

HOW WE  
TEACH  
AFRICA  
MATTERS

AFANWI MAL'BO CHE &  
DEBORA VALENTINA MALITO (EDS)







# How We Teach Africa Matters

Afa'anwi Ma'abo Che, Debora Valentina Malito (Eds)



UJ Press

*How We Teach Africa Matters*

Published by UJ Press  
University of Johannesburg  
Library  
Auckland Park Kingsway Campus  
PO Box 524  
Auckland Park  
2006  
<https://ujpress.uj.ac.za/>

Compilation © Afa'anwi Ma'abo Che, Debora Valentina Malito 2025  
Chapters © Author(s) 2025  
Published Edition © Afa'anwi Ma'abo Che, Debora Valentina Malito 2025  
First published 2025

<https://doi.org/10.64449/9781997468479>  
978-1-997468-46-2 (Paperback)  
978-1-997468-47-9 (PDF)  
978-1-997468-48-6 (EPUB)  
978-1-997468-49-3 (XML)

This publication had been submitted to a rigorous double-blind peer-review process prior to publication and all recommendations by the reviewers were considered and implemented before publication.

Proofreading: Mike Leisegang  
Cover design: Hester Roets, UJ Graphic Design Studio  
Typeset in 9/13pt Merriweather Light



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# Synopsis

This edited volume provides a collection of pedagogic strategies, techniques, tips, and ideas for teaching content related to Africa in Political Science, International Relations and Development Studies without transmitting and reinforcing misconceptions of the continent, its cultures, and its people. While there is a prolific discussion on decolonisation of knowledge, there is a dearth of literature combining attention to both pedagogic discussion and epistemic critique, especially in addressing misconceptions within these disciplines. To help fill this gap, we issued a call for chapter proposals, inviting colleagues to share their experiences with designing, delivering, and evaluating teaching and learning approaches aimed at confronting persistent stereotypes of Africa. Chapters are authored by instructors from around the globe, including Africa, Asia, Australia, Europe, South America, and North America, who are focused on Africa. These contributors share a commitment to transforming and decolonising teaching of Africa while highlighting the practical applicability for anti-misconception pedagogical tools across diverse educational contexts. We believe that this book will be a valuable resource for stakeholders in (African) Political Science, International Relations, and Development Education. This includes lecturers, students, academic managers, curriculum developers, course designers, and education policymakers who are seeking to overcome barriers to meaningful decolonial learning about Africa.



## About the Editors

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# Acknowledgements

We, the editors, are grateful to all the contributors to this edited volume. We sincerely appreciate your commitment, knowledge, patience, and efforts in preparing chapters despite your busy schedules. All chapters underwent peer and editorial review. We thank all those who contributed as peer reviewers. Contributing authors demonstrated much diligence and dedication in revising their chapters within tight deadlines amidst their other academic commitments. Many thanks to you all!



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## Contributors


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# Editorial Foreword

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The question of how Africa is taught, both within the continent and beyond, has never been a neutral one. How Africa is framed, interpreted, and conveyed in classrooms and lecture halls is deeply entangled with centuries of colonialism, epistemic domination, and structural inequalities in global knowledge production. Yet, they are equally interwoven with the powerful agency of African thinkers, educators, students, and communities who continue to resist, reimagine, and reclaim pedagogical spaces. This book, *How We Teach Africa Matters*, makes an invaluable intervention into this enduring debate. What distinguishes this collection is not only its intellectual richness but also its methodological courage. Rather than offering a singular ‘solution’ to the long history of academic imperialism, it brings together diverse voices, case studies, and pedagogical experiments that reveal how layered, contested, and creative the teaching of Africa has become. The volume reminds us that education is not simply about the transfer of information – it is about shaping epistemic frames, constructing identities, and enabling or constraining futures.

Part I of the book foregrounds what many African scholars, activists, and students have long recognised: the persistence of Western-centric legacies in higher education. These chapters trace the ways in which Eurocentric frameworks continue to shape curricula, methods, and institutional power, from development studies in the United Kingdom and Ethiopia, to broader questions of academic imperialism in Africa’s development trajectory. By situating Africa-China scholarship within this debate, the section also points to the global entanglements of knowledge production, demonstrating



that questions of pedagogy are inseparable from shifting geopolitical orders.

The reader is reminded here that Western legacies are not relics of a past colonial era, but active forces structuring how Africa is represented in classrooms today. The insights offered push us to ask: whose knowledge counts, and on what terms? And perhaps more urgently: what are the consequences for African students, scholars, and societies when education reproduces distorted, incomplete, or reductive understandings of the continent?

Part II takes us into the heart of pedagogical practice. The contributions here grapple directly with some of the most pernicious misconceptions of Africa, chief among them the 'Africa is a country' trope, and reveal innovative ways educators are resisting these simplifications. From roleplays and world-building exercises to engaging students as country specialists, the chapters demonstrate how classrooms can become sites of critical inquiry rather than passive absorption.

Equally powerful is the section's emphasis on Indigenous and community-based knowledge systems. The chapter on Elders Critical Teachings (ElderCrits) reframes elders not as romanticised figures of tradition, but as epistemic authorities with vital roles to play in de/anti-colonial turns in education. This epistemic gift is a reminder that Indigenous ways of knowing are not supplementary to Western epistemologies. Instead, they are foundational to rethinking what education means in African contexts.

In these contributions, we see not only critique but also pedagogy in action: strategies for breaking silences, shifting power, and enabling students to imagine Africa differently.

Part III moves the conversation outward, to the structures that regulate and enable pedagogy at the national, institutional, and publishing levels. Here we find a striking diversity of contexts, from Brazil's teaching of African history under Law 10.639/03, to Lusophone Africans dismantling lusotropicalist discourses, to the transformation promised by African-centred publishing. These chapters underscore that teaching Africa is

not merely a classroom matter but a political one: regulated by states, mediated through publishing industries, and framed by global hierarchies of knowledge. Two themes stand out. First, the importance of publishing, both as a tool of liberation and as a contested terrain. Transforming education requires not only new pedagogies but also new infrastructures for producing and disseminating African-centred scholarship. Second, the reminder that philosophies such as Ubuntu are not abstract ideals but living frameworks for pedagogy and community development. The chapters on Ubuntu and the transformative role of African teachers in global classrooms bring the collection full circle, emphasising humanisation, relationality, and empowerment as pedagogical foundations.

This book arrives at a critical juncture. Across the globe, debates over decolonising education have gained urgency, from Rhodes Must Fall in South Africa, to calls to diversify curricula in Europe and North America. Yet too often these debates remain superficial, reduced to token inclusion or rhetorical gestures. What *How We Teach Africa Matters* offers is both depth and specificity: it shows concretely how colonial legacies manifest in teaching, and equally, how they can be undone through active, engaged, and contextually grounded pedagogies.

At the same time, the collection transcends binaries. It does not pit Africa against the West in simplistic opposition, nor does it present Indigenous knowledge as a romantic panacea. Rather, it models a critical pluralism that recognises complexity: Africa as plural, knowledge as contested, pedagogy as practice and politics. This refusal of reductionism is itself a powerful pedagogical act.

The implications of this work extend beyond the classroom. To teach Africa differently is to enable students to imagine Africa differently and to see its peoples not as objects of study but as producers of knowledge, not as recipients of development but as active shapers of global futures. In this sense, the project of teaching Africa is inseparable from broader struggles for justice, dignity, and epistemic freedom. Educators, policymakers, and students alike will find in these

pages both critique and inspiration. The critique is necessary: a clear-eyed acknowledgement of how far we still must go to dismantle entrenched hierarchies in knowledge production. But the inspiration is equally vital: a recognition of the creativity, resilience, and transformative potential of African pedagogies, philosophies, and educators.

A foreword cannot do justice to the range and richness of contributions gathered here. What can be said with confidence, however, is that this book represents a significant step forward in the global conversation about decolonising knowledge and rethinking education. It demands that we pause, reflect, and act on the urgent truth that how we teach Africa matters. To the reader: approach these chapters with openness and humility. Allow yourself to be unsettled by the critiques, challenged by the methodologies, and inspired by the pedagogical innovations. Most of all, recognise that the project of reimagining education is ongoing and that each of us, in our classrooms, research, and engagements, carries responsibility for how Africa is taught, known, and lived. This book does not give us all the answers. Instead, it offers something more profound: the tools, insights, and courage to ask better questions, to teach more responsibly, and to learn in ways that honour Africa's multiplicities and futures.




# Chapter 1

## Introduction: How We Teach Africa Matters

**Afa'anwi Ma'abo Che** 

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This edited volume contributes to pedagogical and conceptual discussion on the educational rethinking and resources needed for breaking myths about Africa in Political Science, International Relations, and Development Studies. Many Political Science education scholars explore and prescribe student-centred teaching and learning methods for achieving various transformative goals, including critical thinking and analysis (Mulcare & Shwedel, 2017), civic engagement (Latimer & Hempson, 2012), and deliberative democracy practice (Bogaards & Deutsch, 2015). In African Political Science education specifically, pedagogic scholarship incorporates efforts towards supporting students in adopting decolonial conceptions of Africa and development (Abdi et al., 2006; Msila, 2020). Active student-centred education practitioners challenge traditional pedagogic models in Political Science education literature by including simulations (Wedig, 2010), discussions (Trudeau, 2005), debates (Abernathy & Forestal, 2021), case- and problem-based learning (Krain, 2010; 2016). These active teaching methods are more effective than traditional teacher-centred, lecture-based models for engaging and helping students move from lower order education goals of remembering and understanding concepts to higher-order goals of applying, analysing, evaluating, and creating knowledge (Bloom et al., 1956; Krathwohl et al., 1964).



Misconceptions of Africa as a homogenous uncivilised entity or ‘country’ afflicted with poverty, contagious illnesses, crime, dictatorship, corruption, violence, harsh weather, droughts, and starvation, have long dominated mindsets in journalistic and academic circles, especially in the West (Buck, 1973; Randolph & DeMulder, 2008; Faloyin, 2022), using (neo) colonial exploitation of Africa (Rodney, 1972). Existing Political Science education literature focusing on the teaching of African politics is audibly silent on addressing preconceived notions and misconceptions that students may have when they enter higher education programmes. Yet, as asserted in cognitive theory of belief perseverance (Savion, 2009), misconceptions potentially embolden human dispositions to resist new ideas, thereby hindering deep conceptual learning and higher-order education. In this edited volume we understand misconception as inaccurate or incomplete ideas of a concept, process, person, people, or place, that often resist (and even persist despite) formal higher education. Theories and conceptual frameworks taught in the classroom that challenge misconceptions, including critical or decolonial approaches to the study of African subjects, can often be resisted, misinterpreted, downplayed as insignificant, or at best, accepted as valid only within the boundaries of classrooms (Savion, 2009).

Even in the best-case situation, students might not be able to apply what they learn in class to their everyday lives if teachers do not use active methods that enhance knowledge retention and stir sensitivities towards transformative actions in society. Little wonder that many students graduate from their academic programmes and enter into the world of practice with many of the same stereotypes held prior to entering the university (Gardner, 1991). In the ‘real world’ requiring the application of learned knowledge (for instance in formulating and implementing foreign policies in the area of international relations and diplomacy), there is a risk of graduates reverting to and drawing on long-held, colonialist and racist misconceptions of Africa to sustain neo-colonial exploitative relations. This is consistent with Goldsmith’s (2006:263) observation that students who fail to properly assimilate and accommodate

concepts taught in formal education settings usually relapse to their preconceptions and misconceptions when faced with theory application challenges. Uncorrected misconceptions hinder students' transition from 'novice' to 'expert', from 'surface' to 'deep' learning, and from concept memorisation to concept application (Engelmann & Huntoon, 2011:465). This edited volume seeks to answer the following questions: In what form, and why, do misconceptions of Africa persist? How can teachers avoid perpetuating or reinforcing Eurocentric visions often at the origin of how the continent is perceived and conceptualised?

We principally aim to explore and share epistemic reflections on student-centred teaching and learning resources that are critical for a more nuanced understanding of African politics, development, and international relations. This is important, because misconceptions have the potential to hinder deep conceptual learning in the classroom and transformative action outside of it. Confronting misconceptions is an important challenge for teachers, students, curriculum designers, academic managers, and policymakers. This is an anti-misconception pedagogic experience sharing project, potentially inspiring wider adoption and adaptation, and by extension, contributing towards transformations of global education that is currently compromised by long-established Eurocentric influences and academic imperialism.

This introduction is structured as follows: first, we discuss the challenges of managing the tension between global awareness and contextual knowledge in global education in the twenty-first century. Second, we situate our contribution within existing educational debates on decolonising how we teach and learn about Africa, and the need for student-centred pedagogic approaches. We claim that to contrast the persistence of Africa-related misconception, understanding the sources of beliefs perseverance and methods for conceptual change are key for belief modification. Third we define how student-centred methodologies are better suited to address the problem of belief perseverance. The fourth part of the book highlights how chapters in this edited volume address the three

general questions at the base of our investigation, i.e. root causes behind contemporary misconceptions of Africa (Part I), actionable pedagogic strategies (Part II), and the interplay between anti-misconception pedagogic strategies and broader policy instruments.

