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African Studies - Response to Plan S

We write as subject associations, learned societies, editors of academic journals in African Studies and editors of other disciplinary journals with interests in the field of African Studies in collective response to the call for feedback about the proposals for the implementation of Science Europe's Plan S. Our concerns are expressed as follows.

Case for humanities and social sciences and African Area Studies

We share the aim of proponents of Plan S to open access to high quality published research for readers and writers. We are not, however, convinced that the Plan will achieve this in relation to our region and disciplines, and we are concerned it may do the opposite.

Our concerns result from the lack of fit between the Plan designed for funded research in Europe in STEMM subjects that is published in expensive science journals, and our own circumstances of predominantly grant-unfunded research, undertaken by scholars in Europe, North America and Southern regions including the African continent, often collaboratively, and published in journals with modest subscriptions. The particular challenges of publication in the Humanities and Social Sciences (HSS) have been explained in other responses (such as those of the British Academy and Royal Historical Society) of which we are aware. These challenges are compounded when research, and also in many cases researchers, are located in the South, and when research is underpinned by an institutional infrastructure that already functions on shoestring budgets. For these reasons, we are anxious that a one-size-fits-all policy designed to address challenges in STEMM subjects will transpire in practice to be counter-productive in widening access for authors and readers in African Studies and have the effect of eroding an already fragile network of publications and the institutions that support them. We advocate greater recognition of the niche ecologies of such areas of research and publication.

Lack of funding for OA in African Studies and institutions

There are concerns in principle about the APC model of OA publishing, including e.g. its lack of affordability to HSS researchers in Southern countries. This problem also affects many ECRs, independent scholars, emeritus staff and unfunded scholars in the humanities in Europe. Virtually no APC-funded articles are currently published in the ‘softer’ humanities in African Studies. For example, over three issues, the *Journal of African History* had one open access article in 2017; similarly, the *Journal of African Cultural Studies* had just one gold OA article over three issues in 2017; the *Journal of Southern African Studies* published 2 OA articles out of a total of 50 articles in 2018. Yet these are core journals in historical, anthropological and cultural studies of Africa.

All serious journals in the field of African Studies seeking to publish the best scholarship in their disciplines prioritise publication of original work from scholars based in African institutions. However, there is currently no evidence of OA funding being available in African institutions to support APCs. Even if such funding were to exist in future, there would be a serious ethical question about ‘expropriating’ such scarce research and publication funding to European institutions and commercial publishers. The mechanisms for supporting fee waivers under Plan S are neither explained nor costed.

To take an example, the International African Institute’s journal *Africa* has published around a dozen gold OA funded articles in the last 5 years. These were funded by the (UK) Wellcome Trust, the Universities of Birmingham, Durham and Sussex, the London School of Economics, the International African Institute (IAI) itself and Dutch and US universities. A significant proportion of these gold OA articles were in areas bordering on medical research.

If this leading Africanist journal cannot secure article funding from institutions in the African continent, it seems unlikely smaller disciplinary journals or new publishing initiatives in HSS would be successful in doing so. The more likely reality is that African scholars in HSS would be further marginalised from international or ‘Plan S compliant’ publications in a context where there are already well-documented structural barriers facing Southern scholars to publish in international journals.

Exclusion of ‘funded’ European authors from ‘hybrid’ or ‘non-compliant’ journals

Whilst African Studies is an African enterprise emanating from the continent, it is also international, for reasons resulting from both colonial history and the integration of the African continent into global research and scholarship. The International African Institute with members and editors from Europe, Africa and the US has published research on Africa since the 1920s. African Studies is strongly represented in the European continent: the biennial European Conference on African Studies is probably now the largest in the world.

