences and trajectories of individuals from African countries, in the context in question, was not fortuitous. In addition to the research we have carried out on leading groups and international circulation (Neris, Seidl, 2015a; Neris, Seidl, 2015b; Neris, Seidl, 2015b; Neris, 2023) or on Nation, memory, and cultural policies in Africa (Barros, 2020; 2021), the historical context concomitant with the Cold War and the Afro-Asian decolonization process – roughly speaking, corresponding to the second half of

the twentieth century (Hobsbawn, 2015) – offers particularly interesting territory for this study, for several reasons.

Starting with the change in international migration patterns, previously dominated by population movements from colonized countries towards colonizing countries (South/North) and the explosion of the universalization of higher education in Africa, especially from 1945 onwards, with dynamics and trajectories that vary according to the country (Zezeza, 2016). Throughout the second half of the twentieth century, as Paul Tiyambe Zezeza (2020) demonstrates, African population migration grew in a higher percentage than any other region on the planet, even tending towards a diversification of destinations with a gradual and consistent increase in displacements on the South/South axis. In fact, this change in patterns has something to say, including about the ways of institutionalizing higher education in Africa and about the training of its leading groups (Niane, 1992; Garcia Jr., 2004).

Equally important was the remarkable expansion of African studies centers, institutes and programs through the molding of an institutional architecture, research and publications (institutes, centers, journals, periodicals) that produced a large number of works (impossible to be inventoried), which do not allow themselves to be crossed by the hierarchies and asymmetries characteristic of the production of knowledge in the international division of intellectual space (Zezeza, 2020). In Brazil, for example, this interest dates back at least to the 1950s, with the creation of the Center for African and Oriental Studies (CEAO) at the Federal University of Bahia, the Center for African Studies (CEA) at the University of São Paulo, which later contributed to the expansion and contemporary consolidation of this field of study in the national academic space (Sansone, 2002; Zamparoni, 2007). As complex, contradictory, processual and/or interdisciplinary as the shaping of African studies may have been, the fact is that these have been structured simultaneously at the national and transnational, local and global levels (Zezeza, 2006), while at the same time taking on different meanings in Africa and in the West (Hountondji; 2010).

We are, however, only at the tip of the iceberg of a current, relevant and decisive debate for the production of knowledge in Africa itself, with a series of epistemological implications and challenges. In fact, it is important to consider that the production of knowledge about Africa on the continent itself is permeated by a power structure that shapes the circuits of intellectual production, validation, circulation and consumption between languages and national contexts that occupy unequal positions (Falola, 2007; Hountondji, 2010; Yanka, 2016).

It is no coincidence that Paul Zeleza criticizes, for example, the way in which in the academic factories of North America and Western Europe African Studies "have historically been imprisoned by languages, epistemologies and discourses that are external to Africa, reducing this continent to no more than a laboratory for testing the supposedly universal models, theories and paradigms" (Zeleza, 2007). Paulin J. Hountondji questions, in turn, whether what we call African studies – which encompasses a diverse framework of disciplines in the Social Sciences (History, anthropology, sociology, economics, political science) – can legitimately be called African, especially when it is not "sourced from Africa or produced by Africans" (Hountondji, 2010). If, for Hountondji, the institutional field of knowledge production in Africa has not been able to formulate original problems, that is, "original sets of problems based on a solid appropriation of the international intellectual legacy and deeply rooted in the African experience" (Hountondji, 2010, p. 128), this does not necessarily mean that there should be a break with the tradition of Western knowledge. In a perspective that seems to us similar to that of the Ghanaian Kwame Anthony Appiah (1997), who studied the formations of African philosophers in the Western tradition, it is understood here that the construction of African knowledge must follow an essentially comparative and critical path, and cannot entirely dispense with the Western philosophical formation itself.

