Introduction: Why *Sources* ? Empirical Rigour, Reflexivity, and Archiving in the Social Sciences and Humanities in African Studies

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Introduction

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Sources: *Materials & Fieldwork in African Studies* has taken on a novel mission for a social sciences and humanities journal: to place field materials at the heart of the analysis. The journal aims to consider the empirical objects researchers produce—and more often co-produce—in their particular investigative context and using specific methods that facilitate theory-building.

These materials are very diverse in nature. They may be public or private archives; old or recent; retrieved in libraries or collected in the field. They may comprise local writing (notebooks, letters, diaries, autobiographies, tracts, pamphlets, religious writings, etc.); excerpts from interviews, conversations, and life stories; notes, particularly from participant observation; maps, diagrams, and sketches by researchers or their interlocutors; knick-knacks, museum exhibits, and regalia; election posters, clothing, and campaign songs; photographs, films, audio and video recordings; excerpts from "grey" literature (reports, evaluations) and newspapers; data from the Internet and social media networks. Examples abound: always relating to an object of study, the research questions that are being developed and re-developed in relation to it, and the research conditions at the time.

The desire to place the empirical at the heart of the analysis is not wholly unique to *Sources*. In anthropology and sociology, numerous French journals give primacy to the field; certain among them, notably *Terrain*, make research conditions an editorial priority. In political science, a discipline that turned to empirical investigation later—and in no small part thanks to researchers studying the African continent—*Politique africaine* long offered a section called "Documents" that published and commented on primary sources. History, inherently concerned with historical criticism of sources

and availability of evidence (Bloch 1949; Pomian 1999), pays still greater attention to the conditions that produced the field materials it commissions, as well as their materiality and even their sensoriality. Recently published works of sociological and historical reflexivity relating to "large collective enquiries" (*grandes enquêtes*) have equally contributed to the mission of grasping better research conditions (Burawoy 2003; Laferté, Pasquali and Renahy 2018), thus contesting decontextualising approaches as one can see in the history of ideas. Archaeology also experienced an epistemological revival in the 1980s (Galay 1986), which is now taken up by English language journals such as the *Journal of Archaeological Science Reports*. It is not, however, very present in the French field, with the exception of *Ramage* which, founded in 1982, saw its last issue published in 2001.

In this tradition, albeit with a more marked bias, *Sources* hopes not only to focus its analysis on field materials *per se*, but to facilitate their archiving and accessibility in order to show the social sciences and humanities in the making. The fact that the journal originated in a research institute in Africa, as close as possible to the places studied (Pommerolle 2019), is not insignificant. In reaction to standardisation imposed by top-tier academic journals in the North and South alike, we reject writing and editorial convention, returning instead to the social world, past and present, as closely observed as possible. The call to place field materials at the heart of the analysis is not a fetish for the empirical. Comaroff and Comoroff observed that in the last quarter of the 20th century, there was "something of a flight from theory, a re-embrace both of methodological empiricism and born-again realism" (2012), an escape from the backlash against grand theory. As early as 1959, Charles Wright Mills mocked the bureaucrats of the empirical (Mills 1959) who, as Jean-Claude Passeron (1991, 1996) reminds us, are mass producing what they conceive of as raw, objective data in a standardized way, but are incapable of "sociological imagination," conceptual inventiveness, and reflexivity. Yet, these skills are indispensable to any attempt to analyse social phenomena. It is not on the basis of naïve empiricism but on strong epistemological and ethical arguments, therefore, that *Sources* makes archiving and dissecting field materials its editorial focus.

The epistemological arguments outlined in the first part of this introduction focus on the nature of the social sciences and humanities as empirical disciplines. As such, they require proof and rely on methodological rules governing the production and use of field materials. The second part develops the ethical imperative that follows, establishing the appropriate relationship between the knowing subject and the subject of knowledge. This imperative, while valuable in general, is all the more important in African studies because the production of knowledge has too often been—and sometimes still is—tied to hidden ideologies and asymmetries of power. The necessity of archiving unfolds from our emphasis on the empirical, as discussed in the third part of this introduction. Preserving and giving access to field materials makes it possible for peers and other audiences to refer to research data, now and in the future. At the same time, it makes such data objectively verifiable, replicable, and

even refutable. In the fourth part, we discuss the genesis of the journal, discussing the different stages of its creation, the actors involved, and the transformations it has undergone. We conclude by presenting its first issue, whose articles embody the epistemological, ethical, and archival ambitions with the empirical rigour *Sources* aims to promote.[1]