## **Background: the globalisation of twenty-first century higher education**

We live in a highly globalised and interconnected world. Higher education in the twenty-first century is even more globalised in terms of contents, participation, and the goals that it aims to achieve. Many countries, universities, and organisations promote global education programmes, seeking to produce ‘global citizens’ with intercultural sensitivities and competencies. However, global citizenship has also become somehow a “floating signifier” (Mannion et al., 2014), and teachers are often left wondering how to make sense of the ‘global’ in specific national contexts. One of the dangers of the cosmopolitan call for global education is the parallel commodification of higher institution values, and the use of idealised images of transformative globalisation that are instead often (even unconsciously) driven by “investments in ignorance, or idealized images of transformation of the individuals, the society and the economy” (Lapping, 2020). One of the key tensions at the centre of our contribution is indeed the relationship between global awareness and contextual knowledge – a tension often crossing other dichotomising relations amongst universality and particularity, globality and locality – and that concerns trends towards homogenising and relativising knowledge, given the delicate balance between knowledge of specific context and globality that is often required in those programmes. One of the challenges embedded with global education systems is indeed the capacity to dismantle superficial knowledge, or what Savion problematises as belief perseverance, i.e. “the naïve theories we generate to make sense of the world” (Savion, 2009:81).

While there is a prolific discussion on the potential and pitfalls of global education (see Lapayese, 2003) there is still limited education research with respect to pedagogic practices and strategies for educating students about countries or regions of the world to which they may have little to no lived or learned exposure. Worse, some students have misconceptions or stereotypes about regions unfamiliar to them, based on informal education, including from family, friends, neighbourhoods, and the media. Africa and its peoples and cultures are amongst the most stereotyped. Several studies, particularly in Western circles (Buck, 1973; Kitchen, 1982; Osunde et al., 1996; Lundy & Negash, 2013; Knight et al., 2022), have identified various Africa-related misconceptions, with recurring scholarly attention even in the twenty-first century illuminating the problem's persistence. However, mischaracterisations of Africa are also present in non-Western circles and variations in learning cultures can impose peculiar challenges for redressing them.

The need for this project emerged from continuous conversations between the editors of this volume, based on reflection on our own teaching experience. We separately taught, managed, and constantly reformed both disciplinary (International Political Economy, Contemporary International Relations) and area studies (International Politics of Development in Africa) modules in a Bachelor of Arts programme in International Relations in a China-based transnational university, Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University. We both noticed that some of our students join our disciplinary and areas-focused modules with misconceptions of Africa, notably the infamous 'Africa is a country' stereotype which underlies unsubstantiated Africa-wide generalisations. In this edited volume we refer to some persistent misconceptions, i.e. the idea that we can talk and know Africa conflating a country with a whole continent; the idea that Africa's history begins with colonial 'discoverers'; the possibility of representing the whole continent under the infamous categories of tyranny, corruption, hunger, poverty and war, etc.

There is not a pedagogical book on the topic of misconceptions about Africa with input from authors from

around the world, and even though there is a prolific discussion on the necessity of decolonising the curriculum and the university, still hidden misconceptions can get in the way of critical decolonial learning and, by extension, of transformative behaviour. This edited collection is based on our conviction that instructors of courses on Africa and International Relations are crucial towards tackling the problem of stereotypes and negative misperceptions about Africa. How we teach Africa matters for overcoming this problem. The challenge of teaching in a transnational context moved us to question why and how inaccurate notions and assumption about Africa persist, and potential pedagogic ways forward. We hope the pedagogic ideas and strategies shared in this edited volume can influence a normative shift towards more respectful engagement of foreign powers in Africa by teaching the future generation of analysts and decision-makers in ways that confront and correct age-old colonial stereotypes underlying unjust exploitation of Africa, its peoples, resources and values.

### **Teaching Africa in between Eurocentrism, decolonial approaches and conceptual change**

There is prolific literature and discussion in the field of Humanities and Social Science on the macro-cosmos of existing misconceptions, and in particular on Eurocentrism's capacity to limit knowledge about Africa. Ake (1982:xiii) understood "mainstream Western Social Science scholarship on Africa" as "imperialism in the guise of scientific knowledge". For Quijano (2000), colonialism has not only shaped political and economic structures but also deeply impacted knowledge production and dissemination with the establishment of a global system of power that perpetuates social hierarchies and reinforces the dominance of Western epistemologies. Coloniality of knowledge involves in parallel the imposition of Eurocentric perspectives as the norm and the marginalisation or exclusion of other forms of knowledge, and the devaluation and erasure of Indigenous, African, and non-Western knowledge systems. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986), for instance explores how colonialism has impacted not only the production and dissemination

of knowledge but also the languages in which knowledge is expressed.

Calls for decolonising knowledge production in academia have intensified in recent years. For Thiong'o (1986), decolonising is fundamentally about dismantling the linguistic hierarchies that support the coloniality of knowledge. For Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2012), decolonising knowledge is about reclaiming African subjectivity. For Mpofu (2013:105), disrupting coloniality of knowledge is intrinsically connected to a project of resistance that is as 'sweaty' and 'bloody' as a liberation project aiming at disrupting coloniality of being and power. Decolonising knowledge implies rejecting the centrality of Western theories as exclusive instruments of knowledge (Pillay, 2018), to carve out a new space for epistemic justice (Zondi, 2018) by rethinking and recentring the role of alternative epistemes in research and teaching experience. These calls share the necessity of redeeming the persistent coloniality of knowledge embedded in the structure of higher education curricula and teaching practices towards a more nuanced understanding of the complexity of African realities. However, they often miss more precise pedagogic articulations on how to address pre-existing conceptions.

On the other hand, limited literature on the micro-cosmos of misconceptions, their adverse impact on learning, and pedagogic counter-tools are mostly confined to the natural sciences, including Biology (Nazario et al., 2002), Physics (Sokoloff & Thornton, 1997), Astronomy and Space Science (Zeilik & Bisard, 2000), Chemistry (Kerr & Walz, 2007), Mathematics (Scheuermann & van Garderen, 2008), and Geoscience (Engelmann & Huntoon, 2011). Instruction designs targeting misconceptions in the natural sciences commonly emphasise the use of 'discrepant events' to uncover misconceptions, trigger a cognitive disequilibrium, and puzzle students to assimilate and accommodate alternative conceptions. A discrepant event is a demonstration performed, usually by the teacher, in front of students, to produce an unexpected outcome about a phenomenon, an outcome different from one connected to a misconception. However, in the social

sciences dealing with human relations, getting students to adopt and accommodate conceptual change (e.g., from Eurocentricism to Afrocentrism in learning about Africa) is challenged by cognitive proclivities to conveniently resist, misinterpret, and downplay new conceptions which are inconsistent with long-held preconceptions and misconceptions. This challenge is emphasised in cognitive theory of belief persistence but is overlooked in education-related books prescribing decolonised perspectives in Africa education broadly (Dei, 2012; Msila, 2020) and Africa development education specifically (Abdi et al., 2006; Abdi & Guo, 2008).

Most of the extant Africa-related education books typically disseminate researched content and/or lived experiences to counter myths about Africa in Western societies, such as the 'Africa is a country' stereotype (e.g., Adesanmi, 2011; Faloyin, 2022; Knight et al., 2022). These books report realities and experiences from various countries while discussing similarities and contradictions to showcase diversity in Africa. The recent dates of some these publications bear testament to the persistence of stereotypes as a challenge worth overcoming. Lundy and Negash's (2013) edited volume, *Teaching Africa: A Guide for the 21st-Century Classroom*, already seeks to improve ways in which Africa is taught while bridging the gap between perceptions and realities about Africa in American higher education circles. However, here disciplinary focus is largely on History and Arts, and also contextually restricted to US higher education circles; such a limited geographical scope of the book is understandable given age-old misconceptions of Africa in US classrooms. Other contributions discuss and delineate indigenous perspectives and cultural values worth adopting for 'decolonising' higher education in/on Africa (see Dei, 2012; Msila, 2020). Contributions on decolonising Africa education typically criticise conventional prevalence of Eurocentric theories and episteme in Africa scholarship as undermining cognitive equity and imposing foreign (Western) models of modernisation which are not only incongruent with the diverse ethnic composition and cultural values of African countries but contribute to neo-colonial exploitation. Accordingly, for

epistemic freedom, cognitive justice, and sustainable African development, decolonial education on Africa call for decentring Eurocentrism and integrating or even centring Afrocentric perspectives in teaching and learning on Africa. However, cognitive inclinations to oppose, misinterpret, and belittle new conceptions which rival long-held preconceptions and misconceptions of students poses a challenge to adoption and accommodation of conceptual change from Eurocentrism to Afrocentrism in learning about Africa.

Still, we have a limited global engagement in the field of Political Science and Development, between pedagogic strategies and ontological investigations into the root of misconceptions about Africa. Existing educational contributions about contemporary teaching of African subjects often do not explore why stereotypes of Africa persist. At the same time, contributions focusing on the causes of the epistemic fallacy rarely focus on pragmatic and pedagogic strategies, and do not discuss how for instance teaching materials can be integrated in higher education delivery designs. Our edited volume addresses these shortcomings: first, we focus on the teaching of Africa-related content in Political Science and Development education backgrounds. The contentious nature of topics in Political and Social Science education (i.e., governance, inequality, and conflicts) is accompanied by heightened risks of student resistance and even rebellion if instruction designs are teacher-centred and interpreted as merely transmitting the teacher's opinions instead of engaging students to 'see' the dysfunctionality of their misconceptions for evidence-based conceptual change. Empirical evaluations of effectiveness of proposed teaching designs are generally not provided and there is a dearth of actionable tips for adapting the designs to rectify misconceptions of Africa and for overcoming related challenges. We readdress this shortcoming, by incorporating empirical evaluative evidence to support specific pedagogic strategies. Second, we recognise how in a highly globalised higher education context it is vital to tackle the problem of misconceptions globally. Our edited volume integrates specific pedagogic contributions from all over the world and

incorporates insight for customising pedagogic interventions to linguistic and learning culture peculiarities of different contexts. By incorporating cognitive theory-informed reflections for overcoming the challenge of misconceptions to conceptual change, this edited volume illustrates possible tangible pathways for navigating the turn towards decolonial teaching and learning.

### **The role of student-centred methods**

Existing literature in Political Science and Development education articulates active student-centred teaching methods for critical and creative learning (e.g., Trudeau, 2005; Krain, 2010; Wedig, 2010; Abernathy & Forestal, 2021) while overlooking measures for correcting misconceptions, despite their obstructive potential. In contrast, the difficulty of misconceptions in learning has gained more attention in the natural sciences, ostensibly because of the preponderance of accepted Physical Science theories or laws for which there is overwhelming universal evidence, constraining alternative viewpoints as explicit misconceptions. Variations across human cultures and societies limit possibilities for making sweeping empirical generalisations in the social sciences, rendering both knowledge production and consumption processes to be more interpretative and hence vulnerable to misinterpretations and misconceptions. Moreover, the concepts we study and teach in Political Science (i.e., corruption, sovereignty, governance, legitimacy, autocracy, and democracy, just to mention a few) are highly abstract, posing adaptability challenges for in-class demonstrations.

Discrepant events, which can also be described as discrepant science events (Freeman, 2000), conceptual change teaching (Zeilik & Bisard, 2000; Limón, 2001), and interactive lecture demonstrations (Sokoloff & Thornton, 1997) are essentially teacher-centred. Longfield (2009) discusses the possibility of adopting ‘discrepant teaching events’ beyond the natural sciences and recounts an illustrative practical adaptation to a course in History. Though no specific illumination is provided for the social sciences, some scholars have reported

lecture-focused attempts to confront specific misconceptions about the Middle East (Çavdar et al., 2019), albeit with only limited success. Thus, if care is not taken to involve students as much as possible while adapting and practicing ‘discrepant teaching events’ in the social sciences, traditional teacher-centred classroom dynamics may be paradoxically reinforced, especially in courses dealing with controversial issues such as inequalities. Maintaining a predominantly lecture-based, teacher-centred approach in Political and Social Science education can be counter-productive for a number of reasons: i) students may (mis)interpret misconception-targeted lectures as attempts by teachers to impose their world views on students, risking resistance and student-teacher confrontations in the classroom; ii) students may not have sufficient opportunities to orally participate and voice any specific deeply-entrenched misconceptions (Tusmith & Reddy, 2002); iii) misconception-targeted instruction leaves the burden of identifying and challenging students’ myths and stereotypes solely with the teacher who may misjudge students’ prior knowledge and learning motivation, causing frustration and apathy amongst students (Goldsmith, 2006:266; Savion, 2009:89); and iv) the teacher-centred lectures may serve as conduits for transmitting (and reinforcing) misconceptions from teachers to students (Haddad & Lieberman, 2002).