Around half of articles published in *Africa* are by researchers based in European institutions. Under Plan S this journal would be forced to choose between remaining non-compliant and hence excluding European authors (on the assumption that publication on compliant platforms would be imposed on funded and unfunded alike). Or else complying with Plan S (becoming gold OA only) to publish funded European authors, but receiving no resources to publish the remainder of the

journal - including some 25% of ‘unfunded’ contributors from the African continent, and the further 25% of contributors from the US whose institutions are not signatories of Plan S. In either case the decision would result in a fragmentation of academic publishing in our fields. This would be invidious and undermining of the intellectual project of transnational borderless scholarship. This scenario would be typical in African and other Area Studies.

Plan S is damagingly divisive. It is potentially Eurocentric – driven predominantly by the interests of European science with scant regard for knowledge production systems outside the global North. But it also threatens to preclude unfunded European researchers from publishing in journals compliant with Plan S and funded European researchers from publishing in non-compliant journals.

Waivers

Waivers are mentioned in the Plan S guidelines. It is assumed these are considered in exceptional cases for philanthropic funding, on the assumption that the preponderance of authors would be from the global North (another Eurocentric assumption). As a counter-example, the IAI’s *Journal of African Cultural Studies* in fact endeavours to publish the majority of its articles from continental African scholars. The *Journal of Southern African Studies* receives approximately 50% of its submissions from Africa-based scholars. How would a waiver scheme work for such journals that didn’t leave them almost entirely without subscription revenue? How would it work in the case of co-authorship with colleagues in both North and South – a publication pattern that major grant programmes such as the UK Global Challenges Research Fund are promoting? Unless such details are worked out in the implementation plan and funding mechanisms explained, it will not be possible to implement Plan S without doing damage to leading journals in our fields.

On access to scholarly journals in Africa and elsewhere in the global South, many of the journals signatory to this letter have schemes in place to afford the widest possible access, which is our highest priority, without undermining essential income for the journals to be viable. As an example, almost 8,000 institutions have access to *Africa* + the associated serial *Africa Bibliography* in Africa/the Middle East. The overwhelming majority of the institutions receive this at no cost via the funded Research for Life scheme. JSTOR, which aggregates many of the journals here, is also widely available and used in the African continent and is free to access for African institutions.

Value of institutions and learned societies partially funded by publication income

Institutes and learned societies, which in African Studies include the International African Institute, the British Academy sponsored British Institute in Eastern Africa, the Royal African Society, the U.S. African Studies Association, all signatories to this letter along with smaller societies in the discipline, do not publish to make a profit on their own behalf. Surpluses from journals published by societies with university presses tend to be modest. The aim for the best performing journals is to break-even or to earn a modest surplus of 5-10% from publication income to fund wider programmes. We agree with the proponents of Plan S that the profit margins of the commercial publishers (that can reach c.40%) are exploitative and excessive. But these profits are largely drawn from journals in STEMM subjects with subscription prices many times those of journals in HSS. The annual institutional subscription for the *Journal of African History* is currently £331 (print and online, 3 issues). The annual subscription for *Journal of Southern African Studies* is £844 (print and online, 6 issues). Shifting such journals to a pay-to-publish model is not the answer to limit the

profits of commercial publishing and would effectively make HSS journals more expensive for research universities that would have to contribute APCs, currently c.£1,800 per article in African Studies. Such a shift would be uneconomic for institutions at the individual journal level and will in all likelihood enhance the profits of commercial publishers via APCs.

Learned societies and institutes further support academic and general book series, including costs for translation, reprint fees and co-publication with Africa-based presses among other activities valued by their constituencies, including conferences, prizes and grants for researchers in Southern countries. These organisations have long prioritised the dissemination of research and publication and as much open access as is sustainable, particularly to readers, researchers and institutions in the global South. Sustained institutional support for African Studies, even at well-resourced institutions, can be patchy and so the supporting role of these organisations for the disciplines and journals becomes all the more important.

Publisher ethics vis-a-vis financial incentives

Whereas publishers claim there is no connection between APCs and editorial decision making, we are aware of examples of publishers questioning editorial decisions about acceptances where publication funds are at stake. Several editors could give examples of authors who have expected their work to be accepted because a grant is attached to a prospective publication. ‘Big deals’ between publishers and national consortia (such as the ‘read and publish’ arrangements combining subscriptions and Open Access fees) are likely to put more pressure on editorial integrity. Research assessment regimes (such as the UK REF), when combined with competition for publication funds, may also introduce considerations other than research quality.