If these conditioning factors of cross-cultural transfers fall strongly on the domain of the social sciences and humanities, they impose themselves even more clearly in the universe of literary production, strongly linked to language and the cultural construction of national identities, even having repercussions on subfields of studies such as comparative literature or comparative studies (Fazzini, 2023). In this sense, Luca Fazzini's (2023) statement is correct that, when one thinks about the place in Africa in *world-literature*, one can see the hegemony/predominance of a restricted corpus of works, authors, and genres (notably the novel), belonging, above all, to the English and French linguistic universe (the Portuguese language occupying a clearly marginal position) and that obtaining global projection and recognition in the Euro-American academic and publishing circuits, they place themselves at the top of the hierarchy of legitimate scientific-literary objects.

The problem becomes even more complex, in fact, when it is conceived that the very definition of African literature(s) permeates/encompasses textualities that are completely marginalized in relation to transnational linguistic areas (English, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Arabic), forming, in practice, distinct and split circuits of production and circulation (Gnocchi, 2004). Sometimes excluded, sometimes confined, weakened and/or

dominated, African literatures then tend to depend heavily on the recognition of international bodies and mediators (with which they become an export product), consequently excluding a wide universe of languages, authors and forms of popular, oral, sometimes anonymous, languages and forms of knowledge produced by Africans and which generally do not enter the order of knowledge (Mudimbe, 2013) and in the canon and in the international literary market (in this regard, see: Fyfe; Krishnan, 2022, Hodapp; 2020)

Although with specificities, the production of knowledge about Africa, literature and social sciences presents similarities when taken from the conditioning factors of these asymmetric transnational cultural exchanges. In fact, it is always useful to remember that the schemes of perception and interpretation of colonial and postcolonial realities have always been fed and have been fed by enterprises of domination that permeate scientific, literary and artistic representations (Ducournau, 2010; Sapiro et al., 2015).

3 THE INTERNATIONAL CIRCULATION OF CULTURAL GOODS: CALIBRATING THE CONSTRUCTION OF LEVELS OF ANALYSIS

As we highlighted in a previous text on the translation of literary works, the contributions of Pierre Bourdieu (2002) and a series of authors inspired by his theoretical perspective are fundamental to the design of global research in the Social Sciences (Siméant, 2015). In a short text entitled "*The social conditions of the international circulation of ideas*", delivered on the occasion of a conference at the University of Freiburg in 1989, Pierre Bourdieu then questioned whether there was a spontaneously international intellectual life, when examining the circulation of intellectual works and the examples of import and export between France and Germany. For Bourdieu, in addition to intellectual life being "the place of nationalisms and imperialisms, preconceived ideas, very elementary summary representations", etc., in practice, "international exchanges are subjected to a certain number of structural factors that generate colossal misunderstandings" (Bourdieu, 2002, p. 6). Understanding some of the social mechanisms that operate in this process and that would represent an obstacle to the development of "a European program of scientific research regarding European scientific relations" (Bourdieu, 2002, p. 5) was the objective of this communication, whose main elements can be summarized below (Neris, Neris, 2016):

- For Pierre Bourdieu, the fact that texts do not circulate with their context, that is, that they do not import the field of production with and against which they were produced, means that, when they are introduced in a different field of production, they are

subjected to a reinterpretation as a function of the structure of the field of reception. As the meaning and function of a work in its field of origin are recurrently ignored, the meaning acquired by this or that work is determined to a large extent by the field of arrival;

