MICHAEL CROSS: AN INSPIRING PAN-AFRICAN SCHOLAR AND MENTOR

Author: Assie-Lumumba

I say YAKO in my Akan/Baoulé language of Côte d'Ivoire, to express grief for our indescribable loss due to the sudden demise of our esteemed colleague Professor Michael Cross on June 6, 2021.

I would like to convey my profound gratitude for having known Professor Michael Cross. My husband, Professor Tukumbi Lumumba-Kasongo, a political scientist who worked with Mwalimu Mazrui, attended a conference organized by Prof. Cross and subsequently contributed a chapter in one of the books produced under the Ali Mazrui Center. His chapter was titled "Pan-African Curriculum in Higher Education: A Reflection," in the book co-edited by Prof. Cross and Prof. Amasa Ndofirepi Knowledge and Change in African Universities. Thus, we convey together our deepest condolences for this loss. My words are also on behalf of the World Council of Comparative Education Societies (WCCES) to which Michael contributed immensely; the Comparative and International Education Society (CIES) of USA in general and specifically its Africa Special Interest Group (ASIG), for his enlightening and insightful contributions; and the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) that honored Michael as the first recipients of the Education Research in Africa Awards (ERAA). We know that Michael was actively involved in many other pan-African and global organizations such as CODESRIA (the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa) which immediately issued a powerful statement upon learning the shocking news. Michael and I had been contributing to a project on the Futures of Higher Education led by UNESCO's International Institute for Higher Education (IESALC) based in Caracas (Venezuela) which also issued a statement of sympathy upon learning the sad news. My words also express shared sentiments among many other colleagues and friends who joined in paying their tributes, from various locations, to the illustrious son of Africa and citizen of the world, Prof. Michael Cross. His global journey took him to numerous countries across the African continent and in many other parts of the world, contributing to educational thought, empirical research and efforts towards social transformation in the collective interest.

I first came to know Professor Michael Cross through his regular attendance of, and substantive presence at, annual conferences of the Comparative and International Education Societies (CIES), the US-based and global professional organization. He attended those conferences as a

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presenter, with relevant topics that were diverse and based on theoretical/philosophical arguments or empirical studies. In the debates in different panels, his contributions were always insightful. During one-on-one or small-group discussions following some panels, we often talked about African historiography, knowledge production, epistemology, the real possibilities for promoting positive change through education.

My direct connection with Michael was also partly related to the work of the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA), where Dr. Hamidou Boukary, who was senior program officer, imagined and led the process for creating the Education Research in Africa Award (ERAA). With distinguished and dedicated colleagues on the Scientific Committee especially with Prof. Martial Dembélé as Chair and Prof. Kabiru Kinyanjui as one of the members, we designed this award with four categories:
- Emerging Educational Researcher
- Accomplished Educational Researcher
- Outstanding Mentor of Educational Researchers
- Enabling Institutional Environment for Educational Research.

Michael could have been nominated for the category of "Accomplished Educational Researcher." However, his dossier was appropriately submitted for the category of "Outstanding Mentor of Educational Researchers" when the first call for submissions was launched. He was recommended as the winner of the inaugural edition of this category. It is worth mentioning a few excerpts of the comments made by members of the jury in the justification of their selection: "very impressive research profile and responded to the required rubrics"; "Highly appreciated in mentoring, research and teaching"; "outstanding & fulfilled all expectations …"; "this candidate is highly appreciated based on his original philosophy that led him to such intensive mentoring, collaborative research activities …."; "great accomplishments." Thus, Michael made history as the first recipient (2011) in the category of the Outstanding Mentor of Educational Researchers of ERAA (Education Research in Africa Award) established by ADEA (Association for the Development of Education in Africa).

The first and second cohorts of 2011 and of 2012, respectively, were combined to confer the awards in a ceremony hosted by CIEP (Centre International d'Études Pédagogiques), Sèvres (France), in May 2013, with Professor Ali A. Mazrui as the keynote speaker.