Requiring Proof

First of all, we take the social sciences and humanities seriously as empirical sciences, that is, as disciplines that examine humans as they are in the world and thus require the collection of data on their practices and the representations they construct of these practices (Foucault 1970 [1966]). The realist epistemology underlying this form of empirical knowledge—acknowledging the different forms and approaches it can take within and between disciplines—is supported by methodological rules regarding the production and use of field materials. These rules underpin the truthfulness of the social sciences and humanities: their capacity to produce true statements or, even better, statements that are "within the true" (Canguilhem 1977; Balibar 1994) insofar as they fulfil the requirements for empirically supporting inferences and generalisations—that is, conceptual abstraction—and thus move beyond the conventional wisdom: "Scientific truthfulness or truth-telling does not consist of faithful reproduction of some truth forever-enshrined in things or in the mind. The true is the said (*le dit*) that follows from scientific saying (*le dire*). How does one know it when one sees it? The true is never said first. A science is a discourse framed by its critical thinking" (Canguilhem 1977: 21[2]). From the beginning, methodological debates in the social sciences and humanities have helped enrich and transform disciplinary knowledge. We maintain that these disciplines, however diverse, possess an epistemic unity: they share similar paradigms and the same modalities for constructing their objects of study, producing data, and making interpretations (Bourdieu, Chamboredon and Passeron 1968; Passeron 1991).

Sources considers three sets of methodological rules as necessities; these rules also constitute publication criteria. Because an object of enquiry is never given, but always constructed, the first set of rules deals with the construction of empirical elements in relation to the object of enquiry. It is crucial first and foremost to explain the "theoretical principles of construction and selection of materials" (Lahire 2005) that inform how a *corpus* is assembled; then, to diversify the materials and to intersect them according to the triangulation principle (Soler 2009). These procedures support the validity of a proposition by allowing cross-checking against different types of materials. They also make it possible to identify elements that do not fall within the scope of the analysis but, instead of obscuring them from view, integrating them theoretically or even using them to develop the analytical framework. They

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1. Our sincere thanks go to the members of the journal's editorial team and several colleagues from different disciplines for their comments on earlier versions of this text.

2. All quotations originally in French have been translated.

thus condition the iterative process, that is to say the back-and-forth between problem and field, between interpretation and data. This process is a first principle of epistemological vigilance against argumentative laziness, analytical weakness, and ideological or metaphysical bias. Rejecting strict hypothetico-deductive logic, these approaches make it possible to produce "grounded theory" (Glaser and Strauss 1967)—defined as theoretical statements rooted in empirical reality—whether one places oneself in a positivist or constructivist paradigm.

A second set of methodological rules relates to contextualisation. Contextualising data consists of relating knowledge to the social conditions of its production. This context is never just a simple background, but a product that results from the researchers' line of enquiry (Lahire 1996a; Feuerhahn 2017). As Christian Jouhaud reminds us, "the context does not exist prior to the operation that constructs it … There are no contexts, but operations, procedures, and experiences of contextualisation that touch, in a partial, specific, and relative way, a part of historical reality" (1994: 273–274). Contextualisation requires providing relevant information—through various lenses, in full historical depth and geographical range—to understand the object being studied. It also concerns the immediate situation of data collection in the field, defined as the time and place of the survey. Who collects the data? Which local issues are at stake? How do these issues impact the research? Given these questions, it is important to account for the different scales at play. Indeed, the objects of study can be approached empirically and treated analytically at different scales. They range from the micro (such as observed social interactions) to the macro (phenomena considered on a regional, national or global scale) through the study of singular or comparative "case studies" (Burawoy 1998; Passeron and Revel 2005). Making the scale or scales of the analysis explicit allows one to justify the level and scope of validity of the theoretical elaborations produced. Additionally, cross-scale or multilevel analysis, because of the interactions between the micro and the macro, can make for the most accurate and complete vision of a phenomenon. Works from history and geography in particular have shown the merit of this approach (Revel 1996; Brenner 2001; Planel and Jaglin 2014).