Given the potential limitations of teacher-centred performances in dealing with Eurocentrism misconceptions in Social Science classrooms, conceptual change education theorists, including Goldsmith (2006:266-276), Savion (2009:89), and Longfield (2009:269), prescribe student-centred, hands-on or minds-on activities which engage students as collaborative partners of teachers in uncovering and countering inaccurate beliefs and perceptions that have the potential to persevere. Belief perseverance is defined as the persistence of original basic beliefs that stick with us because “they ‘fit’ with the relevant pet theory, and they persevere due to being well situated in the set of naïve misconceptions to the point of creating an economical or equilibrium havoc upon removal” (Savion, 2009:89). Understanding the sources and the

necessary functions of pet theories and our cognitive principles are prerequisites for successful belief modification. There is, however, a dearth of practical illuminations of student-centred pedagogic models for dealing with misconceptions, especially with respect to persistent stereotypes. In Political Science and Development education, only one region, the Middle East, has been targeted in extremely few student-centred, anti-misconception pedagogic models (Baylouny, 2009; Caplan et al., 2012; Abboud, 2015). These studies report the use of simulations and peer-learning activities to teach-back mischaracterisations of the Middle East in Western institutions. One pedagogic research (Çavdar et al., 2019), drawing on data from a US institution, highlights possible influences of events in the twenty-first century, notably the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the US and the emergence of terrorist group, Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), in deepening biases. Although Çavdar et al. (2019) report success in uncovering students' stereotypes, the study also highlights limitations of teacher-centred anti-misconception pedagogic models by noting that students still maintained a high degree of bias about the Middle East for certain topics even after 'targeted lecture' interventions.

Turning attention to stereotypes of Africa, which persist despite several positive transformations since the second half of the twentieth century, this edited volume compiles pedagogic experiences, strategies, indigenous African knowledges, ideas, and tips for advancing better conceptualisations of the continent. Common misconceptions about Africa portray the continent as a monolithic block of uncivilised jungle dwellers plagued with malnutrition, diseases, crime, conflicts, and political oppression. Such grossly inaccurate and negative misperceptions support racist justification for and actual exploitation of Africa, including through past slave trades and (neo)colonialism, as articulated in Rodney's (1972) classic on *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. Misconceptions about Africa also fuel racial prejudices and a 'clash of civilisations'. This is evident in the violent anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa in the early 1990s; Afro-Brazilian anti-racism movements leading to a law mandating the teaching of African cultures and history

in Brazil's public schools in 2003; the anger of Guangzhou's African immigrant communities against what they perceived as anti-black racism in the city's coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) containment regime in 2020; and the 'Black Lives Matter' movement in the United States of America (USA).

While misconceptions underlie biases in human relations and threaten harmonious co-existence, persistence of Africa-related stereotypes in the twenty-first century is puzzling given the following transformations: remarkable growth in the economic performance of several African countries since independence from colonial rule; unprecedented levels of integration of African countries in the global economy and global value chains; inclusion of Africa(ns) in global governance institutions; global reach of broadcast media, social media and in-Africa casting of Africa-related scenes and characters in movies; surge in innovative technologies, especially in communication, making the world more interconnected; the globalisation of higher education accompanied by increased staff and student exchanges, greater integration of content on Africa in curricula; academic movements in Africa to decentre Eurocentric colonial perspectives in teaching Africa; and pedagogic reform calls to jettison traditional passive 'teacher-centred' pedagogies for critical active 'student-centred' ones.

## **Structure of the Book**

The book questions the perseverance of misconception about Africa, bringing together scholars from various countries, across different continents, including Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, Ireland, Nigeria, South Africa, Uganda, and USA. This variety of contributions enables us to contribute to the conversation on transnational education from a truly global perspective, taking stock of the main challenges emerging in managing diversity and knowledge of the world in specific local and national contexts. We have organised the book into three main parts. Part I advances theoretical reflections on the root causes behind contemporary misconceptions of Africa. Because (neo-) colonial exploitation thrives on racist ideological justifications which mischaracterise and denigrate colonial subjectivities, the first

part of the book analyses the role of intellectual imperialism (Chapter 2) and the disciplinary power of Eurocentrism (Chapter 3) in shaping how we know Africa today.

In Chapter 2, Tarabinah examines the significance of Western episteme and academic imperialism during colonial and postcolonial times, as well as the function of colonial pedagogy, modernisation theories, and neoliberal policies and ideologies in perpetuating a distorted perspective of Africa's development. The chapter also critically positions issues of decolonising the curriculum within a wider emancipation project as Africa's development lies in overcoming academic imperialism and decolonising the academic space.

In Chapter 3, Ye investigates how Eurocentrism sustains and wields dominance in the field of Development Studies. The chapter examines numerous academic programmes linked with major Development studies institutes in the United Kingdom (UK) and Ethiopia to trace the discipline's history. In the UK, development studies is strongly linked to the process of decolonisation and the requirement for aid agencies and international organisations to handle development projects in post-colonial contexts. In contrast, development studies in Ethiopia emerge as a national effort driven by economic growth incentives, but not without geopolitical pressures and international aid needs.

Puplampu and Odoom assert theoretical arguments in Chapter 4 for decolonising knowledge production and teaching of Africa if misperceptions of the continent are to be surmounted. As China has emerged as a major actor in Africa's development sector, this chapter focuses on knowledge production in the context of China-Africa relations, emphasising the importance of knowledge producers' positionality and agency in teaching and supporting learning about Africa. However, decolonising African knowledge production in connection with China presents various problems, including unequal power relations in institutional finance, design, and administration. After examining these obstacles, the chapter presents corrective measures, emphasising interdisciplinarity and public-private

collaborations between academic institutions as the way ahead for strengthening knowledge production and teaching of Africa in connection with China.

Part II, which consists of four chapters, shares indigenous knowledge from African elders (Chapter 8) and actionable pedagogic strategies (Chapters 5-7) for teaching and supporting nuanced learning of Africa. Inaccurate conceptions and stereotypes of Africa are not exclusive to a single discipline, and consistent with Chapter 4's call for multidisciplinary and decoloniality, Part II draws on empirical data from different modules (albeit all broadly related to Political and Social Science) as well as the experiences of colleagues in various disciplines and continents with diverse classroom cultures.

Constituting the core of this edited volume, the chapters in Part II share evidence-based, student-centred pedagogies and strategies for teaching content on Africa while confronting misconceptions and negative misrepresentations of Africa. Drawing on the teaching experiences of Barure and Okonkwo in South Africa and Nigeria respectively, as well as Freirean pedagogic reflections, Chapter 5 discusses the potential of flipped classrooms for addressing stereotypes about Africa. When applied to African studies, the flipped classroom model provides opportunities for students to critically analyse depictions of Africa in African literature and in contemporary issues. The African mirror methods and the African-Author-Philosophy approach, in particular, assist students in personally identifying with African literature while also offering a wider learning opportunity in which they may actively comprehend the complexity of African societies and cultures. Pre-class media assignments are crucial for challenging prevalent narratives and preconceptions. This chapter discusses how these tactics can help to strike a delicate balance between understanding of African uniqueness and global awareness, while also supporting a decolonial worldview.

In non-African contexts, there is an increased likelihood of teaching students with misconceptions and preconceptions which mischaracterise Africa, as many students may have

limited or no lived experiences in Africa and nearly no prior formal education on Africa. Focusing on an undergraduate module in a European university, D'Arcy explores in Chapter 6 how role plays and world-building experiments can be used to challenge negative preconceptions of African politics, in particular, by putting misconceptions in the spotlight, allowing students to become more emotionally involved and connected to otherwise distant and abstract realities. The chapter includes reflections on how these pedagogic strategies effectively provide students with a decentring experience for confronting misconceptions. However, to be successful they also require a classroom context of trust, and an instructor constantly involved in self-reflection about misconceptions pedagogies.

In Chapter 7, continuing the focus on misconception-targeted teaching and learning, Che draws on cognitive theory of belief perseverance and selected Freirean principles of dialogic partnership to develop a pedagogic model which engages students as 'country specialists' to specifically counter the infamous 'Africa is a country' stereotype. The chapter reports the model's practical application and effectiveness in an Africa-focused module in an undergraduate International Relations programme in a China-based transnational university. This pedagogic model contributes to correcting the 'Africa is a country' inaccuracy by triggering curiosity about Africa's diversity through preconception tests at the start of the semester, inspiring rational evaluations of cognitive biases, while also regularly exposing students to multiple information sources. However, adaptation of the model necessitates instructor inquisitiveness, transparency, and resourcefulness.

In Chapter 8, Dei and Adjei explore how African Elders Critical Teachings (*ElderCrits*) can be used as critical thinking pedagogical tools to cultivate an indigenous understanding of Africa whilst undermining misperceptions about the continent, its people, and cultures. To decolonise learning on Africa, it is important to consider not only questions of how we teach but also what we teach. Consistent with the decolonial logic of teaching African indigenous knowledges, the chapter illuminates the potential of *ElderCrits* for advancing knowledge

about Africa from Africans. Data relating to indigenous African knowledges is collected amongst Indigenous African Elders, leading scholars, and educational practitioners from Canada and Ghana currently engaged in transformative educational work. While the introduction of *ElderCrits* into African curriculum faces opposition from Eurocentric educationists, the chapter posits a variety of benefits that result from integrating African elders' indigenous knowledge as an epistemic gift for decolonial teaching on Africa.

Part III highlights the value of accompanying anti-misconception pedagogic strategies and African indigenous knowledges explored in the book with broader policy instruments which have the potential of centring Africa and African perspectives. These African-centring instruments specifically involve education regulation mandating courses on Africa as is the case in Brazil (Chapter 9), promoting African-centred publishing (Chapter 10), integrating African-authored publications (Chapters 11-12), and philosophies such as *Ubuntu* (Chapter 13) in teaching. Chapters in this final part of the book highlight the importance of policy instruments which can help to centre Africa and African indigenous knowledges with a transformative objective of tackling prejudices faced by Africans and black people around the world.

In Chapter 9, Aguilar showcases the importance of using education-regulating laws at the national level to promote transformative teaching while confronting anti-black racism. Illustrating why and how laws are relevant for promoting African literacy and intercultural sensitivities, this chapter explores how Brazil's promulgation of a law mandating teaching of African history and Afro-Brazilian culture (Law 10.639/03) has impacted Africa-related education. For enhanced anti-misconception and anti-racism outcomes, the chapter avers that this law's implementation needs to pay attention to political and social demands, with prominent participation from the Black Movement.

Countering misconceptions of Africa for transformative decolonial learning necessitates also problematising the

predominance of non-African authored texts used in teaching and supporting learning on Africa. Ideas taught and learned in classrooms are conventionally conveyed and conserved through published texts. In Chapter 10, Mugumbate, Renzaho, and Mabvurira argue that encouraging more Africans to publish on Africa is imperative for dispelling distortions and misconceptions. Hence, the chapter calls for decolonising the publication industry, accompanying anti-misconception pedagogic strategies for teaching Africa with texts published by Africans. However, to increase the volume of publications on Africa by Africans, certain challenges including limited funding and publishing infrastructure must be overcome.

In Chapter 11, Venancio illustrates the utility of African-authored books as anti-misconception pedagogic resources in teaching Africa. This chapter reveals how incorporating Lusophone African authored works in a module on Race, African Diaspora and International Relations can contribute towards correcting the misconception in a Brazilian higher education context that Portuguese colonialism in Africa was less harmful than the prevalent French and British colonial systems of assimilation and indirect rule. Decentring Portuguese narratives while centring African perspectives on colonialism, Venancio uses publications authored by intellectuals from Lusophone Africa to support teaching and learning in the module. By exposing students to African experiences, recounted by Africans in African-authored texts, students in the University of Brasília are brought closer to the realities of racial segregation, inequality, and brutality which are whitewashed in Portuguese postcolonial ideology.

Further illustrating the potential of African-authored works for challenging preconceptions, Brown comparatively discusses in Chapter 12 experiences of teaching about post-colonial Africa through the use of two differently-situated pieces of writing: one, an academic article by a white male American political scientist; the other, a fictional novel by a black Zimbabwean female author. While the former often leads students to position themselves as little more than self-satisfied lookouts for bias amongst their compatriots, the latter

moves students towards a decolonial understanding of Africa, learning from Africans about Africa, enabling students to also learn about themselves. The chapter highlights the pertinence of incorporating indigenous African texts in curricula on Africa in non-African contexts for purposes of inspiring students to move beyond merely condemning colonial exploitation and stereotypical depictions of Africa to actively participating in Africa-empowerment movements.

In Chapter 13, Mtengwane and Metula illuminate the importance of centring an indigenous (South) African philosophy, *Ubuntu*, in teaching and supporting learning in Community Development. *Ubuntu* advocates for collective responsibility in improving the human condition. Conventional Western-centric modernisation approaches to the study and practice of community development overlook indigenous African customs/principles/values. This chapter analyses the literature on the *Ubuntu* philosophy and community development to gain insights into the extent to which this philosophy can foster Afrocentric active learning, collectivism, participation, and collaboration in student engagement while challenging misperceptions and derogatory depictions of African communities.

Concluding the edited volume, in Chapter 14, TIANDEM-ADAMOU explores the utility of engaging African teachers in higher education classrooms around the world. The chapter's specific contextual focus, as with some other chapters in the book, is China, justified by the latter's status as the leading bilateral economic and development partner of many African states. While illuminating the relevance of African teachers for promoting intercultural sensitivity, the chapter examines challenges and transformative contributions of especially African English teachers in English medium universities in China. The journey to decolonising knowledge and overcoming misperceptions about Africa is twisty and long, but having Africans in driving seats as teachers is pertinent for reaching transformative education on Africa.