Regarding our interactions in the US Comparative and International Education Society (CIES), I remember vividly approaching Michael during the 2013 annual conference in New Orleans (Louisiana) and asking for his support in the years to come, as I had just been elected to a leadership position of CIES (a four-year commitment as vice president, president elect, president the third year and finally as immediate past president representing CIES to the World Council of Comparative Education Societies-WCCES). In the CIES, besides his papers submitted to the general pool, Michael was very supportive of the Africa Special Interest

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Group (ASIG) through his paper submissions, attendance of the ASIG highlighted sessions including the intellectual and community debates under the Bantaba forum that was created a few years after the founding of ASIG. As President-elect of CIES, I was responsible for organizing the 2015 annual conference, with the collaboration of several colleagues including a brilliant young African scholar, Dr. Joan Osa Oviawe, who joined me at Cornell as a visiting scholar to contribute to the organization of the conference, and together we selected the theme: "Ubuntu! Imagining a Humanist Education Globally." Held in Washington, DC in March 2015, the conference was conceptualized with several innovations including the pre-conference responses to the theme from regional and thematic perspectives, cinematic spaces, and speed-mentoring. There were several prominent speakers, with Samir Amin as keynote speaker, Dr. Mae Jamison and Prof. Mĩcere M. Gĩthae Mũgo as keynote speakers for the 2015 March 8 International Women Day. This conference with the uBuntu theme stirred extraordinary enthusiasm and drew unprecedented participation in terms of panels and attendees reaching and surpassing, for the first time, more than 3300 registered participants in a CIES annual conference. Michael's own enthusiasm and genuine support were among the critical factors of this unprecedented collective success of the conference. The successful outcome was a testimony to the African presence and contributions to the intellectual debates, epistemology, and knowledge production. Anytime Michael and I passed by each other on the corridors of the Washington Hilton where the conference was being held, he would wave at me with a big smile, and sometimes with a laughter of pride, fulfillment, and approval.

Subsequently, Michael submitted my dossier for a position as Distinguished Visiting Professor (DVP) at the University of Johannesburg specifically in the Ali Mazrui Center for Higher Education Studies. I also expressed my strong commitment to support his visionary work in founding an academic unit bearing the name of the global icon, the late Mwalimu Ali A. Mazrui, an illustrious colleague in the Africana Studies and Research Center at Cornell University for two decades.

In the 2015 conference, Michael made constant and inspiring intellectual contributions during the intellectual gathering of the CIES annual conference. For instance, among the ERAA recipients who were invited by ADEA to submit a paper in the panel "Promoting excellence in educational research and disseminating its outputs: The case of the Education Research in Africa Award (ERAA)," Michael presented a paper that he and Vivian Atinde, also of the University of Johannesburg, had co-authored, titled "The pedagogy of the marginalized: understanding how historically disadvantaged students negotiate their epistemic access in a diverse university environment." The topic, substance and the findings of this paper that were powerfully delivered by Michael, stirred an engaged debate.

Michael's enlightening contribution to the first Bantaba held at the 2017 CIES Annual conference in Atlanta (Georgia) was entitled "The Future of Higher Education in Africa: searching for 'An African turning point'". In his presentation he argued, forcefully about CESA

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(Continental Education Strategy for Africa 2016-2025) and the AU (African Union) Agenda, that there was a need to re-think the future of tertiary education in the African continent based on important concepts embedded in the discourses with regard to the conceptualization of higher education for public good grounded on 'people-centred development'. Referring to the necessary connections imbedded in temporality, he articulated the vital link between the quest for looking to the past for inspiration ('lessons'), looking inwards for individual and collective introspection (a basis for the necessary political, economic and epistemological breaks), and looking outwards to the changing surrounding and global arena for a critical engagement to avoid what he referred to as 'self-ghetoisation'. He posed the question of how the African tertiary education systems would purposefully and meaningfully navigate these complex intersections while addressing with clarity "the issues of colonial bondage and misguided borrowing".