Finally, a third principle of knowledge production "within the true," which overlaps in places with contextualisation, is reflexivity as "objectification of the objectifying subject" (Bourdieu 2001, 2004). This is no narcissistic, complacent return to the researcher's own experiences. Reflexivity consists of analysing the researchers' positioning, that is, their local and localised situation and perspective as part of the world they seek to analyse, as well as of an academic field that shapes them. This stance has given rise to various attempts, from "ego-history" (Nora 1987) to "auto-(socio-) analysis" (Favret-Saada 1981; Bourdieu 2004); dialogic writings (Rabinow 1977; Crapanzano 1980) and publications of field diaries[3]. Self-objectification is often claimed but still only marginally practiced—although there are significant

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3. See, for instance, the famous cases of *Fanthom Africa* by Michel Leiris 2017 [1934] and *A Diary in the Strict Sense of the Term* by Bronislaw Malinowski (1967).

variations between disciplines, anthropology having made its particular mark since the reflexive turn of the 1980s. Yet it should make it possible not only to free oneself from assumptions, prejudices and "preconceptions" (Durkheim 1982 [1894]), but also to work on or even master the subjective relationship to the object. This subjective relationship, which the researcher tends to bring to their understanding of social reality, including all sorts of intellectualist, ethnocentric, and gendered biases, depends on two sets of elements. The first set combines the representations, values, and expectations that are the product of the researchers' real or perceived attributes, such as age, gender, skin colour, social and national origins, etc. (Bensa and Fassin 2008; Monjaret and Pugeault 2014). The second relies upon their position and trajectory in society, including within academia.

Despite these epistemological fundamentals that underpin the truthfulness of any statements made in the realm of the social sciences and humanities, it is common knowledge that there is a tendency among academic journals to value theoretical formalisation at the expense of data visibility. This "empirical offloading" (Olivier de Sardan 1996: 16) is what lies behind derealisation, i.e. abstraction without sufficient basis in social reality and simplification of its true complexity. Bernard Lahire (2005, 1996b) uses the term "uncontrolled over-interpretation" to define an "interpretative outgrowth" of the volume, extent, and nature of empirical material. Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan (1996: 1) refers to "data mistreatment": "The theorist overstretches the empirical evidence or makes assertions that ignore or even contradict it." These "theoretical abuses" (Quidu 2011) invalidate the interpretations produced in an enquiry, since they no longer obey the rules that determine the validity of their elaboration. But what is at stake with such abuses goes beyond each individual enquiry. The larger endeavour of providing evidence, which is at the foundation of the social sciences and humanities, is undermined by this trend towards empirical debasement. For, according to Jean-Michel Berthelot (1990), "if science is based on the requirement of evidence, a system that only relies on ontological commitment to justify propositions, evading logical criticism and factual tests, cannot be considered science." Without empirical rigour, theoretical propositions are no longer objectively verifiable, replicable, or refutable by peers or members of the public. Newspaper articles, diaries, leaflets, posters, maps, sketches, diagrams, music videos, photographs, life stories, interviews, research notes, and other empirical objects that are collected as research data, are signs that "point to an external reality" existing outside of theory. These data "attest to the author's intention to let the reader leave the text" to see for themselves whether the text aligns with the extratextual reality that they take as their object (Pomian 1999: 33–34). The insufficient availability of these empirical elements prevents statements about the social world from being discussed, debated, and, if their validity is recognised, appropriated within and outside of the discipline because of their theoretical strength or social utility. Widespread empirical laxity could gradually lead to a discrediting of the humanities and social sciences: a downgrading to a discourse among discourses.

Ethical Requirements, in African Studies and in General

Sources proposes these epistemological requirements as the foundation of empirical rigour and attached them to an ethical imperative: one that structures the relationship between the knowing subject and the subjects of knowledge. This imperative requires recognition and respect for the humanity, dignity, and reflexivity of the individuals who inform, enlighten, and guide the researcher. It comprises various principles concerning proper research conduct and proper use of the results: the need for free, informed, and continuous consent of research participants; the need for respect, kindness, and even empathy; the requirement of data confidentiality and privacy; the duty to return materials and share analyses, etc. These principles are codified in ethical guidelines and policy statements, which vary by country and region of the world, but agree on certain fundamental principles[4]. Certainly, the limits of these mushrooming disembodied deontologies, particularly relating to their applicability in real-life research situations, have been discussed (among others, Pels 1999; Fassin 2006; Bosk 2007; Benveniste and Selim 2014). Nevertheless, these ethical principles, at once universal in nature and adjusted to the specific conditions of the inquiry, allow the distanced gaze and critical approach necessary for the study of the social without veering into the objectification of the subjects of the inquiry, i.e. their dehumanisation, which opens the door to all kinds of contempt, abuse, and violence.