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# Part I

## Western-Centric Legacies in Education






## Chapter 2

# Academic Imperialism: Colonial Pedagogy and Africa's Development

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### Introduction

The scramble and partitioning of Africa through the instrumentality of The Berlin Conference of 1884 – 1885, established unequal power relations between Europe and the African continent demonstrated through underdevelopment, de-culturation and de-industrialisation of Africa (Amin, 1977; Rodney, 1972). The decolonisation and the attainment of political independence from the mid-1950s was seen as a landmark and freedom of the continent from foreign control. By 1977, 50 African countries had gained independence from European colonial powers as sovereign states. However, decolonisation coincided with the Cold War rivalry between the United States (US) and the defunct Soviet Union. The foreign policy of the US was primarily concerned with the 'containment' of communism within its borders and the recruitment of client states became the major goal of the superpowers.

To achieve these objectives, Western Social Science scholarship was weaponised in the struggle against communism as Western episteme became a tool in promoting the interests of capitalism in the developing nations by propagating capitalist values and serving capitalist interests. This chapter therefore focuses on the role of academic imperialism in the propagation of Western interest; and seeks to answer two interrelated questions: How do misconceptions of Africa still persist since



the end of colonial rule? How do Western episteme construct social identities and maintain unequal power relations? The chapter is divided into five parts. First, I highlight the theory on intellectual imperialism. Second, I evaluate colonial episteme and power relations. Third, I review the role of Western episteme and academic imperialism during the Cold War competition, and the role of colonial pedagogy, theories of modernisation and neoliberal policies and ideologies in reproducing a misconceived understanding of Africa's development. Fourth, I espouse the need for decolonising the academic space. The final part concludes the chapter with recommendations.

### **Intellectual imperialism**

This section elaborates on the “theory of intellectual imperialism”, popularised by Alatas (2000). He offers an interesting insight that the political and economic structure of imperialism generated a parallel structure in the way of thinking of the subjugated people, which is the product of intellectual imperialism. While the classic definition of ‘imperialism’ refers to the subjugation of people for the benefit of the dominant group in the political, economic, and social cultural spheres, intellectual imperialism refers to domination in their way of thinking (Alatas, 2000). This theory is premised on the existence of an intellectual division of labour, which places the Global North as the Centre of scientific knowledge and discovery, upon which valid knowledge flows to the South and the rest of the world (Hountondji, 1997). In this uneven division of labour, Africa (in particular and the Global South in general) exists as sites for hunting and gathering of raw data (Hountondji, 2002). Europe and North America remain the key sites of professional processing of data for the purposes of formulation of social theories. These theories are then disseminated and consumed in Africa and other developing countries of the South. What are considered to be prestigious and international peer-reviewed journals that easily earn African scholars’ recognition and promotion are based in Europe and North America. The concept of academic imperialism was developed in the late 1960s and early 1970s to describe the economic, political and cultural forces

which produce uneven development of academic disciplines and social research in the newly independent societies in both Latin America and Africa (Sanghera et al., 2007). Intellectual imperialism creates power dynamics inherent in knowledge production, dissemination and validation. It thus involves the imposition of Western ideas, theories, and methods as the sole legitimate forms of knowledge, marginalising indigenous and local knowledge systems, which exacerbates the erasure of diverse epistemologies and the suppression of non-Western-centric perspectives.

Since education is a *sine qua non* of development, it provides the milieu in the conceptualisation of academic imperialism as a variable of intellectual imperialism; wherein, academic imperialism pays particular attention on unequal power relations within academia, intellectual imperialism includes it and goes beyond the scope of academic institutions, involving all forms of mental domination, resulting from direct imperialism or indirect control originating from imperialism. In the colonial era, the colonialists established academic systems in their colonies that reinforced misconceptions of Africa. In the contemporary era, Western-centric academic systems have often marginalised non-Western perspectives, perpetuating unequal power relations. The production and circulation of knowledge perpetuate metropolitan dominance and peripheral marginality in Social Science (Phiri, 2021; Connell, 2008). Intellectual imperialism midwifed academic dependency as the education system of non-Western scholars, including curricula, evaluation process and the like, are dependent on the Western education system. This creates an asymmetric power relationship where Western scholarship often determines the research agendas, methodologies and publishing norms. The stock and flow of knowledge, thinking process, academic information and orientation, and also the dimensions of Africa's problems and the suggestions for their possible solutions are based on western theories and journals published by a few multinational publishing companies (Ghosh, 2001). These asymmetric power relations perpetuate misconceptions in order to maintain the international status quo.

The literature on imperialism is prolific and has garnered much interest in the academic community leading to much intellectual debate. Bracking and Harrison (2003) argue that the most incisive way of using the notion of imperialism is to maintain a strong sense of historical location and to understand the contours of economic and political intervention as part of that historical process, which is the couplet that makes the notion of imperialism a useful starting point to understand Africa's global relations; structures of inequality reproduced through a capitalist system of both political and economic power. This is corroborated in Okon and Ojakorotu (2018), that imperialism is not restricted to the economic sphere alone which is characterised by capitalist expansion, but it is demonstrated in the economic, politico-military and social cultural sphere and it is manifested by a subordination of countries and people that help to maintain a relationship of unequal exchange. The subordination may be military, economic, political, cultural or intellectual and even some combination of these.

### **Colonial Episteme, Social identities and Power relations**

Hard power was corollary in the domination of the African continent under the transatlantic slave trade as well as its eventual colonisation, while soft power was the instrument of entrenching the values of the colonial empire and these required European-style education in the territories that they colonised (Bolt & Bezemer, 2008:13). Africans had their own system and history of education, but this changed with the incursion by missionaries, educators as well as conquest and colonialism (Malisa & Missedja, 2019). The drivers for colonial educational policy depended on what the colonialists wanted. They needed to create African Christians or African workers that would be more useful on the land and contented tradesmen or educated subjects who would maintain the status quo and mirror Westernisation (Lugard, 1922) or be assimilated in the case of the French colonialism. This policy influenced the way and manner that pedagogical instructions and curriculum were designed by multiple European actors at different historical phases. While

the emphasis was on industrial education, in reality the major design of the curriculum was based on vocational trades or skills and were taught from a colonial perspective, even from elementary education (Malisa & Missedja, 2019).

The major aim of British colonial schooling was to provide Africans with some minimal level of education, and to build administrative capabilities of traditional chiefs (Bolt & Bezemer, 2008:15). However, education was not designed to empower and integrate the Africans into the ruling colonial administration. Since the British wished to avoid an indigenous educated elite, colonial officials discouraged general education beyond the primary level (Bolt & Bezemer, 2008: 16). On the other hand, in the French colonies, most positions in the colonial administration were to be filled by French nationals, trained in France, the colonial government selected those who received advanced schooling. Pupils in the French colonial schools received training in basic skills only (Lloyd et al., 2000), as the colonial curriculum was designed to educate Africans to assume subordinate roles and be subservient.

Colonial episteme was also an instrument in the reconstruction of social identities in the colonies as indicated in Hunt's (1990) article on foyers in the Belgian Congo which demonstrates how educational institutions outside the public schools were used by colonial and missionary authorities to refashion gender roles. Schulman (1992) showed how colonial ideas about women and domesticity were promoted by the French and later embraced by an emerging African bourgeoisie. The dominant language of instruction was English and other European languages which served to marginalise the African culture by portraying African countries as traditional and backward while portraying Europe and North America as modern and developed. As Salazar observes, "In the third grade, I desperately wanted to be White. My teachers privileged whiteness through the English language and U.S. culture, and they excluded all that was native to me; hence, I ascertained that White children were smarter, more attractive, and affluent. As a result, I became a connoisseur of whiteness when I was eight years old" (Salazar, 2013:122).

The British did not introduce one centralised educational policy in their colonies but instead largely left it to missionaries to provide the population with education and to decide whether to educate also in the vernacular (Bolt & Bezemer, 2008:16). This is because from the early sixteenth century, missionaries had brought European-style education to Africa and during this period, the British colonial government was primarily occupied with maintaining law and order and missionaries remained the only party active in providing formal education to African people in the British colonies (Bolt & Bezemer, 2008:18). Another factor for leaving education to the missionaries was the British desire to contain the cost of colonial administration (Lugard, 1922). In contrast, France had a very tight grip on the development of education systems in its colonies. In 1922, France put forth a decree which further limited missionary activity in education. According to this decree, the establishment of a new school in the colonies required government permission, government-certified teachers, a government curriculum and the exclusive use of French as the language of instruction (White, 1996).

There is a copious amount of literature detailing the relationship between religious and political authorities in fulfilling the agenda of constructing social identities to maintain unequal exchange (Porter, 2004; Stanley, 1990; Frankema, 2012; White & Daughton, 2012; Watson, 1982; Kallaway & Swartz, 2017; Carnoy, 1974). In British colonies, the churches became partners with the state in promoting the national interest of the ruling colonial governments (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2001). Matunhu (2011:69) contends that for the metropolis to succeed in the impoverishment operation, they had to destroy the traditional, pre-capitalist structures of Africa in order to pave the way for super expropriation and appropriation of surplus value. He contends that the missionary education curriculum was the main instrument used to destroy the pre-capitalist social structures in Africa. Didactic pedagogies which was the way that knowledge was transmitted, lacked the necessary ingredients to transform a student to a creative being as it relied only on a one-way knowledge system from teacher to

student, which lay more emphasis on rote learning and passive instructional method than critical exploration.

Colonial pedagogy marginalised the indigenous knowledge system by emasculating African ancestral wisdom in the production of knowledge. Thus, the knowledge industry was not democratised to accommodate the participation of Africans but was aimed at mental impoverishment by deemphasising the importance of African values and culture at the same time glorifying that of the white people. The basic idea was to disorient the minds and reproduce an identity of inferiority in the Africans, thus perpetuating misconceptions and reinforcing unequal power relations.

### **Western Episteme and Academic Imperialism during the Cold War**

Throughout the period of the Cold War (1945-1990/1991), World politics was characterised by the bipolar competition because the world was polarised into the Western Bloc and the Eastern Bloc, but the role of pedagogical coloniality in this competition is often under scrutinised. The Western Bloc was led by the US with its capitalist allies made up of “First World” democratic countries while; the Communist Soviet Union claimed leadership of the Eastern Bloc. The US envisioned a democratic world order with the global spread of capitalism, while the Soviet Union wanted a socialist world order governed by communism. This led to the strategy of ‘containment’ by the US, whereby the US resisted the new states moving politically towards Soviet-inspired communism rather than the American-inspired doctrine of capitalism.

The concept of containment originated from George Kennan’s telegram which was published on 1 July 1947 in his anonymous Foreign Affairs Article *The Sources of Soviet Conduct*, better known as the ‘X Article’ (‘X’, 1947). Kennan argued that the primary goal of the US should be to stop the spread of communism to non-communist nations; better known as the ‘containment policy’ (“X”, 1947). The Truman Doctrine also aimed at this goal and containment was one of its key

principles. The motivation for containment was the “domino theory”, which held that allowing one regional state to fall to communism would threaten the entire region, similar to a series of dominoes toppling. Containment further became the overriding objective of United States National Security Policy approval by President Truman in November 1948. All subsequent US presidents after Truman, both Republican and Democrat, adopted the Doctrine of Containment as being the focal point of US Cold War strategy (Merrill, 2006).

The carrot and stick approach was adopted as a strategy for recruiting client countries as the US supported right wing governments and uprisings across the world, while the Soviet government funded communist movement’s revolutions around the globe. The superpowers mobilised these new countries which were referred to as the “Third World States” (developing nations) by generous granting of financial and military aid, cultural and technological assistance. Despite the aid regime, the ‘most potent strategic tool’ of recruiting client countries was Western episteme, especially in the form of pedagogical coloniality which continues to perpetuate colonial legacies, ideologies and practices including misconceptions about Africa through the education system. Western Social Science scholarship was weaponised in the struggle against communism and logically the newly independent countries became the primary targets, as Western episteme became a tool in promoting the interests of capitalism in the “Third World” by propagating capitalist values and serving capitalist interests. This was achieved through modernisation theories of Political Science, Sociological and Economics scholarship on “Third World” countries. The rhetoric revolved around the transition from one type of society to another. The society whose state of being has to be changed is the ‘traditional or primitive society’ or ‘underdeveloped country’, while the society which is the model for this change is often referred to as the ‘developed country’ (Rostow, 1960; Almond & Powell, 1966; Almond & Coleman, 1960). These scholarships on “Third World” countries revolved around the central issue of how to bring about economic and political development in the guise of

theory of 'modernisation' which Ake (1982) aptly describes as imperialism of Western Social Science.

Western imperialism at every historical stage has its instrumentality. During the pre-independence era, militarism was the dominant instrument for establishing sphere of influence in the colonies. During colonisation, some level of education was required from the Africans to complete the imperialistic process, so the best instrument was the missionary colonial education system that provided the platform in dominating the thinking of the colonial subjects. The educational curriculum was designed to make the colonial subjects more subservient. The post-colonial era provided the milieu for these newly independent countries to be integrated into the global capitalist world order which would enable capitalism to expropriate surplus value. Western Social Science episteme became the main tool of imperialism. Western episteme such as the modernisation theories posit very strongly that "Third World" countries should follow the same development path as that followed by "First World" countries (Ake, 1982).