In 2016, after I was selected as Distinguished Visiting Professor, I travelled to South Africa to start my term. Michael and I held several meetings to discuss my research projects and the stage of each of them to determine the type of support I would need to advance them, and possible collaborations with colleagues at UJ and elsewhere. Among others, I had a project which I had submitted to Cornell University's Mario Einaudi Center for International Studies a few years earlier and could not be funded fully because of the 2008-2009 financial crisis: "Generations of African Scholars and Institutions of Higher Learning." Upon listening to my presentation, Michael indicated that this specific project was exciting, promising and could generate an unlimited number of sub-projects and themes focusing on aspects of temporality and geography considering the regions and nation-states on the African continent as well as Global Africa.

In relation to my other research interests, we talked about the different colonial experiences and languages and their implications for knowledge production and dissemination, gender and women intellectuals, and emerging scholars among the youth, considering several significant factors and the critical importance of intersectionality. I developed the project further and held meetings in different contexts including at the University of Ghana. We decided that since it would be difficult to secure one mega grant because of its scope and all the complexities, it should be realistic to do so by adopting an incremental approach. As a result, we decided that Michael would embark on cases in the Southern Africa region, working with other colleagues.

Michael and I had planned to meet with Prof. Samir Amin in Paris in the summer of 2017 to start a series of in-depth interviews for this project on "Generations of African Scholars and Institutions of Higher Learning." We wanted to meet while I was attending a meeting of UNSECO's Management of Social Transformation (MOST) scientific advisory committee (SAC). Because Michael was travelling at the time, he could not return to South Africa on time to obtain a visa for France for the work with Prof. Amin. Hence we decided that interviews for this research would be held during Prof. Amin's much anticipated visit to South Africa in October 2018 for the "Geo-Politics of Knowledge on Higher Education" colloquium which was

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being jointly organized by the Ali Mazrui Centre with Prof. Cross as its Director and the SARCHI (The South African Research Chairs Initiative) specifically the Chair in Teaching and Learning, Post-School Education and training (PSET), Prof. Brenda Leibowitz. However, the date of May 2018 was changed to October 2018, following the sudden passing of Prof. Leibowitz. Michael proposed that during the October 2018 meeting, we would conduct a series of video-taped interviews of Prof. Amin, who was utterly pleased about the prospect of the trip to South Africa. He was anticipating visiting some comrades and places, primarily Soweto and Alexandra in the shadow of the skyscrapers of Johannesburg but where the effects of Apartheid are still very palpable in everyday life. During a visit to Prof. Amin and his spouse Isabelle in their home in Paris, we discussed the invitation and the new plans. He reiterated his appreciation for the opportunity to travel to South Africa. During our discussion of the various aspects of the visit, he added, with a look of affection to Isabelle, that the trip would have to be arranged on a specific date that would enable him to find someone to stay with her in his absence. Sadly, the October 2018 trip to South Africa did not take place, as Professor Amin passed away on August 12, 2018, from a brain tumor.

Several months later, in an email to Michael dated April 3, 2019, I shared the following concern: "We must move faster with our project. The great Ivorian first-generation intellectual I mentioned in one of my recent emails, Bernard Dadié, whom I desperately wanted to interview, passed away last month at the age of 103!" Michael agreed with me on my expression of a sense of urgency. In August 2019, I traveled to Ghana to discuss again specific areas of the collaboration for this research project on generations of African scholars and institutions of higher learning.

I would like mention that in 2016, I was a UJ DVP when I was elected as the president of WCCES (World Council of Comparative Education Societies), of which Prof. Crain Soudien served as President in 2007-2010. In collaboration with several colleagues, among whom was Prof. Kanishka Bedi, President of the Indian Ocean Comparative Education Society and the current Executive Director of WCCES, I introduced several innovations including symposia between the Congresses which are held every three years, to ensure continued sense of community. Upon my request on behalf of WCCES, Michael enthusiastically agreed to have the AMCHES host the first WCCES symposium which was held on June 21-22, 2018, with the theme: "Comparative Education for Global Citizenship, Peace and Harmony through uBuntu." This inaugural symposium was held concurrently with the first retreat of WCCES since its creation in 1970 as well as the WCCES 53rd executive committee meeting, and in conjunction with the 5th International conference of the Indian Ocean Comparative Education Society (IOCES) "Rethinking Epistemologies and Innovating Pedagogies to Foster Global Peace."