It is all the more important to insist on ethical standards in research because *Sources* deals with knowledge produced on Africa, defined here as the African continent and its past and present geographical, political, economic, sociocultural, and epistemic extensions: Atlantic Africas, African diasporas, and other Africas, plural, in the world at large. Knowledge production on and about Africa began with the imperial expansion of the 15th century and developed with colonisation from the end of the 19th century onwards. This knowledge was built on the political, economic, social, cultural, and epistemic domination of European colonial powers over Africa, particularly what had been carved out and categorised as "Black Africa." The science that developed there—called "Africanism" from the 1930s onwards— was based on an ideology of Europe's colonial superiority and Africa's radical otherness (Piriou and Sibeud 1997; Sibeud 2002; Copans 2010). The identifying, naming, classifying, and sorting of all things African led to the objectification, inferiorisation, and exoticisation of the continent. These practices passed under the cover of objective and impartial science, sometimes erasing the legacy of colonialism but often simply serving it (Fanon 1952; Leclerc 1972). Methodological standards on the production and use of field materials have been repeatedly disregarded, leading to generalisations without empirical basis or, just as damagingly, based on an excess of certain data while contradicting other sets. This failure to respect ethical principles in research

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4. E.g., for Europe, see the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity (European Science Foundation, 2018, https://www.allea.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/FR_ALLEA_Code_de_conduite_europeen_pour_lintegrite_en_recherche.pdf [archive]), and for Canada: https://ethics.gc.ca/fra/documents/tcps2-2018-fr-interactive-final.pdf [archive].

explains how Africans have routinely been treated as things to be known, controlled, and transformed, not as subjects of knowledge themselves. Colonial medicine is a particularly striking example of pseudoscientific discourse and practice (Vaughan 1991). Africanism also included the idealisation of the continent among researchers who were "mad for Africa," whose relationship to Africa was constructed "out of passion; that is, outside the forms of intellectual knowledge" (Ricard 2004: 172).

Criticism of Western body of work on Africa was advanced in the 1960s and gained momentum in the 1970s as part of the broader critique of Western *episteme* and its alignment with imperialism outside of Europe (Césaire 1972 [1955]; Said 1978; Mudimbe 1973, 1982, 1988; Miller 1985; Amin 1989 [1988]). It revealed the impasses of an "ethnological reason" (Asad 1973; Amselle 1998 [1990]) based on the logic of division, classification, and opposition. French Africanism was placed under the auspices of "scientific patriotism" (de l'Estoile 1997: 28) and institutionalised in this form within disciplines, departments, seminars, and journals. Some of the most radical criticisms of it called for the dissolution of the social sciences and humanities. According to V. Y. Mudimbe, "there is no such thing as innocence in the practice of social sciences," which have been made to be "at the service of class power"; thus, the field must be "defeated altogether" (1982: 57). Faced with this uncompromising position, researchers have embraced self-criticism and reflexivity to renew the field of what has now become "African studies." It has required deconstructing academic exoticism, studying African societies like one would study European, American, or Asian ones (Bayart 1993 [1989]); applying the same epistemological, methodological, and ethical requirements to the field as one would apply to any other; and fighting against "the unequal distribution of scientific legitimacy within the international community of specialists on Africa" (Piriou and Sibeud 1997: 15).

A new colonial history has emerged, attentive to the incompleteness and incoherence of the colonial project and to the strategies of resistance or indifference of the colonised (Cooper and Stoler 1997), as well as a global, interconnected history that links Africa to the rest of the world. The social sciences and humanities now study subjects at the nexus of local and global and through the lens of the circulation of ideas, objects, and people; in the past and in the present. All these new approaches have worked within African studies to dislodge stereotypes of a primitive, immobile, closed-in, closed-off, history-less Africa. The legacy of colonial intermediaries and practices of knowledge co-production, too, add nuance to the colonial story (Tilley and Gordon 2007). Without denying the asymmetrical positions of the stakeholders, researchers have explored the essential role of informants. They were the "dark companions," primarily male, of the first missionaries, ethnologists, and geographers (Simpson 1975) as well as educated aides and assistants (Schumaker 2001; Harries 2007; Carré 2015; Smith and Labrune, 2018). These cultural intermediaries were often anonymous, but their identity "sometimes shows up, usually at the bottom of the page, as a student, griot, guard, cook, blacksmith, etc." (Dulucq 2009: 16). Writing practices—whether informal or learned; traditional, institutional, or personal;

produced independently or commissioned—equally testify to the invention, appropriation, or subversion of techniques, procedures, and knowledge (Peterson, 2004, 2012; Dulucq and Zytnicki 2006). They show "African writings of the self": subjectivation in re-elaboration (Boulaga 1977; Mbembe 2002 [2000]). The fact that studies of Africa, both as a reality and as an idea, have developed new concepts, approaches, and perspectives (Bates, Mudimbe and O'Barr 1993; Abdelmadjid 2018) shows that African studies has been and still is fertile ground for social theory in general.