- This resignification is operated by a series of social mechanisms, such as: selection operations (what is translated? what is published? who translates? who publishes?); marking and labeling operations carried out by publishers, authors, disciplines, etc.; and the operations of reading, through which categories of appreciation and problems that are the product of a different field of production are applied to the works.
- By reconstructing the finishing field, it is possible to better understand the effects of the games to which the translated authors and works are subjected. These involve everything from the reinforcement of dominant positions to ways of strengthening dominated positions, always involving a variety of combinations. It is through the reconstitution of these positions, for example, that it becomes possible to apprehend the affinities linked to identity (or homology) that favor the translation of authors with whom there is a convergence of interests, styles, parties and intellectual projects. "Thinkers of great elasticity are, in this sense, a full plate for these strategic uses", emphasized Pierre Bourdieu (2002, p. 9). In the same way, the characterization of distinct intellectual and social contexts allows us to understand how "fictitious oppositions between similar things and false similarities between different things" are sometimes constituted (Bourdieu, 2002, p. 10).
- In addition, this selection is accompanied by forms of annexation and marking through which certain readings and interpretations of the texts are consecrated, specific issues and problems are highlighted, sometimes residual for the author, while the interpretative authority of the translator and the commentator is consecrated. This labeling also involves the typographic structure of the work, the cover images, the distribution of the text with its emphases, succession of prefaces, etc., through which a series of transformations or even deformations of the original message are also operated.

This is, without a doubt, one of the few texts in which Pierre Bourdieu addresses more directly an object that is linked to the spaces of international power. There is no doubt, in fact, about the fact that the very use of the notion of field to address transnational and international

objects has been motivating debates about the conditions of importation, appropriation and redefinition of the concept (Sapiro, 2019). This was also one of the main theoretical questions faced by several authors who composed the work *Les champs littéraires africains* (2001) - a collection of texts organized by Romuald Fonkoua and Pierre Halen, with the collaboration of Katharina Städtler. In addition to the theoretical framework and the conditions of theoretical appropriation, researchers must also be aware of the variety of notions and the implications that the notions of circulation, transfers, exchanges, networks, connections, miscegenation, hybridizations, etc., carry for the object of study itself. In addition to not seeming appropriate to consider them as mere synonyms, it is appropriate to specify the definition of the terms, their uses, and limits (Sapiro, 2021), including here the understanding of the chosen metaphorical register (Lahire, 2006).

Although with reservations, the problem of the circulation of cultural goods internationally raises a series of levels and questions of analysis that deserve to be highlighted (Sapiro; Pacouret, 2015). Yes, because when it comes to studying international or transnational dynamics, it becomes clear that there is a need to define the unit of observation that is usually based on socially recognized and identifiable entities - cultures, societies, communities, nations, states, regimes (Sapiro, 2012).

Equally important, according to Sapiro and Pacouret (2015), is the choice of levels of analysis: at the macro level, attention should be paid to the structural asymmetries in international relations according to the position in the geopolitical, economic, and cultural power relations between countries (central, semi-peripheral, peripheral); at *the meso level* it is necessary to re-inscribe the analysis in the structure of national markets and the fields of cultural production of origin and reception (editorial, artistic, musical, cinematographic, literary, among others) and at the *micro level* arouses interest precisely the strategies and individual or institutional motivations of production, use and appropriation and mediation of imported cultural goods. It is important to emphasize, moreover, that "the center-periphery scheme" constitutes a powerful tool to describe the phenomena of asymmetry in the linguistic exchanges in question (Casanova, 2002)

Once the particular category of cultural asset has been selected - in this case, literature or scientific production in the social sciences - the corpus (author, school and/or genre) has been defined, it is necessary to identify the forms of materialization, the modes of production of publications and the symbolic capital linked to the prestige of both the authors, the mediators or importers. A decisive step is, therefore, to circumscribe this circulation between

spaces and cultures according to the place of publication of origin and the place of reception, and this choice may fall both on larger units such as countries, as well as on more particular cities and contexts (Sapiro; Pacouret, 2015). The use of international catalogs, as well as national publishers, compendiums, anthologies and bibliographic databases can be particularly useful in the attempt to map this circulation. No less important is the very definition of the linguistic area (nationality, geographical origin) which also produces not inconsiderable effects on the conditions of circulation of the works⁴.