Developing countries, according to this episteme, should embrace Western standards of government such as bureaucracy, multiparty democracy, liberal democracy and a vibrant civil society. According to political theories of modernisation, liberal democracy is the only path to development, because it protects the right to own private property or business. Moreover, liberal democracy is perceived to be promoting free enterprise which is supportive of capital and its maximisation of profit (Breakfast et al., 2018). To Tikly (2004), this "New imperialism is presented as the incorporation of low-income countries and regions that were previously subject to older forms of European imperialism into a new regime of global governance which serves to secure the interests of the United States of America, its western allies and global capitalism more generally". The instrument of this new imperialism is World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) with its episteme of 'development', espoused in neoliberal ideology. Neoliberalism as a Western episteme promotes the ideology of unfettered capitalism which includes

the wholesale adoption of Western economic policies in African countries.

Despite the campaign of poverty reduction, debt relief and economic stabilisation, these countries must still implement neoliberal policies that inflict severe injuries on the poor. These reforms often include the following:

1. Reducing government expenditure by making the public-sector redundant, freezing salaries and making cuts in health, education and social welfares.
2. The privatisation of state-run industries, leading to massive layoffs with no social security provisions and the loss of inefficient services to remote or poor areas,
3. Currency devaluation and export promotion, leading to the soaring cost of imports, land use changed for cash crops, and reliance on international commodity markets;
4. Raising interest rates to tackle inflation, putting small companies out of business,
5. Removal of price control, leading to rapid price rises for basic goods and services (Lewis, 2013)

Unfortunately, the neoliberal ideology is found wanting, because the results of these reform programmes were disastrous. Escalating balance of payments problems, mounting foreign debt, domestic political unrest, mounting social problems stemming from unemployment in shrinking economies, de-industrialisation as local companies folded in the face of unmitigated competition from long-established and well-heeled multi-national companies, and a debilitating brain drain. These have been the results of IMF and World Bank-inspired economic structural adjustment programmes in African countries.

While governments in African countries are held responsible for the social and economic outcomes of these policies, the external economic and political forces remain largely invisible (Tarabinah, 2010). So, the neoliberal ideology articulated in the 'Washington Consensus' has failed in delivering net benefits to African countries. According to Fine (1998:1-9), a proclamation made in 1998 by Joseph Stiglitz, a former senior vice-president, and senior economist at the World

Bank, stated that the “Washington Consensus” had failed; and, that a “post-Washington Consensus” was needed and should encourage both the state and market forces to work together for economic development.

The neoliberal ideology is premised on political development theories of modernisation, that African countries were expected to follow the economic approaches of Western countries, which implied that the imperialist countries were once at the same trajectory at some point in history; a claim which contradicts empirical evidence (Ake, 1982:176; Breakfast et al., 2018). Unfortunately, this episteme has framed the “belief perseverance” of Western policymakers and their intellectuals in the ivory towers about Africa, to the perception that Africa is a continent that is inherently designed for Western exploitation, domination and manipulation. To Western countries, maintaining such Western-centric knowledge and perceptions of Africa helps to sustain capitalist privileges, an argument which corroborates a core strand of cognitive theory on why people cling-on to discredited beliefs, as articulated in Savion (2012:81-92).

So, despite the realities on the ground in the area of socio- cultural and economic performance of several African countries since post-independence, pervasive misconceptions about Africa still abound. This is also attributable to African social scientists and policymakers who accept uncritically the epistemology of Western scholars. African intellectuals earnestly seek validation from these foreign institutions and thus are unable to produce African indigenous Social Science that will address African development challenges. Alatas illuminates on this in his concept of “Captive mind.” The captive mind phenomenon represents the extension of colonial mentality or categories by the recipient country in relation to the application of social sciences from the developed countries or the West, without adaptation or critique of the adopted concepts and methodologies, with whole nations been subjected to ill-conceived planning with serious consequences suggesting the continued domination of Western ideas (Alatas, 1972:9-25; 1974).

This scenario in turn produces networks and collaboration between internal forces (states' agents, local politicians and business merchants) with foreign agents (multinational corporations, multilateral institutions and foreign government officials) to undermine home-grown development for the interest of international capitalism.

## **Decolonising The Academic Space**

Decoloniality as a concept has been defined as “the dismantling of relations of power and conceptions of knowledge that foment the reproduction of racial, gender and geopolitical hierarchies that came into being or found new and more powerful forms of expression in the modern/colonial world” (Silova et al., 2017). Le Grange (2016) conceptualises decolonisation as uncentring, displacing, deconstructing a critical engagement with knowledge to offer a renewed understanding of history, culture and language, and a process of ‘forever becoming’. Pedagogical coloniality ensures the misconceptions of Africa as it continually projects Eurocentric biases in educational content, curricula, and teaching methods. So, even though there are structural changes and transformations on the continent, misconceptions of Africa provide the enabling environment for the West to control Africa’s perception of their world and framing of their development paradigm, thus maintaining the existing international order. Africa’s development therefore lies in overcoming academic imperialism and decolonising the academic space. Decolonising Africa’s academic space would involve, amongst others, a redesign of our academic curricula from primary education to the university system and their pedagogical approach in a way that it would promote critical thought and social and industrial transformation.

The concept of Critical Pedagogy, which encourages students to challenge Western epistemic assumptions should also be incorporated in the curriculum. This is possible by incorporating African literature, indigenous knowledge systems, and various narratives into the curriculum. Addressing the biases and Eurocentric viewpoints that frequently pervade educational resources and curriculum is critical. With a broader

perspective, African students can have a more accurate and empowering learning experience that reflects their distinct identities, histories, and realities.

African philosophy and theories should be developed and accorded their rightful place in the academia through integration into existing courses across disciplines. Existing courses should be modified to incorporate specialised courses which focus solely on non-Western perspectives. Strategies for decolonisation should include African research methodologies, acknowledging that Western research methods are not universally applicable. This would deemphasise the monopoly of Western publications and validations in the knowledge production industry, thus restructuring the unequal power relations between the Global North and Global South. Empowering local languages in education is a vital strategy for the decolonisation of African education. Acknowledging and including indigenous languages within the curriculum, has the capacity to enhance cultural identity and pride amongst African students. Successful implementation of this approach requires investment in language resources, teacher training, and curriculum enhancement. Active collaborative partnerships with African academics and universities from non-Western regions should be promoted. This would include facilitating student exchanges to promote cross-cultural learning. By fostering a collaborative environment, researchers from both African and non-African origins can jointly bring their unique outlooks, skills, and experiences to approach the multifaceted nature of decolonisation. Through these partnerships, African scholars regain authority and shape the research agendas, ensuring that they are deeply rooted in their local context and preferences.

The adaptation of the dialogic method of learning as against the didactic pedagogy should be encouraged. The didactic method is teacher-centred and relies on educators to transmit knowledge to passive students, while dialogic pedagogy develops spaces for dialogue where students can share their cultural perspectives. Dialogic teaching thus utilises the power of classroom talks to challenge and stretch students' thinking and, in the process, aid their cognitive, social and

linguistic development (Alexander, 2017; 2020). This method will empower African students by cultivating agency, addressing gender biases, and improving access to quality education aimed at decolonising education in Africa. The attainment of these ideals would require that African leaders and educational policymakers develop a class consciousness and reposition the continent through the instrumentality of a renewed African Union that would challenge imperialism in all its forms as well as eliminating corruption to its barest minimum and devoting an enormous amount of resources to start and successfully finish this revolution.

### **Conclusion**

The history of the world is the history of domination and the struggle for emancipation between individuals, groups, and nation-states. World politics is historically characterised by imperialism and Africa has its fair share. Africa's decolonisation was seen as emancipation of the continent from foreign control and has experienced remarkable transformation in international relations. However, Western concerted effort is geared into transmitting misconceptions about the African continent, its cultures and its people and reinforcing dominance over the continent through academic imperialism. Africa's development therefore lies in overcoming academic imperialism and decolonising the academic space. The chapter recommends a paradigm shift from the episteme of Western Social Science and a reconceptualisation of the African version of development as well as a reconstruction of Africans' identity in a globalised world. This would require a redesign of our curricula from primary to the university system and their pedagogical approach in a way that it would promote critical thought and social and industrial transformation. In addition, since policy is required for its implementation, African leaders must develop class-consciousness and invest more on education and reduce corruption to its barest minimum, as well as strengthening their collective will through the African Union against Western proclivities and imperialism in all its forms.

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## Chapter 3

# The Disciplinary Power of Eurocentrism: Development Studies in the United Kingdom and Ethiopia

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### Introduction

Eurocentrism in the knowledge production of social sciences is increasingly criticised for the lack of social relevance in non-Western countries. This is particularly the case in development studies. Born primarily in the U.K., development studies concern non-Western countries, while it differentiates itself from the anthropological focus on the way of beings in the non-Western world. It concerns the transformation of developing countries and integrates knowledge from various disciplines, including economics, political science, sociology, anthropology, geography, etc. Over time, development studies has evolved beyond its initial focus on economic development to encompass broader dimensions, including economic, social, and human aspects. Ironically, development studies is committed to developing countries' distinctiveness while dedicated to producing similarities to the West in its knowledge production (Corbridge, 2007). Despite the popularity of the critical stance, empirical research on how Eurocentrism maintains and exercises its power in development studies to produce irrelevant knowledge of the Global South are limited. Particularly, how Eurocentric knowledge maintains its authoritative power in an era when flourishing national development in developing



countries drives their higher education expansion and knowledge production remains unveiled.

This chapter employs Michel Foucault's genealogical methods of knowledge and power as the analytic framework to explore the research question. The analytic framework focuses on how development knowledge evolves to form disciplinary power and how the disciplinary power is exercised beyond geographic boundaries through hierarchical observation, normalising judgement, and examination. It investigates development studies programmes in 131 top ten institutions in the United Kingdom (UK), as well as in 44 state universities in Ethiopia, to investigate how Eurocentric disciplinary power is established and reproduced. Ethiopia is selected as a critical case. Theoretically, as the only African country that was not colonised, Ethiopia is more likely to sustain its indigenous knowledge and develop endogenous knowledge based on its indigenous tradition, especially in a post-colonial field like development studies. However, the Eurocentric development knowledge and disciplinary power, reinforced by the uneven post-war power structure, shape development studies in Ethiopia. This chapter reveals the covert mechanisms through which Western-centric knowledge and practices are reproduced in development studies in Ethiopia.

The chapter is structured as follows: First, it examines the concept of academic disciplines in higher education and the necessity to employ Foucault's genealogical methods to explore the mechanism of how the disciplinary power of Eurocentrism is exercised in development studies across geographic boundaries. Second, it employs genealogical analysis to examine the Eurocentric origin of modern academic disciplines to locate the discursive regime that defines truth in social sciences. Then, it traces the emergence and evolution of development studies and the knowledge shifts. The central inquiry pertains to identifying whom discourse serves and how. Third, it investigates the rise of development studies as in British universities to explore how the disciplinary power formed and exercised within and beyond the UK. Fourth, it examines development studies in Ethiopia; particularly how it is transferred from development institutes

funded initially by Western donors and how it is continuously influenced by development aid. Finally, it concludes the chapter by arguing that the disciplinary power of Eurocentrism shapes the intuitional development of development studies in Ethiopia through development aid.

### **Academic Disciplines and the Genealogy of Knowledge and Power: An Analytic Framework**

Academic disciplines are entities in the higher education system based on recognisable intellectual, institutional, and cultural structures. A discipline suggests a specific knowledge domain based on intellectual validity (Becher & Trowler, 2001:41). It implies a shared concern for subject matter, concepts, theories, methods, and epistemological considerations that attain a certain extent of international validity. Academic disciplines usually involve institutional recognition manifested in organisational structures in universities and professional associations (Becher & Trowler, 2001:41). It argues that disciplines are the primary organising base in universities. They serve as the fundamental framework for departments and research centres to conduct teaching and research activities and to facilitate knowledge production (Clark, 1983:14). Alongside the organisational settings in universities, professional associations are crucial to fostering the disciplinary development of specific domains. Many emerged to support specific disciplines by building a community, publishing journals, establishing standards, disseminating knowledge, and raising public awareness (National Academies, 2005:137). Disciplinary cultures exert a less overt yet influential force in shaping disciplines. Individuals are socialised by the cultural structures of disciplines and, in return, shape the structures. On the one hand, attaining membership in a particular discipline is exemplified by the mastery of intellectual discourse, commitment to collegiality, and conformity to norms (Becher, 1981; Becher & Trowler, 2001:47). On the other hand, individuals' professional experiences, particularly in the same domains of their academic endeavours, also influence the academy (Potts, 1997:224). Disciplinarity defines curricula through institutional

structure in universities, quality research through prestigious journals of disciplinary associations, and academic recruitment and promotion standards based on institutional structure and academic journals (Repko et al., 2020:32–33).

Despite identical similarities persisting within disciplines, geographical disparities exist. The geographical differences of a given discipline are confined by the specific situation of economic development, education systems, and socio-cultural elements (Becher, 1981; Becher & Trowler, 2001:43). Taking economics as an example, Keith Tribe (2022:364) notes that by the late 1940s, the institutional development of taught programmes in Economics at undergraduate and graduate levels in the US was more established and closely linked to employment than that in Britain. The restrictions in post-war Britain are attributable to resistance from the labour market, influenced by the education system and socio-cultural factors. It is suggested that post-war Britain's socially selective schooling system prevented most pupils from qualifying for university entrance. Consequently, the chance to attend university was primarily a privilege of the middle class. Their motivation for attending higher education was cultural rather than vocational. Therefore, Economics in British universities was more about courses for independent research than degree programmes (Tribe, 2022:365–367).