The theme of the symposium articulated the persistent inequality and marginalization as well the global trends of violence, intolerance, isolation requiring urgent need to acknowledge and address them as socially produced crises that can also be resolved by social actions and

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engagements guided by uBuntu as a philosophical and practical principle that encompasses human beings and the comprehensive and worldwide ecosystem. A forthcoming book that arose out of this symposium now titled Comparative Education for Global Citizenship, Peace and Shared Living through uBuntu is co-edited by Prof. Cross, Prof. Bedi, Prof. Ekanayake, and myself. The book will be published in the WCCES-Brill | Sense Book Series.

In January 2019, we organized the second WCCES symposium that was hosted by the International Bureau of Education (IBE) in Geneva Switzerland on the theme of "Immigrants and Comparative Education: Call to Re/Engagement." Michael attended this meeting and presented a paper which he co-authored with Michael Jr. The revised version of this paper was included in the WCCES book edited by Prof. Zehavit Gross with the slightly modified title of Migrants and Comparative Education: Call to Re/Engagement published in the WCCES-Brill | Sense Book Series in 2020.

Michael was passionate about knowledge production and dissemination for social transformation. During the numerous conferences, symposia, and congresses that he attended, he always provided insightful contributions through his papers and in debates. He accepted my invitation to serve on the WCCES Research Standing committee during my first term as WCCES President. He continued to serve as a member of the Research Standing Committee and became the Chair of the Peace Education Task Force at WCCES during my second term which started in May 2019.

Earlier this year (2021), he agreed to serve also as a coordinator for a co-authored chapter on Africa for groundbreaking, historical and forward-looking book on comparative education as part of a major WCCES book project involving all the world regions and aiming to capture various regional perspectives on comparative education. Michael and I discussed his contribution in this project again when we spoke (sadly for the last time) on May 14, 2021. The co-authors of the Africa region, comprised of Prof. Ali Abdi as coordinator, Prof. José Cossa, Prof. Aïcha Maherzi, and Prof. Malak Zaalouk, are pursuing an African perspective with a new sense of mission after the passing of Prof. Cross.

In the virtual exchanges that Michael and I had during the COVID-19 disruptions that started in the beginning of 2020, he consistently expressed the hope that the conditions would improve and that I would travel to South Africa again to make contributions in person at the Ali Mazrui Center. We often reminisced many fond and intellectually engaging moments including a writing retreat that he organized in August 2018. Those who attended, besides Michael and I, were Drs. Amasa Ndofirepi, Waithera Kimani Roki, Logan Govender, Phefumula Nyoni, Sibonokuhle Ndlovu, and Ahmed Essop. This turned out to be a very productive meeting. We also talked about the 2018 3rd Eric Molobi Lecture; and the WCCES meetings including its inaugural between-congress symposium. During the retreat, Michael proved that he was really the tech savvy resource-person as we were reminded during the funeral service on June 9th.

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When Dr. Waithera Roki and I informed him that the wi-fi was not functional in the unit where we were staying, he reached out in his bag and pulled out a WIFI external modem, which Dr. Roki and I used for the duration of the retreat.

The personal, educational. and professional dimensions of Michael's life journey converge to reflect a consistent quest for equal opportunity for all, struggle for social justice, and commitment to help develop the full potential of everyone around him, for contributions to rigorous knowledge for development. He played a primary role in the creation of the book series on African Higher Education: Developments and Perspectives with Brill | Sense Publishers, and Higher Education Transformation with Sun Press. His seminal works that encompass solid theoretical components and rigorous empirical research include his book: An Unfulfilled Promise. Transforming Schools in Mozambique. His most recent books include Steering Epistemic Access in South African Higher Education; Knowledge and Change in African Universities with Volume One on Current Debates and Volume Two on Re-imagining the Terrain.