The unequal distribution of this capital orders the literary linguistic field according to an opposition between the literary languages dominated by one part – languages that have recently been "nationalized" (i.e., made national languages relatively late), endowed with little literary capital, little international recognition, a small number of translators (national and international) or poorly known and remaining for a long time invisible in the great literary centers (such as Chinese and Japanese) – and on the other hand, the dominant languages, which, due to their specific prestige, their antiquity, and the number of texts declared universal written in their languages are endowed with an important volume of literary capital (Casanova, 2002, p. 9).

Some important studies can be mentioned as salutary examples of the use of these theoretical perspectives, especially works that deal with the material circulation of symbolic goods, with particular attention to the center-periphery relations between France and the countries of the African continent. The chosen approach is also opportune, since the international trend of valuing writers from the cultural peripheries in the literary, publishing, book salons, schools/or universities gained strength mainly after the 1980s (Sapiro, 2020).

In this sense, it is worth highlighting especially the work of Claire Ducournau, who was directly interested in the material and symbolic mechanisms that guaranteed the access and recognition of authors linked to the African continent, whose careers were marked and shaped by the institutions of French literary life (Ducournau, 2017). In line with the research program proposed by Pierre Bourdieu, Ducournau makes efforts to understand the logic of the work of writing, of publishing and seeing oneself recognized in a literary scene, in view of the structural constraints that condition the production and reception, the internal and external analyses of the works. Thus, through a prosopographical research with 151 writers from the

⁴ In addition to the theoretical issues, it would also be necessary to add here that the study of processes, institutions and actors that move on the international scene also requires from researchers not only the mastery of distinctive social and linguistic skills, but also the availability of resources to carry out empirical work in costly and sometimes adverse conditions. which is a not inconsiderable challenge in a professional and academic area such as ours that recruits mainly graduates from the lower classes and with less chance of having the required economic and linguistic capital (in this regard, see: Siméant, 2015).

French-speaking part of Sub-Saharan Africa who had gained recognition in the post-independence context, she was able to demonstrate how the creation of a "legitimate African literature" or even the emblem "African literary classic" was manufactured in France from two transnational waves: the first, in the 1980s, demarcated by the entry of Leopold Sédar Senghor into the French Academy and, later, in the 1990s, which depended heavily on some intermediaries for it to be recognized as properly literary. In addition to great intellectual figures, such as André Gide and Jean Paul Sartre, literary magazines (the recompositions of the publishing world, as a whole), then contributed to the molding of a kind of legitimate profile of the African writer, with all the implications on how and why some authors are published and others are not.

To a large extent, the outline of these processes converges with the generational dynamics of the black diaspora of African intellectuals in France studied by Abdoulaye Gueye (2001; 2006). Strongly influenced by the more general migratory movements and political dynamics in the African and French contexts, these *Les Intellectuels africains en France* are understood as belonging to different generations in Gueye's reading: the first generation, whose entry would have occurred between the 1950s and 1970s, would be very marked by the transitions of political regime, by the pioneering in the realization of higher studies in independent structures in Africa and massively influenced by Marxism, when not directly engaged in the Federation of Students of Black Africa in France (FEANF), created in the 1950s. Socialized under colonization, these individuals tended to build their identities and engagements around an autonomous Africa, elaborating different repertoires of justification for returning to the newly independent countries, in which they placed their hopes of participating in national construction (notably by engaging in political and/or diplomatic positions).