There is also concern of the possibility of new Plan S journals seeking to cash in on APCs whilst undermining established standards in quality and peer review and diverting funding away from established journals.

Licences and plagiarism

Concerns about the CC BY licence proposed by Plan S for HSS have been fully explicated elsewhere by the British Academy, the Royal Historical Society, the Arts and Humanities Alliance and on the Scholarly Kitchen blog.

Green OA (when the immediate deposit of accepted manuscripts is allowed in institutional repositories) is already practised by several journals party to this letter (e.g. *Africa, Journal of African History, Journal of Southern African Studies*). Why therefore does Plan S insist on using a CC BY licence for Green OA? In addition to well-rehearsed concerns about CC BY licences (including risks of plagiarism, exploitation of copyright for commercial gain elsewhere, misattribution, poor or misleading translations), further ethical and security concerns arise with the possibility of downstream use of research on some African (and also Middle Eastern) countries where academic freedom cannot be taken for granted.

Open Data

There are ethical concerns about proposals for so-called ‘open data’ under CC BY, particularly in relation to ethnographic disciplines and research done outside formal legal structures or at the margins of authoritarian regimes and in other sensitive areas (e.g. research that involves children/minors) that is however representative of mainstream approaches in disciplines such as anthropology and sociology. On this matter, several of us are broadly in support of the European Association of Social Anthropologists Statement on Data Governance in Ethnographic Projects, available here:

<https://easaonline.org/downloads/support/EASA%20statement%20on%20data%20governance.pdf?fbclid=IwAR0cOKlrgWbCYCCa5NmHrU7t57UXQ0nHYHHpILvISVKtOSIxS8sArv15B-4>

Plan S needs to have regard for such concerns broadly affecting humanities and qualitative social science disciplines.

Timing of transition and OA journals in African Studies

If UKRI is not responding to Plan S until halfway through 2019 at the earliest, how can UK journals renegotiate contractual agreements with publishers to produce plans for compliance by January 2020? Journal articles for publication in 2020 are already in preparation. Even if the funding issues could be resolved, it is unlikely most African Studies journals would be ready either to be fully gold OA by 2020 or else to have formulated feasible transition plans. Currently there is only one fully OA journal among the main African Studies journals (as listed by Thomson Reuters and widely understood by academics in the associated fields). This is *Afrika Spectrum* funded by the German Institute of Global and Area Studies – a German foundation with core governmental funding. *Africa Development*, published by the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa is partially OA, funded by grant aid (mainly European/Scandinavian donor funds). There are otherwise very few peer-reviewed and indexed HSS journals in the African continent that are fully OA. The vast majority of established Africanist journals – in Africa, Europe, the US – depend on some level of income from subscriptions.

Repositories

In Europe and the US, all the signs are that the major commercial publishers will take an increasingly dominant role in developing subject or preprint repositories – e.g. Elsevier’s purchase of Bepress; Wiley’s plan to construct a repository for the American Anthropological Association. University presses are also developing their own repositories. At the same time, outside well-endowed US universities, many public institutions and universities lack resources (and in some cases expertise) to deal with the increasing scale and technical complexity of searchable article and data repositories. Where repositories do exist, these tend to be part of university libraries that may be soft targets for institutional funding cuts. The IAI’s own extensive research on repositories in African countries (<https://www.internationalafricaninstitute.org/repositories>) shows that coverage is patchy, not all research universities have any repository provision and some 25 African countries have no known institutional repositories at all. Whilst the International African Institute and other signatories of the letter would be keen to encourage the establishment of an international subject repository for African Studies over the longer term, given the assent of African universities, both the funding and political will to do so are currently lacking. We would hence caution against reliance on existing repositories, particularly in Southern countries, as vehicles (i) for delivering OA; (ii) as substitutes for viable well-established and modestly resourced journals.