However, discussions on geographical disparities of disciplines primarily focus on the institutional dimension. Disciplinary cultures transcend geographical boundaries. Despite phenotypical variations, the genotypical culture of a particular discipline is identical (Ruscio, 1987:363). It is observed that international disciplinary associations manifest collective norms, exert implicit control on curricula, and create a common base for transnational inquiry (Becher, 1994). The intellectual dimension, or knowledge production, is more intricate.

On the one hand, the intellectual validity of a discipline implies international recognition of shared subject matter, theories, and methods. Thus, economists from different countries understand each other in their academic

communication (Becher & Trowler, 2001:44). On the other hand, this shared intellectual validity, particularly in many social science disciplines, is increasingly deemed as the hegemony of Western knowledge or Eurocentrism. Eurocentrism in knowledge production of social sciences in non-Western countries is described as the lack of social relevance resulting from colonialism and political influence (Shin et al., 2023). Nevertheless, how Eurocentric knowledge maintains its authoritative power, particularly in an era when flourishing national and societal development in developing countries drives their higher education expansion, remains unveiled. More specifically, for development studies, a discipline born in decolonisation concerned with developing countries, how does Eurocentric knowledge win and exercise its power?

Michel Foucault's genealogical methods shed light on developing an analytic framework of knowledge and power. This framework helps to investigate how Eurocentric knowledge exercises its power in development studies across geographical boundaries. Foucault considers modern society a disciplinary society where power is exercised to regulate individuals (Foucault, 1977:193-194). According to his argument, discipline serves as a means to exercise power. It can be realised by the organisation of space (e.g., prisons, schools, hospitals, etc.), time (e.g., timetables for work, study, etc.), and activities (Foucault, 1977:147-161). Disciplinary control is achieved through *hierarchical observation*, *normalising judgement*, and *examination*. Combining hierarchical observation and normalising judgement, the examination deploys force and defines truth (Foucault, 1977:184). In this sense, *examination* exemplifies the power/knowledge nexus. In particular, Foucault argues that education is a channel through which individuals gain access to discourse. Education systems are political means with knowledge and power, aiming to maintain or alter the control over discourse (Foucault, 1972:227).

In Foucault's account, academic disciplines are anonymous systems in which objects, methods, true propositions, rules, definitions, techniques, and tools exist and interplay. The inclusion of a proposition in a discipline is

contingent upon its association with particular theoretical fields. It should be “true,” which is subject to its conformity to the rules of renewable discursive policy. A discipline is not a sum of truths or acceptable propositions. Instead, it suggests a control system in discourse production and the continuous power of renewing rules (Foucault, 1972:224). Foucault considers power a productive network that forms knowledge and discourse. The transformation of empirical knowledge implies the discursive regime that formulates scientific truth (Foucault, 1980:112). Understanding this discursive regime requires reflections on the effects of power on scientific statements, what constitutes the mechanism of this power, and how and when this mechanism undergoes global changes. He then situates these questions in genealogy, a historical framework examining the formation of knowledge and discourse (Foucault, 1980:117). The genealogical analysis examines discursive formations or epistemes, either in defiance of or with the assistance of these systems of constraint. It investigates the particular norms governing each discourse and the circumstances surrounding their emergence, development, and divergence (Foucault, 1972:234-235).

Drawing on Foucault’s insights on discipline and genealogy, this chapter advances an analytic framework that focuses on historical accounts of how knowledge evolves and how disciplinary power is exercised within and beyond geographic boundaries. Specifically, it helps us to formulate a set of guiding questions: 1) How is “truth” defined in social sciences and development studies? 2) How does development knowledge evolve and transcend geographic boundaries to become recognised as “global knowledge”? 3) To whom do development knowledge and practices cater? 4) What kind of power is exercised, and in what manner, through the epistemes and practice of development studies? Guided by these questions, this chapter examines how the disciplinary power 1) is achieved through the organisation of space, teaching, and research activities in British universities; 2) is exercised beyond geographic boundaries to Ethiopia through *hierarchical observation*, *normalising judgement*, and *examination* supported

by uneven power structures in international relations and international development cooperation.

### **Knowledge Professionalisation, Institutionalised Social Sciences, and Development Studies**

Academic disciplines in academies resulted from the professionalisation of knowledge in Europe in the nineteenth century which was driven by epistemological and social changes after the Middle Ages. With the rise of modern science, characterised by the Scientific Revolution, empirical science prevailed over metaphysics in the new age. Enlightenment thinkers advocated empiricism based on the scientific method of observation and experimentation. The triumph of empirical science implies profound epistemological changes that eventually led to the separation of natural sciences and philosophy in the nineteenth century. Natural sciences were then institutionalised with the rise of royal academies (Henry, 2002:1-11).

Secularisation separated religious power from science and political life. Martin Luther's thought of the two kingdoms paved the way for the separation of church and state. Modern concepts of sovereignty, state, and state structure in Europe emerged after the Thirty Years' War. The demand to serve modern states' functions and explain social systems arose. This demand was further enriched as the Industrial Revolution generated pressing needs in various fields related to industrial processes and in social sciences to explain the rapid social changes. Accordingly, new categories of knowledge emerged and classified as disciplines in universities for knowledge and talent producing. By the early twentieth century, History, Economics, Sociology, Political Science, and Anthropology were established as the primary foundation of social science disciplines in major European countries. Europe's dominance across the globe further reinforced the institutionalisation of social sciences. With the shift of political and economic power from Europe to the US in the post-1945 era, the US dominates defining issues,

methodology, and priorities. It strengthens scientific paradigms in social sciences (Wallerstein, 1996:34).

The split between natural science and philosophy and the social demand in the nineteenth century constructed the epistemic tradition of social sciences with a preference for positivist epistemology and Darwinian influence on theories. The dominance of Newtonian science over philosophy led to heightened expectations for the social sciences to integrate more closely with positivist approaches on the epistemological spectrum of disciplines (Wallerstein, 1996:10–20). Charles Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection played a crucial role in shaping social science theories, particularly in understanding social change and development. The concept of social Darwinism, raised by Herbert Spencer, was coined by influential scholars in disciplines such as Sociology, Anthropology, and Political Science, suggesting that societies evolved through competition and the survival of the fittest. Despite positivist epistemology's emphasis on the objectivity of knowledge, the Darwinian influence subtly legitimates the superiority of Europe over the rest of the world (Wallerstein, 1996:29). Europe, as the "Western" civilisation, demonstrated superior productive and military prowess at that time. The survival of the fittest legitimated the self-evident superiority (Wallerstein, 1996:29). This is especially manifested in anthropological and sociological studies on race, culture, civilisation, and social changes. Particularly in development studies, this superiority is manifested in modernisation theories which considered European experience as the final stage of developing countries (Rostow, 1959) and claimed that traditional thoughts impeded "underdeveloped" countries to progress (Parsons, 1964).

As revealed above, the rise and evolution of social sciences embody the secular state over the church in governing individuals' lives and empiricism over metaphysics in understanding social reality. The new formation, i.e., secular state, and epistemology, i.e., empiricism, do not signify the vanishment of the old ones. Instead, it implies that another form of power necessitates undergoing genealogical

analysis, that concerns the discursive regime that defines propositions in social sciences, how power is exercised through discursive formation, and whom discourse serves and how. The power of defining propositions as scientifically true in social sciences is constituted by the interplay of the Eurocentric institutionalisation of social sciences and the episteme, which implicitly reinforces the Eurocentric institutionalisation worldwide.

On the one hand, in the late nineteenth century, social sciences were divided into disciplines concerning the “modern” world, i.e., idiographic history, economics, political science, and sociology, and disciplines concerning the “non-modern” world, i.e., anthropology and oriental studies (Wallerstein, 1996:36). This Eurocentric divide reflected the social demands of industrialised countries at that time and their viewpoints of the rest of the world. At the same time, this divide shaped those disciplines’ issue areas and priorities as the institutionalisation of social sciences expanded with Europe’s superiority over the rest of the world. Modern universities in the US inherited European models, particularly the German and British ones while developing their peculiar competence based on their distinctive labour market and funding demand (Tribe, 2022:21). This peculiar competence primarily includes supporting the economic base for higher learning (Kohler, 1990), maintaining powerful academic disciplines (Abbott, 2001:122), and gaining rapid academic vitality measured by international recognition (Tribe, 2022:31).

The unique feature of dual institutionalisation of academic disciplines further granted American universities the resilience of academic disciplines (Abbott, 2001:126). In this dual institutionalisation, on the one hand, academic disciplines, rather than universities, constitute the labour market. On the other hand, the disciplinary system is applied in individual universities. Consequently, the disciplinary system paves the way for faculties and students’ careers, which cannot be deprived by universities (Abbott. 2001:126). With this dual institutionalisation, disciplinary structures remain in degree programmes even if departments are merged (Abbott, 2001:128).

As the American variant does not touch upon episteme, it does not impede the Eurocentric institutionalisation of knowledge. Instead, it reinforces the disciplinary power and resilience of academic disciplines. This reinforced disciplinary power expanded to the rest of the world with the US's superiority of political and economic power in the post-1945 era.

However, political and economic power alone cannot realise the institutionalisation of social sciences globally, as they do not necessarily generate the power to define propositions as scientifically valid in social sciences. Instead, the epistemic tradition does. The Darwinian influence on theories and preference for positivist epistemology subtly justifies Eurocentrism in the episteme of social sciences. Based on the evolution theory, modernisation theories consider the European experience as the model for economic and societal development and argue that developing countries are at different stages of the path. The positivist epistemology in social sciences further supports the legitimacy of Eurocentrism. By emphasising scientific methods, empirical data, and generalised laws, nomothetic social sciences, i.e., Economics, Political Science, and Sociology, claim their universal application. Scientific paradigms in social sciences are further strengthened with the spillover effect of the US economic expansion and investment in science (Wallerstein, 1996:35). Therefore, the combination of Darwinian influence and positivist epistemology justifies the Eurocentric episteme in social sciences as global knowledge. With its implicitly recognised universality, the global knowledge is reproducing itself in developing countries.

The knowledge production of development studies is a compelling case, exemplifying the above-mentioned interplay of Eurocentric institutionalisation and episteme. Over time, development studies has evolved beyond its initial focus on economic development to encompass broader dimensions, including economic, social, and human aspects. The changes are manifested in knowledge shifts in development theories, which are both epistemological and political. Modernisation theories (Rostow, 1959; Parsons, 1964) gained significant popularity during the initial years following World War II (WWII).

As discussed previously, modernisation theories consider industrialised nations' experience as the model for economic and societal development. Developing countries are considered at different stages of the path (Rostow, 1959). Apart from the Eurocentric episteme, modernisation theories also ignored the epistemological divergence between universality and particularity. The concept of development was quite politicised in the ideological rivalry of the Cold War in which the UK stood with the US bloc. For instance, US President Truman (1949) stated development as the growth of underdeveloped regions based on material resources and progress driven by industrial and scientific knowledge and democracy. This address created a plausible correlation between the concern of development and modernisation theories, which argue for a common modernisation path for all.

Modernisation theories were strongly criticised for their epistemological parochialism and failure in the non-Western world by dependency and structuralist theories in the 1970s. The dependency theory and the world-systems theory contributed to the knowledge of development from a structural perspective by criticising the negative effect of the spread of capitalism in shaping the unequal structure of the world economy. It is argued that the global capitalist system shapes the central-periphery relationship, which grants industrialised countries the structural advantage of exploiting developing countries (Prebisch, 1962; Cardoso, 1972; Wallerstein, 1976). Dependency and world-systems theories emerged as macro-level theories that focused on structural forces while overlooking local factors that could contribute to divergent development processes and outcomes. Therefore, it was more of a critical stance rather than providing feasible solutions.

The neoliberalist shift occurred during the global economic recession and debt crisis of the 1970s and 1980s, wherein developing countries, having borrowed extensively from multinational agencies and developed countries to fund large-scale infrastructure projects, faced difficulties repaying their debts. Development economics, which emphasises state intervention and investment in infrastructure, was criticised

for its unproductive implications in developing countries (Kay, 1993). Drawing upon classical liberalist principles of *laissez-faire*, neoliberalism argues that economic growth is attained through diminishing government intervention and unleashing the market's "invisible hand." Neoliberal packages of policy reform, known as the structural adjustment programme (SAP), were prescribed by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund to Latin American debtors and proliferated to Africa, Asia, and post-communist countries (Peet & Hartwick, 2015:98-105). The Washington Consensus, raised by John Williamson in 1989, further strengthened the orthodoxy of neoliberalism. Based on this implicit orthodoxy and their dominant role in the international development cooperation architecture, international organisations also impose *normalising judgement* and *examination* on developing countries. Through the neoliberal policy reform attached to their financial assistance, those international organisations essentially considered neoliberalism as the norm for developing countries' development. With their dominant role in the international development cooperation architecture, they are also examiners to monitor and evaluate development progress in developing countries. Similar to modernisation theories, neoliberalism maintains the Eurocentric episteme and overemphasises universality.

