

Trends of Epistemic Oppression and Academic Dependency in Africa's Development: The Need for a New Intellectual Path

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Abstract

A simple dictionary definition of 'freedom' shows that it implies the power to think, act, and speak as one deems fit without any hindrance. It also denotes the power of 'being' or 'doing'. When many countries in Africa gained independence in the 1950s and beyond, this notion of freedom was what they all aspired to. And although many countries have been formally detached from their colonial heritage, most of them remain attached to the colonial intellectual roots. We argue that this practice is opposed to the independence and development that African countries have sought for several years, and thus, it kills initiative and renders the efforts towards freedom and sustained development meaningless. Therefore this paper highlights trends of epistemic oppression and academic dependency in some African countries, arguing that African people should think creatively from within and produce knowledge that is more in tune with an African context rather than depending on books, theories, and approaches from elsewhere. The overall claim of the paper is that until Africa gains the substantial ability to think, act and speak for itself through progressive scholarship and writing, 'true' intellectual freedom and home-grown development will be unlikely.

Keywords: Africa, knowledge, academic dependency, epistemic oppression, development

Introduction

Development studies, regarded as a post-World War II preoccupation (Bernstein 1971), was greatly influenced by the 1948 Marshall Plan and the 1949 Truman Declaration which further elucidates its Eurocentric underpinnings generally. The process of decolonisation that occurred in the 1950s and 1960s made development both an ideology and an instrumental doctrine of the times, placing Africa at the centre of most of these discussions (Sumner 2006). But the fact is that from modernisation theory in the early 1950s to the contemporary neoliberal Washington consensus, Africa has been the recipient of many policy and ideological prescriptions, most of which only worsened the condition of the continent. Given the important role of knowledge in the development discourse and based on Robert Cox's (1986) popular premise that "theory is always for someone and for some purpose," this paper seeks to critically examine the state of African scholarship and whether or not it is capable of driving development initiatives on the continent. Michael Burawoy distinguishes between professional, policy, public and critical knowledge, each with its specific intents and objectives – the first two being instrumental knowledge and the last two being reflexive knowledge (Burawoy 2007). On the contrary, we posit that these types of knowledge are mutually constitutive. In our society where knowledge has a high price tag and thus, "lacking credibility is a considerable difficulty if one wants to make significant knowledge claims" (McConkey 2004). Hence, one can even be deprived of this credibility even when the context in question is one's own spatial location.

Undergirding this whole notion of academic dependency, epistemic oppression, injustice or inequality is cultural imperialism or chauvinism – the tendency to privilege one's culture over others based on the perception of one's own superiority. Cultural imperialism in this context refers to Western-centrism or Eurocentrism. Simply put, "Cultural imperialism describes the experience of groups who have their means of expression curtailed" (ibid., 202) often for a plethora of reasons. Hence, this trend has been the bedrock of the inability of many African countries and scholars in Africa to write and speak about their own situations. Some knowledge is deemed 'indigenous' or 'traditional' while others are deemed 'modern' and 'scientific', thus bearing the qualities of what constitutes 'good scholarship'. Other terms worth defining at this juncture are 'Euro- or western-centrism' and 'western scholarship'. Eurocentrism (or western-centrism), as used in this paper, implies the neglect of geographical diversity and the imposition of one's ethnic group (in this case Anglo-American) and its standards over others with underlying superiority or narcissism (Bernstein 1971). Western scholarship, on the other hand, has nothing to do with geography per se; it is rather a 'world of thinking' or mindset.

Thus, what we mean by ‘Western scholarship’ is scholarship that perpetuates Eurocentrism in the sense that it celebrates theories, methods and research practices popularised in a particular area of the world without due regard to the diversity of perspectives existing elsewhere. Such practices and theories, according to Nabudere (1997), “tend to ignore the peculiarities of different countries and cultures seeking to find an existence within the international capitalist system of the world”. Furthermore, since it is not limited to geography, scholars anywhere in the world can be promoting this kind of scholarship consciously or unconsciously. But it is no doubt a bane to epistemic freedom in the African context, as argued below.