In a different way in relation to the previous generation, subsequent generations, in addition to having less insertion in the conventional instances of politics, attenuate their political discourses in the same proportion as they invest in other domains (economic, cultural, scientific). Born in the post-independence period and progressively distanced from the African continent, to which they no longer directed their expectations of return or to the reconstruction of Africa, the new generations began to present motivations more directed to concrete and clearly defined objectives, such as punctual sending of resources or materials to the countries of origin (Gueye, 2001). It is precisely among these generational strata that reach adulthood in the 1980s that the first literary productions of part of the literati studied by

Ducournau (2017, p. 299) are found, who, despite their greater concrete distance from the African territory, maintain an ambiguous relationship with an Africa conceived as an entity, discursive and referential in his "works produced outside the continent". In fact, despite the structural differences observed, perhaps this more recent experience of African students who activated different strategies of family reproduction - such as the constitution, for example, of diasporic families, which were dispersed across different countries and continents and in various professional domains - constitutes the manifestation of the acquisition of what Angela Xavier de Brito called the *habitus of migrant*⁵ (Brito, 2010).

In fact, a decisive part of the works of literature published between the 1960s and 2010 in the area in question are concentrated in a restricted number of countries, with a notorious preponderance of France, followed by Cameroon, Zaire/DRC, Senegal, etc. (Ducournau, 2017). Throughout this process, in fact, there was a notorious change in the genres preponderant in the scale of literary values, progressively passing from poetry, until then dominant in African literature, to the novel, which would better adjust to the logic of the market and to the expectations (including university ones) in relation to African literary productions in France. In a very similar way, this issue of the importance of external mediation also appears forcefully in Wend Griswold (2000) who used Nigerian novels to explore the impact of production systems on the content of the literary work. Through his work, it has been evidenced, for example, that British publishers are more likely to publish Nigerian novels if the themes concern the traditional, peasant, rural universe, even if a significant part of Nigerian novelists write books that address urban social problems.

4 STUDENT MOBILITIES IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH: NOTES FROM THE EXPERIENCES OF AFRICAN STUDENTS IN THE FORMER SOVIET BLOC

On this topic, as already pointed out, we shift the focus to a fertile field of study that has explored the redefinition of forms of academic mobility, appearing, alongside the traditional South/North displacements, a series of other multipolar and even invisible

⁵ "This last notion takes into account some of the aspects covered by the concept of *habitus*, as it is summarized by J.C. Kaufmann (2001): the *habitus of migrant* is a second nature, which is constructed through the succession of experiences lived during the processes of spatial mobility, during which people who move acquire new mental schemes and new moral and bodily dispositions. Or even, an implicit intelligence, situated between reflexivity, memory and the unconscious, buried in the most intimate of beings, which is sedimented in individuals and serves, in turn, as an instrument for the transmission of cultural acquisitions. But the *habitus of the migrant* also includes aspects described by the Bourdieusian concept of *habitus*, to the extent that, by dint of being repeated, these dispositions acquire a certain stability, become more or less socially structured - and, therefore, structuring" (Brito, 2010, P. 433)

migrations of students from countries on the African continent (Leclerc-Olive et Hily 2016; Saint Martin et al., 2015). The attempt to retain some lessons from the exploration of the experiences of African students who arrive in the former Soviet bloc is what motivates the project. We then selected the work coordinated by Monique de Saint Martin, Grazia Scarfo-Ghellab et Kamal Mellah (2015), which raises, from our perspective, important questions about the new mobilities between countries of the South, particularly those in Africa⁶. From our perspective, the exploration of the unprecedented experiences faced by students, activists and trainees who settled in a geographical, political, cultural and linguistic context as distinct as that of the USSR allows us to suggest, with great richness, an instigating agenda of research on the expectations, implications and biographical consequences of the international migrations of African graduates who return or settle outside the continent.

In *Étudier à l'Est* (Saint Martin et al., 2015) the authors attempted to combine three fundamental levels of analysis. First, some of the researchers try to outline the political, social and institutional frameworks within which cooperation agreements and government policies from State to State were operated. In this context, two major events that mark the Soviet rapprochement with African states stand out: in 1957, the Sixth World Festival of Youth and Students organized in the socialist bloc and which brought together representatives from 131 countries with 600 African participants; in addition, the foundation in Moscow of the University of the Friendship of the Peoples, which in 1961 was renamed Patrice Lumumba University, intended primarily for students from Asia, Africa and Latin America (Yengo; Saint Martin, 2017). On the second level, the book addresses the experiences, narratives, hopes and contradictions experienced by former African students, notably the first to confront this experience. The last part focuses on the contrasting experiences of the migratory path, but mainly with the conditions and itineraries of return, demarcating the effects and variable profitability of the passage through different worlds.