While neoliberalism continues to prevail, post-developmental thoughts have emerged to influence development knowledge. Post-developmentalists (Sachs, 1992:1-5; Escobar, 2010:1-65; Ziai, 2017) strongly criticise the universality of the market, productivity, and materialistic needs of humans. Instead, they considered economics as cultural values rather than a universal science. They pay attention to various dimensions of economics and advocate alternatives to development rather than alternative development, which is still based on the original power structure (Ziai, 2017). While exhibiting internal divergence, post-developmentalists emphasise endogenous development rooted in local contexts, prompting critical reflections on the Eurocentric nature of development knowledge and practice. Post-developmentalism expands the scope of development studies to encompass issues

such as basic human needs, environmental sustainability, and gender equality. In contrast to other theoretical streams that tend to overemphasise universality, post-developmentalism highlights the significance of particularity. However, it is an ongoing process of theorisation.

As the above shifts revealed, despite struggling and reflection, development studies has yet to escape the profound influence of Eurocentrism. Development studies is committed to developing countries' distinctiveness while dedicated to producing similarities to the West in its knowledge production (Corbridge, 2007). Therefore, developing countries appear as subjects without subjectivity under the Western gaze, which implies *hierarchical observation* in Foucault's terminology. The epistemological tradition of overemphasising universality in development knowledge and policy production strengthens the Eurocentric episteme in development knowledge.

### **Development Studies as a British Discipline**

After WWII, development studies emerged as an interdisciplinary discipline, or more precisely an interdisciplinary field targeting the transformation of developing countries. It is primarily a British field regarding its institutional settings (Harriss, 2005:18). This is closely linked to decolonisation. With the unfolding of decolonisation in the post-1945 era, the UK faced a shift in focus from governing colonies to fostering development in newly independent nations. Development studies then differentiates itself from the anthropological focus on the way of beings in the non-Western world. It integrates knowledge from various disciplines, such as Economics, Political Science, Sociology, Anthropology, and Geography. Based on the colonial tie and Britain's historical involvement in colonial administration, British universities have developed expertise in multidisciplinary African and Asian studies. This foundation allowed them to engage with development challenges in developing countries.

Along with the expansion of the UK's higher education system in the 1960s, multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary

studies were considered the new direction in expanding teaching programmes. In this context, the institutional setting for development studies emerged in British universities (Kothari, 2005:23). In 1966, the Institute of Development Studies was founded at the University of Sussex as Britain's first national institute of development studies (Jolly, 2008). The first undergraduate programme in development studies was established at the University of East Anglia in 1973 (Harriss, 2005:23). Since then, development studies has flourished in universities in the UK. In 1978, the Development Studies Association was founded to serve as a platform to promote research and facilitate networking within the development studies community in the UK. However, over time, its influence and reach have extended far beyond the UK borders (Tribe, 2009).

With strong policy attention, development studies is also influenced by aid agencies and international organisations. This influence is manifested in both teaching and research. The rise of development studies is partly driven by the demand to train professionals for international development. Aid agencies and international organisations are also major fund providers for the research of development studies. Research shows that most research funding for development studies in the UK from 2000 to 2007 came from the UK's Department for International Development (DFID), the World Bank, the European Union, and other official aid agencies (Colclough, 2010). The talent demand and funding pattern suggest a close link between university knowledge production and policy practices. As former colonial officers involved in teaching development studies and providing policy consultancy for aid agencies, international organisations, and non-governmental organisations (Kothari, 2005:52), this connection is further reinforced with a complex and contradictory influence both sustaining and challenging colonialism. If seeing from the perspective of developing countries, an "other" created development studies as a discipline specifically on developing countries primarily based on the former's policy and practice of delivering aid to those countries. With the knowledge produced by British universities

informing the policy practice of aid agencies and international organisations in developing countries, developing countries appear as subjects without subjectivity in development studies.

The initial disciplinary practice of development studies works through the institutional setting at universities. Research centres and teaching programmes provide the initial institutionalised space and timetables to regulate the teaching, learning, and research of development studies. While less mature than traditional disciplines, the institutionalisation of development studies is making significant progress. According to *Top Universities*, world university rankings by subject 2023, the top ten universities in the UK that are best for development studies include the University of Sussex, SOAS University of London, the London University of Economics and Political Science (LSE), University of Oxford, University of Cambridge, The University of Manchester, University of East Anglia (UEA), University of Leeds, The University of Edinburgh, King's College London (KCL) (QS, 2025). As illustrated in Table 1, seven of them have established independent departments / schools / institutes to provide degree programmes on development studies. Three of them, i.e., the University of Cambridge, the University of Leeds, and The University of Edinburgh, place development studies programmes under politics-related departments. As shown in Table 2, more than half of them have developed undergraduate programmes on international development or global development.

Apart from SOAS, which insists on the Department of Development Studies, the remaining six name those independent units as Department / School / Institute of International Development or Global Development. This naming approach more accurately reflects the nature of development studies in the UK, which is about the development beyond the UK. Thus, this discipline for developing countries is clearly about their national development, while it concerns other countries' development for the UK. The UK's position as a knowledge hub of development studies is complicated. Therefore, its lens is neither cosmopolitan nor endogenous. International or global development suggests a broader scope

and vision beyond developing countries, while it essentially concerns developing countries.

**Table 1:** Top Ten Universities for Development Studies 2023, UK

		University	Unit
Independent Unit	1	Sussex	Department of International Development
	2	SOAS	Department of Development Studies
	3	LSE	Department of International Development
	4	Oxford	Department of International Development
	5	Manchester	Global Development Institute
	6	UAE	School of Global Development
	7	KCL	Department of International Development
Politics-related Unit	1	Cambridge	Department of Politics and International Studies (Center of Development Studies)
	2	Leeds	School of Politics and International Studies
	3	Edinburgh	School of social and political science

*Source: compiled by the author based on information from the QS (2025) and official webpages of the universities.*

Education systems are primarily part of the public system to serve the country. Developing human resources through education for the country is especially the case for post-colonial countries where an established education system to develop human resources for the country did not exist. Universities and academic disciplines largely serve this purpose in such countries at least at the initial stages of national development. Specifically, regarding development studies, the initial establishment of development studies institutions in African and Asian countries were supported by Western countries.

**Table 2:** Undergraduate Programmes Amongst the Top Ten Universities for Development Studies 2023, UK

University	U.G. Programme	No.
Sussex	BA Anthropology and International Development, BA Economics and International Development, BA Geography and International Development, BA International Development, BA International Development with a Language, BA International Relations and Development, BA Sociology and International Development	7
SOAS	BA Global Development, BA Global Development and (Languages/Languages and Cultures/Linguistics/East Asian Studies/Economics/History/History of Art//Music/International Relations/Law/Politics/Social Anthropology/World Philosophies)	2
Manchester	BSc Global Development	1
UEA	BA (Hons) in Geography and International Development, BA (Hons) in International Development, BSc (Hons) in International Development and the Environment, BA (Hons) in International Development with Anthropology, BA (Hons) in International Development with Politics, BA (Hons) International Development with Economics, BA (Hons) Media and International Development	7
Leeds	BA International Development	1
KCL	BA International Development	1

*Source: compiled by the author based on information from the official webpages of the universities.*

Those African and Asian countries developed such institutions to contribute to their own national development rather than being interested in how Western countries would develop better, or just developing a university showcase. For developed countries like the UK, development studies has been about the development of other (poor) countries since the very beginning. But for a country like Kenya just after its independence, the UK-supported DS institution is about Kenya's own development. However, the institutionalisation of development studies in universities granted the UK authority of knowledge

and, therefore, disciplinary power in development studies. This disciplinary power is exercised through its academic influence in developing countries and connects with the development industry.

How disciplinary power is exercised through the connection with the development industry is mainly manifested in taught master's programmes. Amongst the 131 programmes, 91 are taught master's programmes, accounting for 70% of the total. Unlike undergraduate programmes, which are general or with discipline-based concentrations, taught master's programmes usually have issue- or function-based specialisations. Environment and climate change, conflict and security, migration, gender issues, humanitarianism, and education are popular specialisations of taught master's programmes in international development. Functions related to development planning, financing, management, and evaluation are also found in the concentrations. As these programmes aim to train development professionals, field trips and engagement with development projects are included in some programmes. Some of the students enrolled in such programmes already possess prior professional experience. Therefore, development knowledge is transmitted from universities to the development industry, while students' prior experience also informs knowledge production in universities. This two-way transmission strengthens universities' power of discursive formation in development studies.

Compared to taught master's programmes, undergraduate programmes are more general or with discipline-based focuses. Anthropology, Economics, Geography, Sociology, International Relations, and Politics are primary disciplines that are combined in the discipline-based focuses. As discussed previously, those disciplines also support the interdisciplinary field of development studies. Therefore, the knowledge taught in general programmes without discipline-based focuses is also informed by such disciplines. A further examination of the modules that these undergraduate and postgraduate programmes offer reveals that Economics and development theories, policy, and practice are shared foundation knowledge in teaching. It is also the case

in taught master's programmes and research programmes. Since the Eurocentric episteme profoundly shapes these social sciences disciplines and development knowledge, Eurocentrism is unconsciously reproduced in the teaching to some extent. As British universities become hubs for development studies that attract scholars and students from developing countries, their institutionalisation and episteme expand beyond the UK's boundary. The post-developmental preference manifested in the concentrations of taught master's programmes may imply reflections on Eurocentrism. However, whether such concentrations also exemplify the agenda setting of the West on developing countries required scrutiny of the issue areas and knowledge production of development studies in developing countries. The following section examines development studies in Ethiopia.

### **Development Studies as a Discipline in Ethiopia**

The emergence of development studies in Africa diverges from the context in the UK. In the case of most African countries, the inception of development studies reflects their internal quest for national development following independence. This internal pursuit necessitates establishing national systems and various sectors to foster development. However, these development endeavours were intricately intertwined with external influences, driven by the US-Soviet competition during the Cold War and the rise of international organisations and development agencies. The US-Soviet competition incentivised both sides to vie for and support their respective allies in Africa through foreign aid. These allies, in turn, chose either capitalist or socialist development models based on their relationships with the competing powers. Concurrently, with international organisations gaining prominence in the development field and establishing the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development)-dominated architecture of international development cooperation, the Western neoliberal development model has profoundly influenced aid-dependent Africa. Consequently, Africa has become an experimental arena where different development models are tested, and this distinctive

attribute inevitably shapes the field of development studies on the continent.

This is also the case in Ethiopia. Ethiopia's demand for national development is endogenous, while the discipline of development studies is profoundly shaped by development aid, which is external to the country. During the Cold War, despite the fact that being a non-colony prevented Ethiopia from the type of aid based on colonial ties (Abegaz, 1999), Ethiopia was deeply involved in ideological and geopolitical competition. The imperial government of Ethiopia (until 1974) was a major strategic partner and aid recipient of the US. This was attributable to Ethiopia's strategic location in the Horn of Africa (The Reporter, 2025), its leadership in African unity and stability (The Reporter, 2025), and its famine as a potential seedbed for communist revolution (Kissi, 2000). Consequently, military and food assistance were the priorities of USAID (United States Agency for International Development) in Ethiopia. In 1972, the Institute of Development Research (IDR) was established at Haile Selassie I University (the predecessor of Addis Ababa University, hereafter AAU) in collaboration with USAID and Ford Foundation to facilitate indigenous development research and support their development projects. Conformed to the contracts of the US side, the IDR concentrated on agricultural and rural development in Ethiopia and developed a social sciences-oriented feature (Sisaye, 1978). The socialist revolution in 1974 led to the Derg regime (1974-1991), which developed a close tie with Moscow and embraced a centrally planned economic approach. Western influences were portrayed in the manner of the ideological competition between the US and the Soviet Union. Although the socialist ideology prevented Ethiopia from neoliberal reform, Official Development Assistance (ODA) to Ethiopia and the US humanitarian aid in response to famine continued (Abegaz, 1999; The Reporter, 2025). Intertwined with humanitarian purposes, humanitarian aid was deployed by the US as a tool to weaken the Derg regime (Poster, 2012).

Because of its domestic political situation, Ethiopia's exposure to the neoliberal SAP was later than that of many African countries. After the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary

Democratic Front (EPRDF) came into power in 1991, the World Bank acknowledged the EPRDF's liberal gesture. It launched the Emergency Recover and Reconstruction Program (ERRP) in Ethiopia. Donors of the ERRP included the International Development Association, UNDP, African Development Bank, European Economic Commission, European Investment Bank, Germany, Japan, the Netherlands, Sweden, and the US (World Bank, 1992). In 1996, the Center for Regional and Local Development Studies (RLDS) was set up in AAU in collaboration with the Institute of Social Studies in The Hague as part of a capacity-building project funded by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Ahadu, 2019).

As revealed above, the initial establishment of development research institutes in Ethiopia was shaped by foreign aid. However, the USAID and aid from international organisations shaped development research institutes in Ethiopia in distinctive ways. In the USAID, primarily in the form of military and food assistance, Ethiopia appeared as a subject of the ideological and geopolitical competition which was essentially about the US and Soviet Union. Despite the critical importance of agricultural development to national development from the Ethiopian side, the ultimate goal of the US intention to support IDR was to prevent communism and, later on, to weaken the new socialist regime. In this sense, Ethiopia was a subject under the gaze of the US and Soviet Union. By contrast, development aid initiated by international organisations shaped Ethiopia's development research institutes in the knowledge dimension. Capacity-building projects were the primary means of transmitting Western development knowledge and agendas to Ethiopia. Such knowledge and agendas have become central themes in Ethiopian development studies, serving as the basis for normative judgements. The evolving institutional setting of development studies in Ethiopia, which I will discuss in the following section, further reveals how normalising judgement occurs.