Recent calls to "decolonize" or "decentralize" the production of knowledge about Africa, reversing epistemic and institutional asymmetries, are a reminder that there is still work to be done. In 2020, almost fifty years after the errors of Africanism, certain theoretical doxa, academic elitism, and antiquated institutional procedures remain (Hountondji 2002; Sibeud 2011; Quashie 2018; Doquet and Broqua 2019). Critics of European universalism question the capacity of the sciences to theorise the universal without falling into ethnocentrism (Amselle and Diagne 2018). These debates have been fierce in connection to the Subaltern Studies movement (Guha 1982; Spivak 1988; Chakrabarty 2000) and under pressure from social movements and mobilisations within American, British, and South African universities (Ampofo 2016; Mbembe 2016; Matthews 2018). They have also been initiated in francophone African studies. As many scholars have observed, there is a gap between the places where the history of these Africas in the world is made (or was made), and the places where it is studied (Mbembe and Sarr 2017; Copans 2019a, 2019b; Gueye et al. 2019).

While these debates reveal more open questions than shared findings, they nonetheless bear witness to African studies in a process of transformation. In the midst of this transformation, *Sources* is taking its place. As great a task and tough a challenge as founding a journal may be (Blondiaux et al. 2012; Damerdji et al. 2018), to be effective, its contribution must be circumscribed to a limited area of action. For *Sources,* that area of action is placing empirical rigour at the heart of the production of objective, critical, and reflexive knowledge; promoting the dissemination of knowledge with open access to as many people as possible in order to contribute to the universalisation of research; and encouraging the publication of all those working on and in Africa, in its broadest definition. It is also our aim to build and preserve corpuses of field materials; to make them freely accessible to a variety of audiences, in the North and the South, not only now but in the future; and to provide sources for the research of tomorrow by documenting African realities and research on Africa in all its variety. As a journal whose creation was supported by French research personnel and institutions, a just and diverse representation of the scientific community in its board and representatives is crucial, as well as in its orientations, themes, issues, and authors. Without this symmetry and diversity, we risk passing for a mere ploy of the West to maintain its epistemic hold on Africa—under the cover of empirical and archival reasoning rather than classifying and hierarchical reasoning, this time.

Archiving and Accessibility of Materials

Over the past twenty years, initiatives to preserve and digitise African archives have multiplied. Mainly led by American and British institutions, these projects aim both to safeguard research materials (audio, video, text) and to make them accessible to as many people as possible with the help of information technologies. The University of Michigan's Matrix project (http://aodl.org/) and the British Library's Endangered Archives programme (https://eap.bl.uk/) have greatly contributed to the "digital turn" in the field of African studies (Chamelot, Hiribarren and Rodet 2019). Many materials are now freely accessible on these platforms: religious archives from Botswana, colonial archives from Burkina Faso and Guinea-Bissau, private records from Algeria, court records related to the transatlantic slave trade from Benin, archives from Ethiopian monasteries, recordings of Guinean orchestras, Kenyan railway archives, Lesotho familial records, photographs from Liberia and South Africa, Arabic manuscripts from Mali, Nigerian press archives, Sudanese trade union archives, etc. The diversity in theme, data, geographical area, and historical period bears witness to the vibrancy of research carried out on and from the African continent. Additionally, the online availability of these materials is a formidable resource for research and teaching, thus contributing to the dissemination of knowledge.

This enthusiastic account of the digital archiving revolution should not, however, obscure the many problems and conflicts that it engenders. In addition to the question of the durability and reliability of digitised data, as well as its ecological impact (Berthoud 2012), a number of scientific debates have revealed the political stakes of digital archiving. Far from being a miraculous shortcut to equal access in knowledge production, the "virtual rush" can obscure a new "digital imperialism" (Breckenridge 2014). These controversies took an unprecedented form in the 2000s in South Africa, a pioneer in the creation of digital archives[5] where the decolonisation of knowledge is a heated political and scientific issue. At the heart of the debate are two opposing conceptions: are archives an instrument of good governance and democratic transparency, or an instrument of racial and cultural domination? In many cases, the actors involved in these projects seem to reproduce the division of North-South relations, which involve unequal access to knowledge and Web resources between countries, regions, and individuals (Crampton 2003). The controversy also concerns intellectual property rights on digital sources and the risk of their expropriation from the African states, organised collectives, and individuals who own them, especially when there is no legal framework or when its application requires unequally shared legal resources. Thus, if digital archiving raises many scientific, educational, and democratic hopes, whether these hopes are realized depends on how these data are used, politically and economically (D'Alessandro-Scarpari et al. 2008).