The history of colonialism, coupled with the current socio-economic realities in many African countries (as well as the perpetuation of imperial or neo-colonial tendencies) has placed the continent in an unfortunate dilemma of whether to stick with the colonial form of education and books or use its limited resources to generate innovative ways of producing contextually relevant knowledge. This paper argues that the present state of intellectual capability on the continent is characterised by knowledge dependence and thus not well suited towards the development of Africa. Second, we describe ways in which this knowledge dependence is played out and explain why this is so, using a political economy analysis of Africa’s own development trajectory characterised by neo-liberal hegemony and internal policy and political atrophy. The paper finally argues that development will continue to elude Africa unless the continent begins to carve a new path for itself instead of relying on policy handouts from ‘outsiders’; and this can only be achieved when the continent is epistemically liberated. In conclusion we outline some ways the continent can take hold of its intellect and development.

Epistemic Oppression and Academic Dependency¹

Epistemic oppression results from epistemic injustice built into the global knowledge production project. An aspect of this injustice identified by Fricker (2007) is ‘hermeneutical injustice’ – the situation where a significant aspect of an individual’s social experience is obscured due to “prejudicial flaws in shared resources for social interpretation.” The obscurity of ‘other’ experiences often results from gate-keeping tendencies of the sites of knowledge production which leads to the further propagation of dominant ideas and experiences. This hermeneutical inequality has made Africa unable to tell its own stories, and to publish works that are based on practical experiences and contextual realities. At the extreme, there is an ‘uncritical receptivity’ to these dominating forms of knowledge which makes one “vulnerable to the vice of gullibility” (Marshall 2003).

On the other hand, however, doubting or questioning the credibility of the speaker leads to “the vice of suspiciousness” (ibid., 174) in which case almost everything one says is taken with a pinch of salt. Being self-critical of established knowledge claims will cause one to be suspicious of taken-for-granted assumptions but in the case where the knower casts doubt on the legitimacy or credibility of this suspicion, it does not make a great deal of impact. In the broader scheme of things “the denial and distortion of recognition that takes place with epistemic injustice reinforces existing oppression and damages the status in society of the putative knower” (McConkey 2004, 204). This then perpetuates the cycle of epistemic oppression. Those who possess ‘epistemic authority’ (Lewis 2007) are often empowered and privileged knowledge claimers who view the world in their individualistic contexts as though no other forms of knowledge prevail elsewhere.

Epistemic oppression leads to academic dependency in the sense that the inability of an individual to make knowledge claims leads to the reliance on already ‘established’ knowledge. And the perpetuation of this trend tramps upon creativity, innovation, and the reflexivity needed to establish a viable intellectual independence. Dependency as captured by dependency theorist Dos Santos (1970) is “a situation in which the economy of certain countries is conditioned by the development and expansion of another economy to which the former is subjected” (ibid.,231). This definition captures the state of inequality characteristic of the global capitalist system.² Any kind of dependency deals with these keywords; unequal (power) relations, and this can be expressed in economic, political, social, military, cultural or epistemic sense. Thus, academic dependency simply refers to the unequal structure that undergirds the production and circulation of knowledge within the global system. Therefore, the ‘big powers’ in economic and social terms are also the ‘big powers’ in the social sciences (Ake 1979). Thus, the social sciences, which were *invented* and *constructed* by Western scholarship, have perpetually become another home of socio-cultural dependency (Gareau 1988).

As the ‘center-periphery continuum’ in the social science corresponds to the North-South divide well noted by dependency and world-systems theorists, Alatas (2003) defines academic dependency as “a condition in which the social sciences of other countries are conditioned by the development and growth of the social sciences of other countries to which the former is subjected” (ibid.,603). He attributes academic dependency and what he also calls ‘academic neo-colonialism’ to the global division of labour which comes in three forms: 1) the division between theoretical and empirical intellectual labour; 2) the division between other country studies and own country studies; and 3) the division between comparative and single case studies. In sum, academic dependency “recognizes an imbalance in the production of social sciences across societies and the resultant division of labour between the producers and consumers of such knowledge” (Alatas 2000, 84). The imbalance reveals the vertical and unidirectional flow of knowledge and information from the core to the periphery and the absence of communication among social scientists that belong to the former. And dependency is expressed in four main ways, namely; dependence on ideas as well as the media of ideas; dependence on the technology of education; dependence on aid for research and teaching; and dependence on investment in education (ibid.).