It is also worth highlighting the suggestive methodological strategies, based on in-depth interviews and the use of a corpus of very diverse sources, such as archives of the Russian Federation, Unesco, embassies of African countries, as well as literary testimonies written by former African students, such as the novel by the Guyanese Jan Carew, entitled *Moscow n'est pas ma Mecque* or *Tavarich Gay*, written by Souleyanta Ndiaye (Saint Martin

⁶ Although they were increased from the 1960s onwards, with the creation of several establishments in Eastern Europe aimed at welcoming African students, it should be noted that their contacts with the communist world were older (Yengo; Saint Martin, 2017).

et al., 2015). In this way, the authors were able to explore various facets of the Soviet experience, such as the weight of the discovery of otherness, the challenges of adapting and learning the language, hopes and disappointments, daily vicissitudes and undesirable events, relationships of complicity, friendship, but also surveillance and control, etc. The diversity of memories of former African students then refers to the very complexity of experiences and trajectory, combining convergent dynamics at the same time as singularities.

As is well known, while the international migrations of students were characterized until the 1950s by the omnipresence of currents going notably from colonized countries towards colonizing countries, from the mid-1950s onwards new mobilities emerged, such as that of students from African and Asian countries, recently independent, destined for socialist countries. This process is undoubtedly linked to the increasingly central place acquired by the international in the legitimation schemes of the ruling groups on the global stage (for an excellent reconstitution of this debate in Brazil, see: Seild, 2013). In the case of Africa, this increase in international student mobility has shifted northward (Gérard, 2008; Niane, 1992), as traditionally occurred, but with a strong increase in the south-south axis and within the continent itself, as has already been evidenced in several recent studies (Geisser, 2000; Mazzella, 2009; Tati, 2014).

It should also be emphasized that a significant part of these migrations are still part of the framework of cooperation agreements, which depend heavily on government policies and the strategies of the new African states in an international space divided into blocs. Concomitantly with the Afro-Asian decolonization movement, there was the progressive opening, carried out by the Union of Soviet Republics (USSR) and different socialist countries, of institutions, programs and incentives for the massive and systematic collection of Maghreb and sub-Saharan students (Saint Martin et al, 2015). The reasons for this opening, however, do not stem simply from an expansionist policy of the USSR in relation to the third world, but also from the demand of African countries that did not yet have universities and had an urgent need to train new elites (Gheorghiu, 2012).

The case of Portugal's former colonies can be taken as an illustrative example of this, since, with the end of Salazarism in 1984 and the massive departure of metropolitans and their descendants, the leaders of liberation movements in Angola, Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau had to "appeal to the offer of intellectual and political skills at an international level", with which a series of posts were opened for Brazilian exiles (Garcia Júnior, 2004, p. 249). Occupying first-level positions in public universities or even in the educational system of

countries such as Angola and Mozambique, these Brazilians then participated in the process of diversifying the forms of international cooperation with effects not yet fully understood (Garcia Júnior, 2004). Be that as it may, in parallel with the massive return of Brazilians in the context of progressive liberalization of the Brazilian public space, there was an increase in Russian, Bulgarian and German cooperation from the German Democratic Republic (GDR) in the Portuguese-speaking space of Africa.

Thus, through the creation of Soviet Houses of Science and Culture, Soviet Cultural Centers, the organization of libraries full of Soviet publications in other languages, or even the demand for the incorporation of Marxism-Leninism in the education systems of the countries economically and politically supported by the USSR, broad Soviet hegemony was consolidated in the space in question. All of this allows us to understand more clearly how African mobilities towards Eastern Europe have been increased on the continent, and are certainly "among the most important institutionalized student mobilities in the history of higher education and executive training" (Saint Martin et al, 2015; Katsakioris, 2015).