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5. For example, the archives of Nelson Mandela are available online thanks to the Nelson Mandela Foundation: https://archive.nelsonmandela.org/.

Informed by these topical debates and wishing to contribute, *Sources* does not intend, however, to replace large-scale public and private archiving projects. The journal is more concerned with the archiving of researchers' data[6] and the open science approach. Documenting, structuring and perpetuating research data, whether produced individually or as part of large collective enquiries (Laferté 2006), is an epistemological and ethical requirement, as much as it presents a collective challenge in the digital age (Clavert and Muller 2017). While several initiatives have been launched in recent years, through personal sites or specific collective online platforms[7], few social science journals have yet begun to disseminate open access research corpuses[8].

Sources will upload the materials associated with each article in part or in full, as appropriate, and summarise them on digital platforms dedicated to the archiving of scientific data that are adapted thematically and meet the principles of *FAIR data*[9]. There are legal and ethical limits to the transparency of these data: protection of privacy, personal data, and intellectual property in particular. In order to respect these principles, publicly available sources may be partially anonymised. Responsible use and representation of sources, especially those of a politically sensitive nature or that could otherwise affect people's safety, will be discussed among the board and with the author. The journal is primarily published online, allowing multiple source formats (video, audio, social media) without worrying about volume. Much emphasis is placed on the precise reproduction of metadata, as well as how and where the data was collected. It is often said that the digitization of documents leads to their alteration or that digital data have no smell, taste, or texture. Yet, the contributions published in *Sources* place a primordial emphasis on the senses, on the material and contextual dimension of the data discussed in its pages. As the historian Arlette Farge (Farge 1997) points out, the time spent tracking down and flipping through mountains of dusty papers are essential to researchers' penetration of the world they are studying, in the same way archaeologists spend time with artifacts of a past they are seeking to understand. This concern for lived experience and interaction is also reflected in recent sociological, anthropological, geographical, sociolinguistic,

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6. On the topicality of open science policies in the African context, at the time of the preparation of the first issue of this journal, see for example "Déclaration pour le partage et l'ouverture des données de la recherche pour le développement durable" (Declaration on Sharing and Opening up Research Data for Sustainable Development), published in November 2019: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3538891.

7. In France, see for example "Les archives des ethnologues": https://ethnologia.hypotheses.org/category/le-consortium; or the collections of researchers of the Fondation Maison des Sciences de l'Homme (https://archivesfmsh.hypotheses.org/dons-darchives/dons).

8. See in particular the journal created in 2016 and published by Brill, *Research Data Journal for the Humanities and Social Sciences:* https://brill.com/view/journals/rdj/rdj-overview.xml.

9. The acronym "FAIR" refers to a technical structuring of platforms, a description and formatting of the deposited elements making them, in the sense of Web technologies, *findable, accessible, interoperable* and *reusable.* See in particular "Fair Principles" on the Go Fair website (https://www.go-fair.org/fair-principles) and Wilkinson et al. (2016).

literary, etc. research. In the wake of the archival turn, understood as "the passage from the archive as source to the archive as subject" (Stoler 2009: 77), the articles published in *Sources* aim to reveal what lies behind the curtain: the long chain of data production and archiving—analog and digital—as intertwined with issues of power and knowledge.

The journal's publication of materials online is therefore neither exhaustive, nor a return to the fetishisation of documents; even less an invitation to desert the field for the computer. On the contrary, data availability is a doorway behind the scenes of research work: it allows the pooling of collected materials and comparison. Responding to the necessary requirement of evidence, this transparency also encourages interdisciplinary collaboration by bringing sources used by different disciplines together around a common theme. Also, a special section entitled "Inside the Digital Archives Studio" is intended to publicise data collection, conservation, and archiving projects, whether old and new, as well as specialised studies of sources from Africa and the diaspora. The aim is to give an account of the dynamics at work in projects to digitise African sources and to restore the ethical, legal, political, and archival debates surrounding the sharing of scientific data.