In this context, the structural inequality that dependency theorists refer to has translated into epistemic inequality – a case where some ‘knowers’ have more recognition and privileges than others, often racialised ‘others’. Lacking this recognition in the academy is the fundamental definition of nonentity, a situation that many African scholars face. But to a large extent, it is the internalisation of the belief that Western worldviews, theories, institutions, and practices are superior that drives the non-Western world into self-marginalisation, self-abasement, and self-negation (Alatas 2006). Undergirding this is the universalism, Eurocentrism and ideological bias that surround development discourse from modernisation theory to neoliberalism (Brohman 1995). As already alluded to, Eurocentrism implies the neglect of geographical diversity and the imposition of one’s ethnic group and its standards over others with underlying superiority or narcissism. Modernisation, for instance, was considered to be a ‘universalist faith’ which was worth imposing on the so-called ‘backward societies’ of the time. The sociology of development and modernisation had a certain *a priori* assumption of the ‘modern’, and their proponents were shameless in proclaiming it as the ‘universalist faith’. Universalism follows “the rational-deductive method of positivist science” (ibid., 126). By neglecting culture and indigenous knowledge, notions of ‘development’ are imposed on other societies without considering the context. The ideological bias in the neoliberal ‘common-sense’ (Soederberg 2004) as well as most of the other Western theories continually perpetuates the status quo, thereby silencing ‘other’ forms of knowledge.

Contextual Issues/Challenges in Africa

After exploring the theoretical basis for this paper, let us consider further some key contextual issues in Africa that directly speak to ways through which the quest to carve out a new intellectual path for Africa’s has been undermined. These include both external and internal factors although we will reiterate our argument that the dependence on external sources of knowledge has been a bane for both Africa’s intellectual growth and socio-economic development.

- **The Role of Western Scholarship and Theories**

We believe that although “the lack of home-grown or indigenous theories, concepts and methods in the human sciences...is true of the general condition of knowledge in the Third World” (Alatas 2006, 23), it is far more devastating in Africa. To a large extent, “African social scientists have been caught in the bind of addressing African realities in borrowed languages and paradigms, conversing with each other through publications and media controlled by foreign academic communities, and producing prescriptive knowledge...” (Zezeza 2002, 9). To be sure, more schools and universities were established within the first 25 years after colonialism than during the period of colonial rule. For instance, the 9 percent literacy rate that Africa had in 1960 skyrocketed to about 50 percent three decades later (ibid., 10). But this expansion was met with constraints and challenges particularly in the late 1990s, coupled with the austerity measures under the structural adjustment program.

As of 2002, Africa was one of the least educated continents in the world with the ability to provide higher education to only 3.5 percent of its college-age population, compared with 60 percent in many Western countries (ibid.). This remains a daunting challenge for the continent. Apart from the institutional deficits, the end-product of this challenge is the over-reliance on Western scholarship, at least in the few cases where higher education is promoted.

A brief glance at course outlines in some African universities shows how the course instructors in these schools rely on Western theories, sometimes to even teach domestic politics.³ For instance, a course in political/social theory will contain all the big names such as Plato, Aristotle, John Locke, J.J. Rousseau, Max Weber, and Anthony Giddens without the mention of African theorists. And in most cases, students are expected to reproduce these theories, often with little or no critique at all. A few renowned African scholars such as Frantz Fanon, Claude Ake, V.Y. Mudimbe and Ali Mazrui do receive minimal mentions in some of these outlines but much more needs to be done to use theories and approaches that directly speak more to African knowledge than to some abstract formulations of the ‘ideal world’ elsewhere. This trend continues because of the perception that no contemporary political scientist from the non-West, for instance, has created an original theory (Alatas 2000). On the contrary, we argue that it is the over-essentialised notion of ‘originality’ that is questionable. Once there are established forms of knowledge, a scholar is expected to do far more to show that the new idea they are espousing is really novel. For example, if an African scholar attempts to develop a theory of democracy, it is usually measured by the standards of Alexis de Tocqueville, Anthony Downs, or perhaps Robert Dahl, among others, even though the context for which the theory was formulated is different. As Mignolo (2009) notes, under the façade of ‘zero point epistemology’ the idea of ‘originality’ reveals the control of ‘subjectivity’. Any theory that does not embody this strict detachment from the object of study is no theory at all; and this has been the reason why Western scholarship and theories have maintained a hegemonic position in the discourse of Africa.