The data compiled by Katsakioris (2007) corroborate this centrality acquired by the Soviet Union as the main destination (from 611 between 1959-1960, the number of African students only increased to more than fifteen thousand in 1980 and reached about 30 thousand on the eve of the fall of the Berlin Wall), followed at a distance by Romania and the GDR. The available statistics regarding these student flows are full of gaps, however, requiring several precautions from researchers. When researching African students in Romania and the GDR, Mihaï Dinu Gheorghiu highlighted the state of disorganization of the archives, the geographical dispersion of the actors and the difficult communication between Europe and Africa as a powerful discourager for carrying out studies such as the one under discussion (Gheorghiu et al, 2015).

In any case, the compulsory research allows us to outline some of the striking traits of these African students, mostly men, recruited for studies in Eastern Europe. Although these should be selected from among the children of workers or peasants, according to Soviet guidelines, in practice, as Katsakioris, Demintseva and Mazov (2015) have found, the selection on the African side was carried out arbitrarily, without exactly meeting the criterion of modest social origin, which allowed students from middle social sectors to enter, of the elites and even of the offspring of the aristocracies of their countries of origin. In some situations, such as that of Minabe Diarra, of the Communist Party of Mali – who defended her thesis in 1972 at the Institute of Ethnography and Anthropology of the USSR Academy of

Sciences – these students did not even have a secondary education (Siim-Moskovitina, Dobronravin; 2015). Almost all of these students were supported by scholarships, either those provided by their home states or by Soviet political, social, or cultural organizations.

Although they were divided into different areas, including literature, philosophy, cinema, most of these students focused on training in engineering, medicine, pharmacy, agronomy, among others (Saint Martin et al, 2015). Generally, the disciplines in the field of Social Sciences were the object of optional teaching in universities – when they were not subsumed under the teaching of Marxist-Leninist philosophy – with only a small minority of foreigners who specialized in these disciplines. It is not surprising that few studies have been concentrated on the intellectual and/or political trajectories of elites of the humanities among the works gathered in the work (Kouvouama, Bowao; 2015). Be that as it may, it is precisely in the domain of the social sciences that the Soviet ideological influence was most clearly outlined, based on a methodological and theoretical basis necessarily informed by Marxist-Leninist ideology. Anna Siim-Moskovitina and Nikolay Dobronravin (2015) thus show part of the demands that were imposed on the production of theses and thesis summaries sustained in Leningrad or Moscow:

In these disciplines, Marxist-Leninist ideology was the formal basis of methodology. All students were required to quote Lenin, Marx, Engels, and the Soviet leaders of the time (from Khrushchev to Gorbachev) in their writings and speeches. This was even more true if they were preparing for a PhD in history or anthropology. When African doctoral students described and analyzed their own cultures and societies, all the phenomena described were interpreted within the framework of historical materialism. They had to severely criticize the "bourgeois and pro-capitalist" approaches of the West in the social sciences, as well as the reality of traditional societies (caste, arranged marriages, polygamy, etc.) and their "old-fashioned" and "archaic" way of life that "delays" the development of individuals.

When it comes to African Studies, Anna Siim-Moskovitina and Nikolay Dobronravin (2015) also note that these were poorly developed until the 1960s. An example of this, the Institute of African Studies, founded in 1959 and dependent on the Russian Academy of Sciences, began its first publications only in 1973, extending until 1990. This process of institutionalization, by the way, was contemporaneous with the increase in interest in the USSR in French, Portuguese, and English-speaking African literature among the more general and specialized Soviet public (Nikiforova, 2000). This is a process of African-Soviet rapprochement that arouses interest not only in relation to the patterns and conditions of

student circulation, but also opens up an agenda of research on the growing number of art and film festivals, the creation of conferences of African and Asian writers and the reception of African artists and intellectuals by the USSR (In this regard, see: Blum et al., 2021).