Michael was always very supportive and encouraged everyone to advance the research and publication they were involved in. He did not want to be the only shining star. In fact, he did not aspire to be a star. Rather, he wanted all who were associated with him to succeed and become outstanding academics/professionals. In the process, he created the most enabling environment. We are all grateful for his generosity in sharing knowledge and mentoring members of our community.
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would be difficult to secure one mega grant because of its scope and all the complexities, it should be realistic to do so by adopting an incremental approach. As a result, we decided that Michael would embark on cases in the Southern Africa region, working with other colleagues.

Michael and I had planned to meet with Prof. Samir Amin in Paris in the summer of 2017 to start a series of in-depth interviews for this project on "Generations of African Scholars and Institutions of Higher Learning." We wanted to meet while I was attending a meeting of UNSECO's Management of Social Transformation (MOST) scientific advisory committee (SAC). Because Michael was travelling at the time, he could not return to South Africa on time to obtain a visa for France for the work with Prof. Amin. Hence we decided that interviews for this research would be held during Prof. Amin's much anticipated visit to South Africa in October 2018 for the "Geo-Politics of Knowledge on Higher Education" colloquium which was being jointly organized by the Ali Mazrui Centre with Prof. Cross as its Director and the SARCHI (The South African Research Chairs Initiative) specifically the Chair in Teaching and Learning, Post-School Education and training (PSET), Prof. Brenda Leibowitz. However, the date of May 2018 was changed to October 2018, following the sudden passing of Prof. Leibowitz. Michael proposed that during the October 2018 meeting, we would conduct a series of video-taped interviews of Prof. Amin, who was utterly pleased about the prospect of the trip to South Africa. He was anticipating visiting some comrades and places, primarily Soweto and Alexandra in the shadow of the skyscrapers of Johannesburg but where the effects of Apartheid are still very palpable in everyday life. During a visit to Prof. Amin and his spouse Isabelle in their home in Paris, we discussed the invitation and the new plans. He reiterated his appreciation for the opportunity to travel to South Africa. During our discussion of the various aspects of the visit, he added, with a look of affection to Isabelle, that the trip would have to be arranged on a specific date that would enable him to find someone to stay with her in his absence. Sadly, the October 2018 trip to South Africa did not take place, as Professor Amin passed away on August 12, 2018, from a brain tumor.

Several months later, in an email to Michael dated April 3, 2019, I shared the following concern: "We must move faster with our project. The great Ivorian first-generation intellectual I mentioned in one of my recent emails, Bernard Dadié, whom I desperately wanted to interview, passed away last month at the age of 103!" Michael agreed with me on my expression of a sense of urgency. In August 2019, I traveled to Ghana to discuss again specific areas of the collaboration for this research project on generations of African scholars and institutions of higher learning.

I would like mention that in 2016, I was a UJ DVP when I was elected as the president of WCCES (World Council of Comparative Education Societies), of which Prof. Crain Soudien served as President in 2007-2010. In collaboration with several colleagues, among whom was Prof. Kanishka Bedi, President of the Indian Ocean Comparative Education Society and the current Executive Director of WCCES, I introduced several innovations including symposia

Professor N'Dri Thérèse Assié-Lumumba, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York, USA; Distinguished Visiting Professor in the Ali Mazrui Center for Higher Education (AMCHES) at the University of Johannesburg, South Africa; President of the World Council of Comparative Education Societies (WCCES), Geneva, Switzerland
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between the Congresses which are held every three years, to ensure continued sense of community. Upon my request on behalf of WCCES, Michael enthusiastically agreed to have the AMCHES host the first WCCES symposium which was held on June 21-22, 2018, with the theme: "Comparative Education for Global Citizenship, Peace and Harmony through uBuntu." This inaugural symposium was held concurrently with the first retreat of WCCES since its creation in 1970 as well as the WCCES 53rd executive committee meeting, and in conjunction with the 5th International conference of the Indian Ocean Comparative Education Society (IOCES) "Rethinking Epistemologies and Innovating Pedagogies to Foster Global Peace."