An “epistemological decentralisation” (Andreasson 2005)⁴ is requisite if Africa seeks to overcome this setback because by repeating and mimicking Western theories, we maintain the status quo by giving Western theory even more citational power. But above all, it is not simply an issue of the absence of non-Western theory but rather the neglect of it in the so-called high-rated journals. There are cases where one particular approach or theory is repeated in many of these journals, often with few changes to wording. And in contrast, non-Western theories never get this much fame and publicity because the means of marketing, managing and expanding on such thoughts lie in the hands of the Western academy.

- **The Role of Language**

Language is a key factor in generating knowledge. But since the English language has become the global lingua franca, it is difficult for ‘other’ people who have legitimate knowledge claims to proceed as whatever language to be used will be deemed unintelligible. French, German, Spanish, and more recently Chinese, have managed to step up to the play; and some scholars from these areas publish most of their papers in these languages. But this is difficult for Africa because while English and French are the common national languages, there is an enormous amount of local languages and diverse speech patterns which most people are more familiar with. Hence, widely spoken indigenous languages in Africa need to be considered for scholarly communication by African scholars. For instance, although Kiswahili is a widely spoken language in East, Central and some parts of southern Africa, few scholarly works on the Kiswahili language are published in other languages (Ondari-Okemwa 2007). This language barrier needs to be addressed as we do consider language as a formidable ‘vehicle of knowledge’ (Jaygbay 1998).

- **Colonial Education: Deficient in the Sciences**

A common notion that underpins ‘modernisation’ is that the West has science and the non-West has culture. This claim is highly questionable, and intently racist but it does speak to how much of the current education system of say the U.S. and Ghana differ. The former has a plethora of subjects ranging from liberal arts to natural sciences but focuses more on scientific innovation as a major driver of the economy. The latter, however, is still tied to the colonial education system which very much focuses more liberal arts, or the “chew and pour” (learning by memorising) learning culture, without thinking of how these arts disciplines will translate into organic entrepreneurship and well-needed inventions (Adjei 2007). Scholarship in Africa, having emerged within the context of colonialism, was not necessarily suited to serving Africa but rather Europe and European objectives (Moore-Sieray 1996). And as it stands now, African scholarship is still crying for decolonization in most cases. It remains that “the African academic enterprise has long suffered from a culture of imported scientific consumerism. This culture established during the colonial era spread after independence despite rhetorical protestations to the contrary and ritual obeisance to local cognitive needs” (Zezeza 2002, 21). This has not yet changed. Anderson (2006) puts the problem starkly when he states that:

When one looks at Africa's current and vast education systems, we see that they are inextricably bound up with Western Education in the deformed and retarded form of *Education for Underdevelopment*. This process of underdevelopment manifests itself through an ahistorical view of science, technology and mathematics that deliberately leaves Africa and its peoples out of evolution of humanity's science, technology and mathematics. This process of intellectual, economic, social and spiritual oppression and repression is passed off by the powers that be as 'products of *developing* societies.' As a result, our remoteness from the knowledge and positive advances of science and technology has increased since those heady days of a generation ago that were filled with anticolonial struggles and the talks and socialistic dreams of an United States of Africa (<http://www.blackeducator.org/africanscienceed.htm>, accessed November 7, 2012).

