

FOREWORD

AFRICANIST BIBLIOGRAPHY
C H ALLEN

Africa Bibliography was first published in 1984, under the editorship of Hector Blackhurst. When the International African Institute suggested that I might take over from him as editor I hesitated; wisely, as it turned out. Hector Blackhurst had built up over nearly a decade a very impressive publication, continually adding to its scope and coverage, and making it the best one-volume general Africana bibliography. While I have some experience in the field, I knew it would be difficult to match his work, and more difficult still to improve on it. I hope I have at least succeeded in the former.

Modestly, the previous editor never described the problems of the task he took on in 1983, and the extent of his achievement may thus have been underestimated. I therefore outline below some of the main difficulties that beset compilers of such bibliographies. This in turn helps to explain the changes that I have begun to make in the Bibliography in an effort further to improve it.

The problems of Africanist bibliography

Africanist bibliography seems to epitomise the full range of problems of current bibliography compilation. Africanist material is published mainly in the humanities and social sciences which are areas notorious for poor bibliographic control, and in which all too many of the potential users are ignorant of the range of resources available or even indifferent to them. Frequently they cannot read in any foreign language. Thus there is not sufficient recognition of the value of bibliography and of library services in general, nor appreciation of the contemporary limitations upon them.

The materials are themselves remarkably fragmented. They may come both from explicit area-study sources, or from any of a very wide range of disciplines, within which the study of Africa is usually marginal – just as African Studies itself has become less significant within humanities and the social sciences in most of Europe and North America. Materials may also come from virtually any country, and thus appear in a wide variety of languages, and may be presented in almost any form. Apart from the familiar academic sources – journals, books and papers – there is a larger array of non-academic material that we must be able to list and locate. Part of the reason why bibliographic control in the social sciences is weak is precisely that so much production in the field occurs outside universities and research institutes. Non-printed materials, such as tape, film and video as well as online sources are becoming increasingly important and ought also to be committed to lists. There is, lastly, no single library – not even the splendid Library of Congress – that covers the full range of materials, and library staff are less and less able to take on bibliographic tasks for the common good.

Thus bibliographic activity tends also to be fragmented. We see too many

broadly similar, overlapping but incomplete general Africana bibliographies, some much weaker and more dated than they should be, and thus of little use. Bibliographies tend to be directed at too narrowly defined a group - at scholars and librarians, especially those outside Africa - rather than at Africa-based users, and at non-academics, especially those in government, agencies and business, for whom up to date current bibliography ought to be a valuable asset.

We lack, finally, not only adequate bibliographic control, but also adequate computerisation. Online facilities are still incomplete, uneven and not standardised. Databases tend to be narrowly constructed, concentrating on academic sources, often primarily those in English (or only from the US). Library catalogues vary considerably in the range of information they include, and can provide surprisingly different information on, for example, the number of pages in a given book.

The implications of all this are simple: it is foolhardy to attempt a one-woman or one-man current general bibliography in this field, especially in the time left over from a fulltime academic post. Indeed it is not possible to do so in a wholly satisfactory way, and we have instead to look for second-best solutions, and for means of limiting problems while minimising the associated loss of value to users.

The Africa Bibliography

Good though its previous editor made it, the *Bibliography* has its weaknesses, which I would see under three heads: scope, coverage and retrieval.

Scope. An effective current bibliography ought to be the first place a potential user would think of looking for a given topic or item. If it is not, if there exists a non-Africana bibliography with coverage that is more extensive and more reliable, then it is pointless to compete. The areas where this applies most obviously are medicine, science and technology. I have therefore reduced the number of entries in these fields, together with physical geography, physical anthropology, and to a lesser degree archaeology, retaining those that a user from a social science/humanities background might conceivably use. Thus meteorology is out, but studies of climatic change, and rainfall, remain in; the treatment of specific diseases is largely excluded, while discussions of their extent and impact (especially AIDS) will continue to be included. Another fairly well covered area is African government publications, and these I have excluded. Relevant publications by other governments are usually included, although I have not normally included those of the United Nations and associated agencies, as these are habitually listed by the UN.

Coverage. Despite the *Bibliography* growing in size over the years, there remain several categories of publication that have tended to be poorly covered. In rough order of increasing difficulty, they are:

- Non-academic materials, especially in policy-related areas, and in the social sciences, where they constitute a considerable proportion of the total output in the field.
- Materials from new or unusual journals, especially those that rarely include Africana.
- Working papers and other limited circulation academic materials: such series appear and disappear without warning, but include important items.
- 'Grey' literature, especially that from agencies, NGOs, consultancy services and

quasi-official bodies. There are large and usually distinct worlds of literature produced by government, agencies and business, as well as by academics, and those in one world tend to be unaware of the wealth of relevant material available in another.

