

Postscript: Dakar, 1968¹

An unlimited general strike, a boycott of examinations, and “getting rid of the current regime.”² These are among the actions that the *Union des Etudiants Sénégalais* (Senegalese Students Union, hereafter UDES) considered, in the course of successive UDES study sessions and internal assemblies which took place starting in early 1968, and culminated in May of that year. The initial meeting, on March 18th, had been triggered by a unilateral decision from the government to cut down scholarships, the main source of income for most students, by one third to a half, according to a new funding scheme. On May 26th, following one final failed negotiation attempt with the government, the UDES published a 9-page memorandum outlining their demands, and went on strike. Beyond calling for the restoration of full scholarships, the memorandum described the University of Dakar as “a French university settled in Senegal.”³ They had a point. In 1968, nearly one third of the University of Dakar’s students were French—the rest of the student body coming from Senegal and other francophone African countries. More importantly, the curriculum, as well as the administrative and teaching body—including the Dean himself—were largely French.⁴

The strike soon blossomed into a full-blown uprising that spread throughout Dakar. Students occupied the university, organized the blockade of several major streets in the city, and recruited school pupils to join their movement. The response from the State, only eight years into Senegal’s emergence as an independent nation, was swift. On May 29th, President Léopold Sédar Senghor—the African socialist leader lauded as the *président-poète* [poet-president], and as a major figure of the negritude movement—declared a state of emergency, and sent the army into campus. One student was killed, 69 were injured, and thousands arrested—while the Senegalese students were sent to prison, the other African students were deported back to their countries. On May 30th, the *Union Nationale des Travailleurs Sénégalais* (UNTS), a federation of all major unions in the country, representing roughly 90% of Senegalese workers, called for a general strike in support of the students.⁵ Their movement was also met with

repression, with Senghor going as far as calling-in the French army for material support. By early June, fearing that the social unrest might keep spreading, Senghor entered into negotiations with the UNTS, cleverly maneuvering to break the alliance between workers and students. By September, the UDES also entered into negotiations with the government, and successfully secured a number of their initial demands.⁶ More importantly, pressure from the student's movement arguably led to political reforms beyond the university. President Senghor relinquished some of his power, through the creation of a Prime Minister position, and Senegal's parliament adopted a more transparent financial system.

While the 1968 Dakar uprising emerged out of a specifically Senegalese context of decolonisation and early post-colonial rule, the global context is key to fully understanding the movement's deeper undercurrents. Beninese journalist Francis Kpatindé was thirteen years old at the time:

We were young, very young—school and highschool kids, or students—in Dakar, Ouagadougou, Cotonou, Niamey or Bangui. We had vaguely captured the spirit of Bandung, birthplace of the non-aligned movement. And we had, early on, acquainted ourselves with revolutionary rhetoric, and the basics of agitprop. We had read—in publications sometimes borrowed from the French Cultural Center—Sartre, Marcuse, Fanon, and Ralph Ellison's remarkable *Invisible Man*. And also, Stokely Carmichael, coiner and icon of the Black Power movement, whom I would eventually get a chance to meet, much later on, as he was living in Guinea under a new, twice-meaningful identity: Kwame Ture. Of course, we had taken-in bits and pieces from Marx, Engels, Mao, and Che. Ears glued to our shortwave transistors, we avidly drank the never-ending tirades of Castro and Ahmed Sékou Touré, on Radio Habana Cuba and Radio Conakry. Conakry: the very city where Kwame Nkrumah, architect of panafricanism and father of Ghanaian independence, was living in exile, having been overthrown two year earlier in a coup allegedly orchestrated by American imperialists. On April 4, 1968, in Memphis, MLK had been shot dead. His body was still warm.⁷

Two decades after the upheaval, in 1987, the university of Dakar was renamed. Today, a large mural at the entrance of campus—pictured on the cover of this special issue of

Ufahamu—pays tribute to the famed Afrocentric scholar whose name the university now bears. An adjacent stele reads: “*Au professeur Cheikh Anta Diop, 1923-1986. Par son génie, il a réhabilité les civilisations nègres. [To Professor Cheikh Anta Diop, 1923-1986. Through his genius, he rehabilitated negro civilizations.]*” This inscription echoes one of the main preoccupations in the mind of Dakar’s students in 1968: that the university center African, rather than European, concerns—in essence, that it be decolonized.