The irony that while this 'scientific consumerism' prevails, there is the absence of real indigenous-based scientific innovation that will lead to the invention of basic products, and thus the populace ends up buying from outside sources. We do agree with Jacob Carruthers that "the objective [of moving past 'intellectual colonialism'] is neither to adapt African discourse to the parameters of a European discipline nor to modify the European discipline to include African content because both approaches are essentially intellectual versions of neocolonialism" (http://africawithin.com/carruthers/invention_of_africa.htm, accessed August 17, 2011). Rather, African people should construct their own disciplines, theories, worldviews and approaches that are based on the pillars of African history and culture, and their perception of what change should entail or whatever social transformation the people aspire to.

- **The Role of Western Philanthropy in African Higher Education**

To start with, it is worth noting that the majority of African universities are public institutions founded, financed, and managed by the state. In most cases, the annual budgets of these states are over-reliant on donor support and sometimes loans from international financial institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank. Thus, the issue of academic dependency remains real and current when one looks at the level philanthropy that surrounds higher education in Africa. While donor funding has no doubt supported knowledge production in Africa, in some cases, the knowledge that emerges from this endeavour, is a continuation of an earlier colonial enterprise that either promotes "western paternalism" (Moore-Sierray 1996) or trivialises African culture/knowledge. And above all, such knowledge is geared towards the larger goal of foreign intellectual domination of the continent and the use of scientific knowledge for disempowerment in order to facilitate the fostering of imperialist interests in Africa (Ake 2000).

We can cite the example of PhD students in African universities who, for lack of reading resources, have to take a year of course-work or directed reading in an American university. The end result of this endeavour is often a mixture of good and bad. While having such mutual learning experiences is vital to one's intellectual development, these students may go home and finish their PhDs only promoting Western theories they were exposed to in America.⁵ To move forward, however, we find this statement by Olukoshi (2006) regarding how African education can be decolonised is instructive:

Clearly then, to be truly meaningful to Africa, while being fully critical in the best of academic traditions, African Studies will need to be better anchored locally in ways which are organic to the domestic priorities of African countries, permit the full engagement of endogenous knowledge systems, and are disciplined to the aspirations of the social players that are the bearers of change - as opposed to the prevailing situation, in which African Studies is primarily geared towards serving extra-African needs, whether it be in terms of policy, the training of personnel, or the generation of knowledge for strategic decision making (Olukoshi 2006, 539).

The 'crisis of higher education' remains a constant blow, but the earlier African countries began to desist from relying on Western philanthropy in education, the better they will be for them to indigenise and make knowledge more relevant for overall social change.

The Enemy from Within: Publishing, Intellectual Property Rights, Politics

- **Absence of Scholarly Publishing in Africa**

Apart from the inadequate budgetary provision and poor educational infrastructure, one of the key setbacks to localised knowledge production in Africa is the absence of scholarly publishing. The academy puts a high tag on publishing; hence it is everything when it comes to knowledge dissemination. This is because scholarly publishing is not solely meant to help disseminate and validate one's research, but it also helps in advancing the career of academics/intellectuals, and in promoting a particular college/university. The inability to publish therefore has a double blow; one to the scholar and the other to the kind of knowledge and context the research being produced. The argument here is not that there is no publishing at all in Africa, but rather, most of what goes on is dominated by foreign publishing houses. Table 1 (Ondari-Okemwa 2007) shows the publishing trends in African nations south of the Sahara, particularly those countries that maintained 235 or more records between 1997 and 2007.

Table 1: Africa South of the Sahara, Scholarly Output (Publishing), 1997-2007Note: Based on publication records in *Thompson Scientific* as of May 2007.