- African sources (where we also are affected by the relatively greater difficulty of bibliographic control of such material in Africa).
- Material in 'minority' languages, or from minority areas. It is difficult enough to be sure of a reasonable level of coverage in French, German or Italian, but there are also significant flows of Africana from Eastern Europe, Asia (notably Japan), Latin America and the Pacific.

The process of increasing coverage is a gradual one. It will be helped by a grant to the Institute from the British Academy to help with the compilation of an up-to-date database of sources of Africana. In this volume I have concentrated mainly on including more material from non-academic sources, from working paper series, and from African sources, notably books. In doing so I have had to rely in part on other published sources, including accession lists and the lists of specialist book sellers, crosschecked against major library catalogues such as that of Northwestern University. I have also used online bibliographic sources to search new and unusual journals, though this is of limited use due to the lack of abstracts in most such sources. I hope to build up a more routine flow of information on new publications over the next few years, and thus to expand coverage continually (and retrospectively). It is always helpful and encouraging to be sent information (or publications) by those who have noticed omissions in the listing: please continue to do so, especially in the categories outlined above.

Retrieval. The arrangement and indexing of entries in a bibliography is crucial. The problem is always that there is no general agreement on how best to do this - perhaps there cannot be - and thus it will always depend to some degree on the compiler's intuition and bias. Africanists make matters more difficult by their disregard for disciplinary boundaries, for while this is one of the most attractive aspects of area studies, it does make classification more taxing. Reliability in subject indexing demands that one is a polymath, able not only to understand each discipline and its concepts in its own terms, but to interpret these to appropriate audiences with other disciplines as background. To some degree this can be achieved by multiple entries for a single item, but there must be limits to this practice.

I have made few changes in arrangement or the indexing this year. The category 'Criminology' has been eliminated, and the entries placed with Sociology, as there were so few of them. In future years I intend to separate Sociology from Anthropology, and International Relations from Politics (which will simplify the index), while introducing a new category of Gender Studies, to reflect the level of output in this area. In indexing I have, like Hector Blackhurst, combined the use of a number of broad general categories with keywords and key phrases drawn from the titles of books and articles. Where an item is adequately described by the general subject heading within which it has been placed, then it will not appear in the index; it is therefore sensible to scan the subject listings as well as the index. Cross-references have been added to this volume, and are indicated at the beginning of subject divisions by the abbreviation 'sa' (see also).

Changes in the entries

If the Bibliography is to increase its coverage, then it must find space for new entries. To some degree this is provided by the exclusion of the more technical material, and the dropping of book reviews. There have also been changes to the entries themselves, to make them shorter, especially those for journal articles. The use of Roman numerals has been dropped, as has that of abbreviations such as 'Vol.'. Thus a reference such as:

'Africa (Roma) Anno XLV. No. 4 1990. pp. 527-554.'
will now read

'Africa (Rome) 45, 4 (1990) 527-54.'

The titles of journals are in italics; those of articles and books are in plain type. The entries for chapters in collections have been changed to eliminate the need to consult a second listing at the end of the volume. Instead of being referred to a 'book number', the user is now given a short title to the collection, and its editors, together with a number that indicates where the full entry for the collection is to be found. While this does take more space, it is hoped it will prove more convenient. Finally, the entries for books no longer include the ISBN number or price. It is not always possible to discover these, especially for pamphlets, or for books published outside Europe and North America, and the information seems to be less useful to those who wish to consult the material than it is to librarians and others who wish to acquire it.

Apologies and thanks

This edition of the Bibliography is late – very late – and I must apologise to those inconvenienced by its temporary absence. I plead a combination of circumstances – a time-consuming year as Head of Department, and unforeseen teething troubles with the new technology and software that I was using, and which has now been improved. I also owe thanks to a variety of individuals, and am very happy to render them. Vivian Bone of Edinburgh University Press and Elizabeth Dunstan of the International African Institute overcame their growing apprehensions about the lateness of the volume and remained supportive to the end. The Morel Trust provided a generous and timely grant that allowed the purchase of a more powerful microcomputer than would otherwise have been possible, and which proved essential to the task. Alister Baillie acted as research assistant for many months, dealing with software snags as well as the routine of tracking down and entering material; he would like to dedicate his contribution to his grandfather, Duncan 'Pop' MacCallum, who celebrated his hundredth birthday during the making of the volume. Tony Berrett agreed at very short notice to help with the task of preparing the completed file of entries for publication; his good humour and commitment made it far less daunting. Angela Cheater of the University of Zimbabwe once again provided a fat wad of references drawn from local journals and other publications. Finally I should thank Hector Blackhurst for his initial help, and even more for having established the Bibliography in the first place.