Signatories

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Professor Phil Burnham
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Professor Ambreena Manji
President, African Studies Association UK on behalf of the Council of ASAUK

Dr Nicholas Westcott
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Dr Jane Humphries
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Dr Lucy McCann
Chair, SCOLMA – UK Libraries and Archives Group on Africa, on behalf of the SCOLMA committee

Dr Maria Grosz-Ngate, President of the U.S. African Studies Association
on behalf of the Board of Directors of the U.S. African Studies Association
(Supporting letter attached as Appendix A)

Dr Derek Peterson, FBA
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(Supporting letter attached as Appendix B)

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Appendices A and B



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Response to Plan S

The African Studies Association (US) is the largest scholarly organisation of its kind, representing the interests of over 2,000 university academics based in the United States, Europe and Africa. We wish to associate ourselves with the statement prepared by the International African Institute concerning ‘Plan S’. While we are keen to promote open and equitable access to scholarly publications, Plan S would encourage the exclusion of Africa-based scholars from top-quality publishing venues. As our colleagues in the I.A.I. have described, scholars based in African institutions—and colleagues based in less well-resourced institutions in the global North—will find it impossible to raise the funds necessary to publish in ‘Gold’ Open Access journals. Plan S would therefore bifurcate scholarly publishing, isolating African scholars from the leading journals in their fields while also obliging European scholars to publish in journals where no Africa-based colleague could afford to publish. We therefore wish to reiterate the central point in the I.A.I. statement: Plan S is damagingly divisive. It discourages scholarly collaboration between European, American and African colleagues, creating new barriers to publication for scholars in the global South while undermining the many ‘hybrid’ journals which curate the production of academic knowledge in our field.

Endorsed by the Board of Directors of the African Studies Association

31 January 2019



Stephanie Kitchen
Chair, Publications Committee
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January 30, 2019

Dear Stephanie Kitchen:

On behalf of the journal *Mande Studies*, journal of the Mande Studies Association (MANSA), we wish to express our support for your efforts to see Europe Science's Plan S redrafted to accommodate the specific needs of the humanities and social sciences, disciplines that have, traditionally, been poorly funded in comparison to the STEM disciplines. We agree that journal subscriptions sustain and ensure the high quality of publications in these disciplines:

"Humanities journals are overwhelming published on a hybrid basis for the simple reason that the majority of the articles they publish are not publicly funded by the UK government, the ERC, or charities." (letter by Alexandra Walsham and Matthew Hilton editors of *Past and Present*)

Scholarly journals require managing editors, copy editors, and so forth to maintain quality, an entire team of people whose work should be fairly compensated. Journals like ours, however, are already struggling to generate the funds necessary to ensure their smooth operation. Therefore we need to maintain a subscription-based format to remain viable.

Furthermore, the revenues from our journal and membership fees--tied in part to access to our journal--enable us, in addition to other sources (mostly donations by members), to fund the participation of scholars from the Global South at our international triennial conferences, thereby contributing to the collaborative exchange and democratic dissemination of knowledge.

The acquired stature of any journal, won through time as a result of the rigor of its peer-review process, scholarly impact, reputation, etc., enables readers to quickly choose publications of assured quality from an almost limitless range of choices, many of which are of dubious value. In other words, state-of-the art journals stand out

precisely because they constitute essential references in the search for reliable knowledge on a topic. We need to maintain such reference points in our fields in order for sound scholarship to thrive.

Were Plan S to go into effect, an "unintended consequence might be to erode the high standards of quality control, peer review and editing that Humanities journals regard as essential to the validation of the scholarly articles they publish" (Ibid.).

For all of the above reasons, we join our colleagues in asking the authors of Plan S to revisit and reformulate their proposal so as to accommodate the particular and crucial needs and requirements of publishing in humanities and social sciences journals.

Sincerely,



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