Country	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	Total
South Africa	4568	4613	4759	4609	4732	5049	4974	5395	5657	6305	1077	51738
Nigeria	877	838	864	884	746	854	855	926	1223	1269	204	9540
Kenya	582	579	617	578	597	666	694	662	684	843	159	6661
Tanzania	266	221	230	253	235	271	316	322	370	473	80	3037
Ethiopia	239	207	261	244	216	275	300	312	302	333	58	2747
Cameroon	188	193	187	209	216	263	292	332	344	425	69	2718
Zimbabwe	258	263	258	263	256	269	251	216	242	234	44	2554
Uganda	136	167	191	191	203	188	244	310	304	382	119	2435
Ghana	173	158	190	198	194	208	206	239	261	305	53	2185
Senegal	168	205	224	202	182	176	239	209	247	224	40	2116
Eritrea	112	159	146	142	147	155	146	153	148	156	38	1499
Benin	112	118	117	134	110	135	126	156	168	216	38	1430
Botswana	96	105	114	129	128	156	135	143	148	186	29	1369
Malawi	101	87	107	132	124	132	132	143	148	167	30	1303
Sudan	92	123	119	90	81	110	112	126	135	135	25	1148
Burkina Faso	68	90	82	78	95	108	135	138	127	175	31	1127
Zambia	99	97	83	78	99	89	98	86	121	152	29	1031
The Gambia	81	54	67	69	82	77	82	86	78	113	14	803
Mali	53	56	34	47	53	65	70	82	88	140	12	700
Gabon	53	64	64	52	64	63	69	69	81	97	11	687
Niger	78	69	53	50	51	62	61	45	86	85	15	655
Madagascar	14	21	14	19	21	33	115	91	123	150	27	628
Namibia	38	56	47	33	64	53	61	56	95	88	8	599
Mauritius	27	41	40	42	51	61	40	51	57	69	11	490
Mozambique	28	36	44	38	46	36	42	57	63	81	17	488
Togo	28	46	54	62	37	32	45	53	48	59	8	472
Swaziland	60	21	17	24	43	29	30	37	26	30	5	322
DR Congo	46	22	21	29	11	13	21	17	28	18	9	235

Source: Ondari-Okemwa 2007.

This table, taken on face value, might look good. But in a striking comparison with Table 2 below, one finds that even the foreign-dominated field of publishing in African nations south of the Sahara is way below their counterparts in the Western hemisphere, and some Southern countries. The closest Africa gets is with South Africa, which recorded 51,738 over the ten-year period, compared to Canada's 59,271 in 2006 alone.

Table 2: Comparison of scholarly output, 2006		
Country	Region	Number of scholarly publications
United States	North America	>100,000
England	Europe	97,904
Germany	Europe	94,899
Japan	Asia	89,507
Canada	North America	59,271
South Korea	Asia	31,268
India	Asia	30,744
Russia	Eurasia	23,558
Brazil	South America	21,450
Israel	Middle East	15,564
Mexico	North America	10,948

Source: Ondari-Okemwa 2007.

There is more to this disparity than merely the non-acceptance of knowledge from Africa. Most publications arise out of conference papers where feedback is sought for the betterment of one's working or draft paper(s). Scholars residing in Africa, for a mix of financial, logistical and visa issues, are often unable to attend these academic conferences. This means that first of all, they will lack the ability to solicit constructive comments on their work in progress. Secondly, these scholars, no matter how good they are in their respective universities, do not receive the reputation and fame that comes with presenting novel ideas at conferences. Thirdly, they will also lack the ability to establish strong networks with other intellectuals that may result in joint projects and/or publications.

Thus, apart from publishing books and edited volumes, a test of scholarship is in attending select conferences annually. If African scholars are unable to attend, the alternative would be to establish intellectual associations that will organise conferences with a strong continental focus,⁶ in which case most may find proximate – although it is almost equally expensive to travel from say Côte d'Ivoire to South Africa for such a conference, as it would be to travel from Côte d'Ivoire to London, for instance.⁷ While organisations such as the Dakar-based Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) has made important strides over the past 30 to 38 years in serving as a Pan-African organisation to promote African scholarship and facilitate the participation of African scholars in its publications, conferences, and workshops, this initiative has not been largely replicated on the continent.

Also, in spite of its enormous wealth of knowledge in terms of history, folklore and indigenous knowledge, African countries depend almost entirely on the North for books and knowledge. As Wafawarowa (2006) notes – quoting data from the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) and the African Publishers Network (APNET) – Africa, in spite of some progress is a net consumer of knowledge: “of all books that are produced in the world, the African continent consumes more than 12% but contributes less than 3% of all books that are read in the world. Even in relatively more developed book sectors like South Africa, of every 4 books that are sold in the general book sector, 3 are from the North.”