Finally, it should be noted that the experiences of return are varied and the very conditions of using the diploma as an asset depended strongly on the political dynamics of each African State of origin. It is necessary to guard against the view that the rate of return on stays abroad consequently generated given conditions for social ascension on return. Thus, for example, while the degrees obtained by students from countries that opted for the path of socialism (Benin, Congo, Mali, Angola, etc.) served as tickets for quick access to public and prominent functions, in countries still strongly linked to colonial metropolises, such as Morocco or Ivory Coast, the diplomas acquired in the socialist bloc were often declassified and labeled as mediocre in the face of the excellence of the studies carried out in the bloc capitalist. The exploration of the diversity of return itineraries of these students and the problematic cases of recognition of the diploma obtained in the USSR, requiring a series of reconversions or professional reorientations, reveal that the value of the diploma was not at all mechanical and univocal (Saint Martin et al, 2015). The example of Bulgaria and the varying effects of international mobility in the field of social sciences and humanities can be taken as particularly suggestive.

5 THE CIRCULATION OF AFRICAN WORKS, GRADUATES AND TEACHERS: SOME PROVISIONAL CONCLUSIONS

At the end of the text, the reader may rightly ask himself: what is the common point in the empirical and theoretical considerations made so far about the production of knowledge about Africa, Literature and Social Sciences. At first glance, it may not seem like much, but the scientific curiosity outlined here in relation to the conditioning factors of the production of knowledge, the circulation of cultural goods and literary productions to/from/for Africa has led us to highlight precisely the experiences of migration, travel and displacement of concrete individuals that end up playing a fundamental role in the reconfigurations of the imaginary and sensibilities in relation to the continent. Valid for the African literary scene (in this regard, see: Mazauric; Sow, 2013), the importance of these mobilities is also decisive when it comes to thinking about the academic space itself and the circulation of research models, knowledge, and practices (Niane, 2011) in an increasingly complex, diverse, and competitive structure of the global market for scientific skills (Dia, Ngwe, 2018).

Obviously, the selection of student or teacher mobility is aligned with the very intention of reflecting on the epistemological conditioning factors of knowledge production in Africa and by Africans (Hountondji, 2010), also opening space to reflect on the contribution of researchers from the continent to research in the humanities and social sciences in Africa (Gueye, 2011). But these reflections are equally useful when one thinks, for example, of the trend identified by Paul Zeleza (2006) in departments of Euro-American literature in which, under the influence of the dominant versions of postcolonial theory, at the same time that generous niches have been opened in multicultural studies programs for African writers, there is a tendency to canonize a literary production based on the West or on themes set in it, filtered by the stereotyped focus on transnational and migrant subjectivities and textualities. In fact, much remains to be done in order to objectify the relations of domination that permeate the schemes of interpretation of colonial and postcolonial realities in literature, the arts and the social sciences (Sapiro; Ducournau, 2010),

Despite the existence of peculiarities/singularities in the conditioning factors of the circulation of scientific and literary works (Sapiro, 2012), there are many dimensions of international circulation and the experiences of various individuals that raise convergent problems at various points. In any case, what we want to emphasize is that the exploration of African migrations, of African diasporas, which articulate ancient and innovative dynamics, archaic or contemporary forms - it would be necessary to recall with Zeleza (2020, p. 921) the existence of differences and similarities between the "trans-Indian oceanic diasporas, the trans-Mediterranean diasporas and the transatlantic diasporas" - offers unique opportunities to apprehend the reconfiguration of the imaginary, of sensibilities and, certainly, of the modes of production of knowledge as well as of the goods and works of culture. What we sketch here were the outlines of the construction of a dynamic object, which continues to challenge researchers.

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