The theme of the symposium articulated the persistent inequality and marginalization as well the global trends of violence, intolerance, isolation requiring urgent need to acknowledge and address them as socially produced crises that can also be resolved by social actions and engagements guided by uBuntu as a philosophical and practical principle that encompasses human beings and the comprehensive and worldwide ecosystem. A forthcoming book that arose out of this symposium now titled Comparative Education for Global Citizenship, Peace and Shared Living through uBuntu is co-edited by Prof. Cross, Prof. Bedi, Prof. Ekanayake, and myself. The book will be published in the WCCES-Brill | Sense Book Series.

In January 2019, we organized the second WCCES symposium that was hosted by the International Bureau of Education (IBE) in Geneva Switzerland on the theme of "Immigrants and Comparative Education: Call to Re/Engagement." Michael attended this meeting and presented a paper which he co-authored with Michael Jr. The revised version of this paper was included in the WCCES book edited by Prof. Zehavit Gross with the slightly modified title of Migrants and Comparative Education: Call to Re/Engagement published in the WCCES-Brill | Sense Book Series in 2020.

Michael was passionate about knowledge production and dissemination for social transformation. During the numerous conferences, symposia, and congresses that he attended, he always provided insightful contributions through his papers and in debates. He accepted my invitation to serve on the WCCES Research Standing committee during my first term as WCCES President. He continued to serve as a member of the Research Standing Committee and became the Chair of the Peace Education Task Force at WCCES during my second term which started in May 2019.

Earlier this year (2021), he agreed to serve also as a coordinator for a co-authored chapter on Africa for groundbreaking, historical and forward-looking book on comparative education as part of a major WCCES book project involving all the world regions and aiming to capture various regional perspectives on comparative education. Michael and I discussed his contribution in this project again when we spoke (sadly for the last time) on May 14, 2021. The co-authors of the Africa region, comprised of Prof. Ali Abdi as coordinator, Prof. José Cossa, Prof. Aïcha Maherzi, and Prof. Malak Zaalouk, are pursuing an African perspective with a new

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sense of mission after the passing of Prof. Cross.

In the virtual exchanges that Michael and I had during the COVID-19 disruptions that started in the beginning of 2020, he consistently expressed the hope that the conditions would improve and that I would travel to South Africa again to make contributions in person at the Ali Mazrui Center. We often reminisced many fond and intellectually engaging moments including a writing retreat that he organized in August 2018. Those who attended, besides Michael and I, were Drs. Amasa Ndofirepi, Waithera Kimani Roki, Logan Govender, Phefumula Nyoni, Sibonokuhle Ndlovu, and Ahmed Essop. This turned out to be a very productive meeting. We also talked about the 2018 3rd Eric Molobi Lecture; and the WCCES meetings including its inaugural between-congress symposium. During the retreat, Michael proved that he was really the tech savvy resource-person as we were reminded during the funeral service on June 9th. When Dr. Waithera Roki and I informed him that the wi-fi was not functional in the unit where we were staying, he reached out in his bag and pulled out a WIFI external modem, which Dr. Roki and I used for the duration of the retreat.

The personal, educational. and professional dimensions of Michael's life journey converge to reflect a consistent quest for equal opportunity for all, struggle for social justice, and commitment to help develop the full potential of everyone around him, for contributions to rigorous knowledge for development. He played a primary role in the creation of the book series on African Higher Education: Developments and Perspectives with Brill | Sense Publishers, and Higher Education Transformation with Sun Press. His seminal works that encompass solid theoretical components and rigorous empirical research include his book: An Unfulfilled Promise. Transforming Schools in Mozambique. His most recent books include Steering Epistemic Access in South African Higher Education; Knowledge and Change in African Universities with Volume One on Current Debates and Volume Two on Re-imagining the Terrain.

Michael was always very supportive and encouraged everyone to advance the research and publication they were involved in. He did not want to be the only shining star. In fact, he did not aspire to be a star. Rather, he wanted all who were associated with him to succeed and become outstanding academics/professionals. In the process, he created the most enabling environment. We are all grateful for his generosity in sharing knowledge and mentoring members of our community.

[1] A longer version of this paper was delivered virtually during the Memorial service for Michael Cross (1952-2021), organized on June 18, 2021 by the Ali Mazrui Center for Higher Education Studies (AMCHES), University of Johannesburg, Johannesburg, South Africa

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