The call for papers for this special issue of *Ufahamu*, “The African University,” was announced in the summer of 2016. The call for papers was open-ended, listing a variety of topics that would be considered relevant and associated to the title. Unsurprisingly, upon receiving submissions, one thematic clearly emerged: the decolonization of academia. In the guest editorial from Busisiwe Seabe, an activist of the #FeesMustFall campaign in South Africa, this very concern was central. Busisiwe had originally submitted her editorial in Swahili in order to “decolonize her academia,” channeling Ngugi wa Thiongo’s *Decolonizing the Mind*. However, the limited staffing at *Ufahamu* only allowed us to stand in solidarity with her in spirit, as we were unable to locate a Swahili editor in our publishing timeline and limited budget. Now having an English translation, we wish to thank Busisiwe for her commitment to spreading her message, and hope that her conviction has not been compromised. In her guest editorial, Busisiwe recounts her experience in the struggle in 2015, its consequences, and the individual trauma tethered to participating in revolution. What has been intellectualized and analyzed in the essays of Part I, Busisiwe was on the ground realizing, and struggling to effect change. We salute her for all her efforts in the struggle to decolonize, as well as transform, education.

Opening Part I, Hugo Canham analyzed what is considered knowledge within spaces of learning. He spoke of a racialized rubric where embodied knowledge, specifically knowledge held by black bodies, is rejected. This dismissal of black and African forms of knowledge preservation, as well as black bodies, contributes to the overall thematic of this special issue. Amber Murrey and Anteneh Tesfahun continued this theme in a conversation, from Jimma University, discussing the imperialistic and excluding nature of knowledge production. Savo Heleta’s essay responded in discussing the strategy and targets for decolonizing

knowledge—primarily the curriculum, and the institution that protects it. Gregory F. Houston, Chitja Twala, and Nkululeko Majozi collaborated to critique the curriculum in South Africa arguing that it has yet to be decolonized, with the history of the liberation struggle largely being elided from instruction. Using the Pan-African University as a case-study, Morgan Ndlovu pondered what real knowledge decolonization, not African mimicking of Western practices, looks like, and laid out the conditions for the creation of African futures. Beyond their unrealized decolonization, other issues continue to affect African universities. For instance, what happens when war erupts, and disrupts the work happening at universities? Adegboyega A. Adedire discussed how the 1967-1970 Nigerian civil war impacted the University of Ibadan campus.

In Part II of the issue, we expanded our discussion beyond university campuses, and beyond the continent. In an interview on primary and secondary school curriculum reforms in Kenya, Wandia Njoya denounces the Kenyan government's ongoing efforts, in the name of economic development, to create a docile workforce and undermine engaged citizenry. In the United States, Robin D. G. Kelley calls for university students to engage in "fugitive study" within an institution "incapable of loving them." This means proactively making use of the intellectual resources the university provides, to fuel their activism and political work, even though the institution itself cannot be expected to be a motor for social change.

This issue ended with Abdoulaye Sounaye's description of an ongoing research project on the impact of Pentecostalism and Salafism on *Boko*—i.e. secular education, in Hausa—throughout university campuses in Niger and Nigeria, and two book reviews. Thabisile Griffin discussed Salim Vally and Aziz Choudry's *Reflections on Knowledge, Learning and Social Movements: History's Schools*, and Madina Thiam examined Boubacar Sangaré's *Être Étudiant au Mali*.

We hope you enjoyed reading this special issue of *Ufahamu* on "The African University." We were fortunate enough to be able to put the finishing touches to the issue from Senegal, where a number of events this year have shaken university campuses. In May 2018, students at Gaston Berger University in the city of Saint-Louis went on strike. The disbursement of university scholarships, their main source of income, was 10 days late. In the

course of the ensuing protest they staged, a police officer shot and killed one of them, 26 year-old Mouhamadou Fallou Sène. In August 2018, the administration of Cheikh Anta Diop University also failed to pay students on time, triggering another round of protests. Fifty years after the 1968 uprisings, Senegalese students, much like their comrades throughout the continent, are still fighting for a decolonized, transparent, and fair university.

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Notes

¹ To read more about the 1968 events in Dakar, see: Abdoulaye Bathily, *Mai 68 à Dakar ou la révolte universitaire et la démocratie*, (Paris: Chaka, 1992) and Omar Guèye, *Mai 1968 au Sénégal: Senghor face aux étudiants et au mouvement syndical*, (Paris: Karthala, 2017).

² Françoise Blum, “Mai 68 au Sénégal,” *Le Maitron: Dictionnaire Biographique, Mouvement Ouvrier, Mouvement Social*, <http://maitron-en-ligne.univ-paris1.fr/spip.php?article167386>.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Anaïs Angelo, “Mai 68 à Dakar, Senghor et « con-bandit »,” *The Conversation*, May 23, 2016, <https://theconversation.com/mai-68-a-dakar-senghor-et-con-bandit-59612>.

⁷ Francis Kpatindé, “Mai 68 à Dakar, Chronique d’une époque fébrile,” *Le Monde*, May 7, 2018, https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2018/05/07/mai-68-a-dakar-chronique-d-une-epoque-febrile_5295557_3212.html. Translated from French by Madina Thiam.