Origins of the Journal

Sources came into being in several stages. The first took place at the French Institute for Research in Africa in Nairobi (IFRA-Nairobi) in Kenya. In 2014, Marie-Aude Fouéré, then a resident researcher, inaugurated a column entitled "Sources, archives, and materials" in the institute's biannual journal, *Les Cahiers d'Afrique de l'Est / The East African Review*. In the preface to issue 48 of 2014, she concisely announced the empirical orientation of this column, which would publish "fieldwork materials collected by researchers (such as transcribed and translated interviews, songs, etc.) and primary sources (written local histories, political manifestos, poetry, disquisitions of philosophy or theology, biographies and memoirs, diaries, letters, etc.) edited, annotated and introduced by short accounts about their value and interest for a larger audience of scholars" (Fouéré 2014). In issue no. 49 published that same year, three articles responded to the call. They presented and analysed original materials from field research which, for the researchers who had produced them, had played an important role in theory-building. A formal interview with an influential academic from Makerere University in Uganda (Olivier Provini), oral accounts collected from villages in Tanzania (Jean-Luc Paul), and a vernacular print produced by local leaders in Kenya (Chloé Josse-Durand) were at the centre of the reflection. They were transcribed or reproduced in full in their original language (with their translation in the case of rare languages, such as Kiluguru from Tanzania). The work of contextualising these materials and explaining their role in the investigation took precedence over theorising (Provini 2014; Paul 2014; Josse-Durand 2014).

The first objective of this section was not to defend an empiricism without concepts, but on the contrary, in a constructivist and reflexive vein, to show the

places, moments, and actors of the (co-)production of knowledge that conventional academic writings usually minimize. A second objective was to make up for the lack of space offered in journals for the materials resulting from research, forcing researchers to cut back on their empirical data. A third and final objective was to gradually build up a field archive for IFRA-Nairobi, which would accumulate over the years materials collected by students and researchers who had worked there. As a collective and shared archive, it should be usable by others as a source of information, but also as an object of analysis for future researchers looking back on what their elders' research was like: the questions they asked, the ways they answered them, and the sociopolitical conditions of their investigations. The idea for such a column sprang from the unique position of a French research institute abroad as a place of research close to the field, with the mission of supporting empirical work.

The results of these two issues were mixed: the researchers were enthusiastic when the objectives of the column were explained to them, but the column had difficulty in attracting an unusual mode of writing, one that is not valued or considered valuable in terms of publication norms and prestigious publication spaces. Some researchers also seemed anxious, for various reasons, about sharing their research materials widely. The initiative was not continued beyond issues 49 and 50: it would change, not so much in content as in form.

The September 2014 arrival of Marie-Emmanuelle Pommerolle as Director of IFRA-Nairobi and departure of Marie-Aude Fouéré marks a second milestone. As a result of a handover between the two researchers and the Director's new understanding of the project, the objective becomes twofold: to transform what was just a column into a journal, and to bring together several research institutes around this journal rather than having it carried by a single institution. Marie-Emmanuelle Pommerolle then approached other French research institutes based in sub-Saharan Africa (UMIFRE). The aim was, in part, to maintain the initial link between the scientific ambition to focus on materials and the unique sites of empirical production that these institutes represent. Additionally, it was in response to urging by supervisory institutions—the Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs (MEAE) and the National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS)—to bring together separate institutes, which professional habit had previously led to operate largely autonomously, with the occasional ad hoc common project. The French Centre for Ethiopian Studies (CFEE) in Addis Ababa, the Khartoum branch of the Centre for Economic, Legal, and Social Studies and Documentation (CEDEJ), the French Institute of South Africa - Research (IFAS-Research) in Johannesburg, the French Institute for Research in Africa (IFRA-Nigeria) in Ibadan, and the French Section of the Sudanese Directorate of Antiquities (SFDAS) in Khartoum then became involved in the project.

An initial editorial board was set up with the aim of launching the journal. It included the Institutes' directors, founding researchers, and other researchers interested in this project. Proposals for special issues emerged in connection with ongoing institutional research programmes: sources on violence, the linkage

between sources in history and archaeology, and rubbish as source. What remained to be done was the editorial and logistical streamlining of a journal whose ambition was both academic and practical. Within the constrained framework of academic recruitment, and knowing university journals generally have very limited support staff, the request to the CNRS to hire an editorial manager working for both the research unit *Les Afriques dans le monde* (LAM) in Bordeaux and the UMIFRE in sub-Saharan Africa was accepted. Since September 2018, Bastien Miraucourt has taken charge of both the editorial direction and online archiving of the materials discussed in the journal. This collaboration, which was initially one of convenience, has made it possible to broaden the journal's institutional base as well as its scientific solidity. In February 2019, the journal adopted an Editorial Board as a governance structure. It relies on an Editorial Team that comprises two Editors-in-chief, an Editorial Manager, and Editors made up of directors and researchers from UMIFRE in Africa and from French research institutions. This team is responsible for editorial choices and operational tasks. The Editorial Board also rests on Associate Editors. These academic correspondents, both French and international, are invited to propose themes, contribute to columns, and participate in the peer-review process. The journal welcomes *varia* and special issues, for which a call for contributions is circulated. It values the publication of different textual formats. Mainly trilingual (English, French, Portuguese), it welcomes other languages of publication (Arabic, Wolof, Kinyarwanda, Swahili, etc.), accompanied by a translation, on a case-by-case basis. The institutional and scientific expansion should soon be reinforced by collaboration with African universities and research centres, as well as their researchers, who are UMIFRE's first partners.