- **Weak Intellectual Property Rights**

Part of the problem of the declining ability of Africa to generate and disseminate knowledge reflected in the very little indigenous publishing happening on the continent today is also compounded by its inadequate copyright protection mechanisms. This leads to unauthorised copying and mis- or overuse of scholarly material that deprives African publishers of revenues for their publications. This situation serves as a great disincentive to African scholars and publishers, and leads to a low level of information produced in Africa. The consequence of this is that Africa continues to rely on information generated in the North or knowledge produced through support of philanthropic organisations in the North. Given the importance of knowledge, especially in today's world, the underdeveloped nature of knowledge production in Africa is partly a result of weak intellectual property rights which means that Africa cannot adequately benefit from the different kinds of values and powers that knowledge confers on countries and societies.⁸

- **Political Instability and Inadequate Political Support**

Additional, a key factor influencing knowledge in Africa is political instability. One incontrovertible fact is that besides the unfavourable international milieu and marginal location in the international system, Africa's political instability and other related problems is basically a consequence of poor leadership. While some gains have been made towards democratisation and good governance on the continent, the level of political stability in Africa is still quite inadequate. For example, in a survey of Political Instability Index of 165 countries, including 48 African countries, by the Economist Intelligence Unit using a combined "measures of economic distress and underlying vulnerability to unrest", 13 African countries were ranked among 19 countries rated as being "very high risk", 21 countries were rated as being "high risk" while 14 were rated as being at "moderate risk." No country in Africa was rated among countries described as being at "low risk" to political instability (*The Economist* 2009). Although we do not fully endorse this index and its problematic view of what constitutes 'risk', political instability is an undeniable fact in Africa. Political instability or the economic distress underlying it not only leads to instability in education policies and curricular, but it also leads to underfunding in the education sector (and other critical services and sectors of the economy for that matter) and creates a protracted period of stagnation for a great number of Africa's educated elites who then migrate in droves to the well-financed centres of international scholarship in a process described as 'brain drain'. In some instances, these African scholars and intellectuals have been persecuted and forced to flee into exile as a result of state censorship and harassment (Anyidoho 1997). While the economic contributions of these emigrated Africans or Africans in Diaspora has in no doubt contributed to the economy of their respective countries, these countries nevertheless are deprived of the contribution that their knowledge could have made to technological and educational advancement, and wealth creation. Of course, there are several exceptions of African scholars who continue to engage with issues from their home countries through research and scholarly writing, even when in other countries – just as we are doing here.

Conclusion

To sum up, let us reiterate some points that will be vital to Africa's development as a more practical commitment. The first place to start is to question the policy prescriptions of some of the 'development experts'. With their Western orientations and ontologies, they often fail to appreciate how things operate differently in other parts of the world. Also due to its neoclassical economics background, the idea of culture itself has been neglected by so many development scholars; it was actually considered 'backward' by Rostow (1960), and only as an initial stage towards modernity. A disjuncture from orthodox economics will do a lot of good. Dispensing with it means problematising the validity of macroeconomic indicators in measuring overall levels of poverty. Additionally, by not accepting and understanding the culture of the people, knowledge is ignored.

This leads to what we call the 'I-am-the-knower-and-you-are-not' syndrome, a case where the researcher thinks they know more than the people they are interviewing or investigating; and thus they begin with the goal of *teaching* instead of *learning*. But above all (as alluded to above), Africa will need to carve its own intellectual path which will culminate in the development of context-specific models of social transformation the population requires. Of course, there may not be a uniform African model which spans across time and space, disregarding the various differences that prevail among the over fifty countries on the continent, we can argue for a concerted realisation that knowledge is closely connected to social change, and until Africa is liberated from the uncritical following or mimicry of models and approaches from elsewhere, very little change will occur.