Sources: Issue 1

The first issue of *Sources*, which brings together *varia*, aims to show the diversity of research materials used in the field of African studies and the contrasting uses of field practices depending on discipline and research topic. To this end, it brings together six articles from history, political science, anthropology, and archaeology. Based on selected, presented, and analysed materials, these articles explain the conditions of collection and methods of investigation, revealing the biases that result from researchers' choices, but also a plurality of possible interpretations and avenues of reflection. Criticism of the data is the common thread running through each of these scientific approaches, which take as their object the most material of sources, such as bricks studied by Gabrielle Choimet in Sudan; written texts from the Nigerian press in the 1940s and 1950s (Sarah Panata), from a local election campaign in Kenya in 2013 (Chloé Josse-Durand) and from the Mahadist administration of the 19th century (Anaël Poussier); as well as digital sources in a Mozambican context (Rozenn Nakanabo Diallo), and musical material on Burundi (Ariel Fabrice Ntahomvukiye). While each contribution highlights a source or a selection of sources, the authors are continuously concerned with contextualising their investigation in light of existing

works and comparing their data with other available materials. The space taken up by written sources in this first issue testifies, as if there was still any need, to the long-running importance of written culture in African societies (Ficquet and Mbodj-Pouye 2009; Barber 2007). However, the emphasis here is mainly on writings that are usually neglected, marginalised, and obscured in research because of their difficulty to access. This can be due to their private nature, as in the example of email exchanges, or their technical nature, as is the case with Arabic accounting sources.

These cases illustrate the importance of putting materials online in order to make them accessible. Doing so makes it possible to renew, for example, the approaches to administrative practices (Nakanabo Diallo; Poussier) usually viewed through the lens of state sources. Sara Panata and Chloé Josse-Durand shed particular light on individual appropriation of the written word by studying a corpus of letters sent to the Nigerian press by male and female readers and by analysing a "Political Code of Conduct" written by former politicians seeking to maintain their political hold, respectively. These sources, being "ordinary writings" (Fabre 1993, 1997), were produced in uncertain and conflictual political contexts (decolonisations, elections). Attentive to the text as well as to the sociohistorical environment in which the text was produced, the authors show how much the anxieties and imaginations of the times are at work in these writings, setting aside their own normative bias. Surprisingly, the oral sources (interviews, traditions), which history has vindicated and which constitute the primary sources of many investigations, are only mobilised secondarily here, in order to shed light on and contextualise the empirical production. In the vast field of aural sources, there are the civil war-era gospel songs from Burundi, now edited into video clips shared on social networks, which the researcher has transcribed from Kirundi and translated into French. These sources bear witness to the porosity of the media (textual, audio, visual) which transcend the long-imagined borders between material and immaterial culture. The materiality of data is at the centre of the contributions collected for this issue, which are attentive to the manufacture and diffusion of technology; to the circulation, weight, uses, and reception of these sources in African societies. It finds a singular echo in the ethnoarchaeological approach of Gabrielle Choimet, who deciphers, with great finesse, the ways of saying and doing of contemporary Sudanese bricklayers, in order to shed light on the practices of the ancient period.

This first issue closes with an interview with historian Vincent Hiribarren in the section "In the Digital Archive Studio." Hiribarren analyses the challenges of the dual archival and digital turning point in Africa in light of rich research and archival experience in the Bornou Empire (in north-western Nigeria) but also in Madagascar and Benin, insightfully highlighting the lively economic, political, and ecological issues that mass digitisation of archives raises.

By making their research materials available to read, see, and hear, the contributors to *Sources* have agreed to comply with the requirement of evidence. They have also generously agreed to share their data and embark on an adventure with a new

journal; for this, we thank them. The fact that the authors of this first issue are young researchers is certainly significant. It shows a transformation of professional practices in favor of a more collective and collaborative *modus operandi.* Happily, it also shows a sincere appetite for the kind of work—field work included—that *Sources* aims to promote.

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