Almost one and a half decade ago, Moore-Sieray (1996) listed some key issues to consider in thinking about re-inventing African scholarship, namely; rethinking and reformulating guidelines on the philosophical orientation of what scholarship in Africa should be; encouraging management of research by establishing effective research institutions and universities; creating an enabling environment in which ideals and objectives of research can be translated into practical solutions; initiating a program to indigenise African scholarship by making it more African and untied from the ideological imprisonment of Europe or American models/theories; and improved sponsorship from governments in support of scholarship. These issues will not be easy to address especially considering the budget constraints on many African nations, but we endorse these long overdue steps as the way to go.

Yet still, it is worth acknowledging the several efforts on the continent that aim to resist the epistemic oppression discussed above. Per Ankh Publishers in Senegal, Afram Publications and Sankofa Publishers in Ghana, Cote d'Ivoire Publishers, University of KwaZulu-Natal Press in South Africa, African Publishers Network (APNET) in Nigeria, Fahamu Books and Pambazuka Press (in Nairobi, Cape Town, Dakar and Oxford), and Adonis & Abbey Publishing Ltd. are the few among many publishing houses⁹ that are promoting African centered scholarship. The ongoing concern, however, is that many of the works published by these houses based in Africa do not go beyond the border of the continent unless the authors or affiliated publishers are based in countries outside Africa. Thus, we argue that the attempt to 'fight back' should be cushioned by the conscious endeavour of African scholars to use and critique knowledge that has been produced on the continent. To answer our initial question about whether or not Africa needs to carve a new intellectual path, we argue that an affirmative answer is long overdue. For the continent to carve this new path, African scholarship has to be harnessed, utilised, and continually refined.

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Notes

¹ Academic dependency theory originated from Brazil in the 1950s to counter the epistemic imbalance in the social science at that time. But for over six decades, the trend is not necessarily better. See Syed Farid Alatas, "Academic Dependency in Social Sciences: Reflections on India and Malaysia," *American Studies International*, 38 (2000).

² For Immanuel Wallerstein, for instance, this system remains same till date and has shown no positive signs of changing for the better in terms of bridging the North-South divide, although various social movements around the world are making some good impact. See Immanuel Wallerstein, "After Developmentalism and Globalization, What?" http://socialforces.unc.edu/epub/pub_soc/cornell.pdf (accessed August 18, 2011)

³ This is mainly based on the authors' inference from their own course outlines based on degrees they obtained from Ghana and Nigeria, respectively. Other inference is made to South Africa. The cautionary note is that no grand survey method was used – and this is something future research in this area can consider.

⁴ Andreasson (2005) argues that this form of decentralisation requires that we do not maintain a central Archimedean point of what constitutes 'good' knowledge.

⁵ We must admit that we are guilty of this since both of us have benefitted from generous funding targeted at helping us complete our PhDs in Canada.

⁶ An internet search reveals that South Africa is quite ahead in this step by having several conferences lined up for each month of the year. See <http://www.conferencealerts.com/southafrica.htm> (accessed August 18, 2011). Nigeria also has a substantial number of conference lined up, see <http://www.conferencealerts.com/nigeria.htm> followed by Egypt, Kenya, Ghana and Morocco. Note that most of these conferences do not target indigenous knowledge per se, neither are they necessarily organized by an organic group of intellectuals. But the fact that international conferences are spreading out to these areas is commendable.

⁷ A quick look at online booking sources will show prices ranging from \$900 to \$1,300 for either location on an economy ticket. This of course could be more for the summer peak season.

⁸These include instrumental value, competitive value, accumulative value, educational value, cultural value, and transcendent value. See, Peter Johan Lor, “Knowledge production, international information flows and intellectual property: an African perspective”, paper at the at the Association of African Universities DATAD workshop on Intellectual Property, Governance, Dissemination and Funding Strategies, Accra, Ghana, February 19-20, 2004.

⁹ For a list publishing houses published by the Ghana Book Review, see http://www.ghanabookreview.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=102&Itemid=141 (accessed November 6, 2012). Another list exists here: <http://www-sul.stanford.edu/depts/ssrg/africa/publish.html> (accessed November 6, 2012), although some of the publishers listed on this Stanford website are not based in Africa per se.