## **The Institutional Setting of Development Studies in Ethiopian Universities**

In contrast to the initial establishment, the formal institutional settings of development studies, manifested as teaching and research programmes in departments / institutes / colleges of universities, have been established with the expansion of Ethiopia's higher education driven by national development. The ERRP later transferred into an SAP, which triggered neoliberal reforms, including devaluing the Ethiopian currency and privatising public enterprises. Nevertheless, the EPRDF rejected Western donors' demands for liberalising land, banking, telecommunication, and energy sectors (Feyissa, 2011). The tension projected the EPRDF's agency in managing donor relations and the divergence of development approaches. This divergence was more overt when the EPRDF embraced the developmental state approach in the 2000s.

Along with the agricultural development-led industrialisation adopted since 1994, the developmental state approach has long been a dominant discourse in the development process of Ethiopia (OECD/PSI, 2020:125). From 2005 to 2019, Ethiopia achieved a double-digit annual gross domestic product (GDP) growth rate (African Development Bank, 2022). Higher education in Ethiopia has expanded rapidly since the mid-2000s to serve national development. New universities and institutes are built to serve industrial policy based on international experiences, particularly those of Germany and East Asian emerging economies (Oqubay & Lin, 2019). A number of teaching programmes and departments on development studies have also been set up.

As illustrated in Table 3, amongst the 44 public universities listed on the official webpage of the Ministry of Education, three have established independent colleges or institutes for development studies. In 2008, AAU integrated the original IDR, RLDS, and the Institute for Gender Studies (IGS) to form the country's first College of Development Studies (COD) to conduct postgraduate training and research. The COD comprises six centres on environment and development studies,

gender studies, population studies, rural development studies, food security studies, and local and regional development studies, respectively (AAU, 2023a). The Institute of Policy and Development Research and the Institute of Environment, Gender, and Development Studies were established at Hawassa University and Mekelle University, respectively, in subsequent years. Below the college or institute level, the institutional setting of development studies is situated in the College of Business and Economics (CBE) and the College of Social Science and Humanities (CSSH). Fourteen universities have built the Public Administration and Development Management in the CBE, while six universities locate development studies in the CSSH. In the CSSH, gender studies, governance, and environmental management are the concentrations of development studies.

Apart from the comprehensive attention of the COD at AAU, gender, environment, and development management are the core themes of the institutional setting of development studies in Ethiopian universities. Similar to the IDR and RLDS, gender studies in the institutional setting of development studies in Ethiopia is a legacy of development aid intertwined with Ethiopia's higher education expansion. In 1991, the Ethiopian government and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) jointly set up the Centre for Research Training and Information on Women in Development (CRTIWD) under the IDR at AAU. This centre was upgraded to the IGS in 2006 to offer a postgraduate programme, responding to the government's graduate expansion programme (Mulugeta, 2007). By contrast, establishing development management is a proactive response to development aid in the context of higher education expansion. The first Department of Public Administration and Development Management was established in the CBE of AAU in 2004 and has played a critical role in designing the national curriculum on public administration and development management (AAU, 2023b.), which has expanded to 14 public universities. According to AAU, the development management module in the curriculum includes courses on macroeconomics, microeconomics, theories and politics of development, and development administration

(AAU, 2024). The rise of the institutional setting and curriculum of development management is largely a response to the talent demand of the “development industry,” of which Ethiopia is an aid recipient.

**Table 3:** Development Studies in Ethiopian Public Universities

Type	Unit	University	No.
College	COD (2008)	AAU	1
Institute	Institute of Policy and Development Research (2015)	Hawassa	1
	Institute of Environment, Gender and Development Studies	Mekelle	1
Department	Public Administration and Development Management (CBE)	AAU, Ambo, Assosa, Dila, Dire Dawa, Gambella, Haramaya, Injibara, Jigjiga, Kebri Dehar, Mekelle, Wachamo, Warabe, Wollega	14
	Gender and Development Studies (CSSH)	Bahir Dar, Gambella, Gondar	3
	Governance and Development Studies (CSSH)	Mizan-Tepi, Wolkite	2
	Development and Environmental Management Studies (CSSH)	Gondar	1

*Source: compiled by the author based on information from official webpages of the universities*

As discussed above, the institutional setting of development studies as a discipline in Ethiopian universities echoes to the expansion of higher education driven by Ethiopia’s national development. Nevertheless, development aid remains the primary channel through which Eurocentric development theories and themes exert influence. On the one hand,

Ethiopia's rapid economic growth has fostered higher education expansion, resulting in new universities and more disciplines and programmes to accommodate this growth. It is in this context that development studies was established as a discipline and expanded. On the other hand, the core themes of this discipline inherit the initial development research institutes funded by early development aid and proactively responds to talent demands of development assistance. In this sense, the "development industry," dominated by aid agencies and international organisations, implicitly defines the standard of what is useful and should be taught. Therefore, development studies fails to generate endogenous development knowledge derived from local practices. Instead, it is primarily based on the practice of being an aid recipient. In this way, it implicitly positions Ethiopia as a subject under the normalising judgement of Eurocentric development theories and examination by international organisations and aid agencies.

### **The Misperception of Development Studies as a Social Science Discipline**

The normalising judgement and examination also shape the misperception of development studies as a social science discipline in Ethiopia. As the above survey reveals, development studies is primarily set up in the CBE and CSSH in Ethiopian universities, making it a social science discipline. Meanwhile, many development-related issues, such as agriculture, land, water, environment, etc., are addressed in discipline-based colleges, schools, institutes, or departments in natural science. The split of development studies as a social science discipline and development-related issues scattered into natural sciences is partially in line with that in the UK. Nevertheless, in the Ethiopian context, this split was initially shaped by development theories and the interaction of donors' policies, particularly in the field of agricultural and rural development.

In the 1950s and 1960s, agriculture was not given high priority, as Ethiopia's national development strategy was guided by the prevailing development idea of import substitution

industrialisation (OECD/PSI, 2020:121). The initial institutional setting of agriculture in Ethiopia's higher education, manifested in teaching programmes and institutions, was built with the USAID. In 1953, the first Bachelor of Science programme in general agriculture was established, after which various teaching programmes at different degree levels and institutions were set up (Belay, 2008). Giving agriculture was not prioritised in national development strategy; it was largely limited in the domain of natural science in Ethiopia's higher education system.

When it came to the late 1960s, donors' policies, particularly those of the Sweden, World Bank, US, and Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, changed to value agriculture in Ethiopia. They incorporated their ideas in Ethiopia's Third-Five Year Development Plan (1968–1973) (Aredo, 1992). While the design and implementation of agricultural plans in Ethiopia was dominated by technical scientists, these international funding agencies had an increasing demand to involve social scientists in planning, formulating, and evaluating their development projects (Sisaye, 1978). As discussed previously, the IDR was established at AAU accordingly and became the initial foundation for disciplinary evolution of development studies in Ethiopia. Donors' demands raised and sustained social science expertise in agricultural and rural development in Ethiopia while not in the way of facilitating integration with natural science. This institutional split contradicts Ethiopia's reality. Unlike developed economies, the agricultural sector in Ethiopia contributes to over one-third of the country's GDP. However, it encounters constraints arising from both abiotic and biotic factors (Wendimu, 2021). Consequently, the integration of natural science and social science becomes particularly significant within the Ethiopian context.

In a nutshell, development theories and the interaction of donors' policies in Ethiopia shape the misperception of development studies as a social science discipline. As discussed, agricultural and rural development was a natural science subject that did not gain primary attention in Ethiopia in the 1950s and 1960s. The prevailing development idea of dependency theory

which emphasises import substitution industrialisation to reduce foreign dependency (Singer, 1950; Prebisch, 1962) shaped this preference. By contrast, the country turned to highlight agriculture in the late 1960s to accommodate donors' demands. Apart from the US' ideological and geopolitical considerations, this shift also projected the implicit influence of modernisation theory which considers agricultural-based economy as the initial stage to the modernisation process to the age of mass high consumption (Rostow, 1959). With donors' rising demands to involve social scientists in planning, formulating, and evaluating their development projects (Sisaye, 1978), social science expertise in agricultural and rural development sustained in Ethiopia with integrating with natural science.

Notably, it is important to acknowledge that the limited incorporation of natural science and social science within development studies in Ethiopia does not suggest the absence of development research within the local context. Various discipline-based institutions such as colleges, schools, institutes, and departments that focus on specific development issues demonstrate substantial endeavours in extensive developmental exploration. Additionally, the comprehensive attention given to development by the COD at AAU holds promise for the integration of development studies.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter explored how Eurocentrism maintains and exercises its power in the discipline of development studies in an era when flourishing national and societal development in developing countries drives their higher education expansion. Drawing on Foucault's insights on discipline and genealogy, it employs genealogical analysis to examine how development knowledge evolves, who discourse serves, and how the disciplinary power of development studies is exercised in the UK and Africa, with Ethiopia as the critical case. It argues that the interplay of the Eurocentric institutionalisation of social sciences and knowledge production constitutes the power of defining propositions as scientifically true in development studies. The combination of Darwinian influence and positivist

epistemology justifies the Eurocentric episteme as global knowledge. Through development aid, which has long been dominated by OECD countries and international organisations, the “global knowledge” on development studies is reproducing in the developing world.

Since the Eurocentric episteme profoundly shapes these social sciences disciplines and development knowledge, Eurocentrism is unconsciously reproduced in higher education institutions and development assistance practice. As British universities become hubs for development studies that attract scholars and students from developing countries, mainly former colonies, their institutionalisation and episteme expand beyond the UK’s external boundaries. The teaching and research of development studies are also influenced by aid agencies and international organisations that fund research and demand professionals in international development. Development knowledge is transmitted from universities to the development industry, while students’ prior experience also informs knowledge production in universities. This two-way transmission strengthens universities’ power of discursive formation in development studies. With the development knowledge production in British universities guiding the policy practice of aid agencies and international organisations in developing countries, developing countries appear as subjects without subjectivity in development studies.

Decolonisation does not lead to the vanishing of uneven power structures. Instead, the previous colonial power structure transferred into the uneven post-war power structure featured by the US-Soviet competition during the Cold War and the divide between developed and developing countries. In this structure, Africa has become an experimental arena where different development models are tested, which inevitably shapes the landscape of development studies on the continent. The power competition during the Cold War and development aid profoundly shapes Ethiopia’s national development and its discipline of development studies. The initial establishment of development research institutes was facilitated by development aid from the US, the Netherlands, and the UNFPA. Despite

development-related intentions, institutes were mainly set up at critical transitions in Ethiopia with donors' geopolitical or ideological considerations and intertwined with prevailing development theories. Particularly in the field of agricultural and rural development, the misperception of development studies as a social science discipline has been shaped by development theories and the interaction of donors' policies in Ethiopia.

The thematic preference of development studies in Ethiopian universities, i.e., gender, environment, development management, was jointly shaped by the origin of Ethiopia's development studies institutions and talent demands arising from development aid. Ethiopia's higher education expansion is driven by economic growth, which propels the institutional setting and expansion of development studies in universities. However, it does not necessarily promote endogenous knowledge production. Development studies proactively responds to the talent demand of development aid to develop new teaching and research programmes. In this sense, similar to that in British universities, Ethiopia remains a subject that has undergone implicitly normalising judgement and examination of Eurocentric development theories, international organisations, and aid agencies. Notably, in a wider sense of development research, various discipline-based institutions such as colleges, schools, institutes, and departments in Ethiopian universities that focus on specific development issues demonstrate substantial endeavours in extensive developmental exploration based on local practice.

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## Chapter 4

# Theoretical Reflections on Knowledge Production and Teaching Africa: Insights from Africa–China Scholarship

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### Introduction

Knowledge production and the related implications for teaching have assumed a vital position in our knowledge-driven twenty-first century society. In the case of Africa, that is often misconceived and portrayed in a negative light, the issue of how knowledge is produced and taught becomes necessary. African universities, as centres for knowledge production and teaching, have embarked upon changes because of or in response to the twenty-first century forces of neoliberal globalisation. The changing role of the state, one feature of neoliberal globalisation, has given rise to the dwindling role of public resources for African universities. In response, universities have initiated various changes that coalesce around the idea of entrepreneurial universities (Feola et al, 2021; Puplambu & Wodinski, 2016). Key aspects of such universities include plans on how to utilise technology in knowledge production and

transfer, to the recruitment of faculty and students from beyond national borders.

Another significant aspect of entrepreneurial universities is the emergence of and partnership with new actors, both state and non-state, including for-profit organisations. In Africa, one major state actor is China. Africa-China relations have historical and contemporary foundations in developing nations solidarity, specifically the South-South Cooperation (SSC) and Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) respectively (Odoom, 2018). While the contemporary significance of China in Africa is often traced to President Xi Jinping's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in 2013, China's foreign aid programme since the start of the Cold War. The programme has been supported by "five principles of peaceful coexistence" and the "eight principles", which have been further distilled into two central elements: mutual benefits and noninterference in the internal affairs of any sovereign government (Gu et al., 2014). The implied win-win and non-interference model has been a critical feature of China's development assistance in Africa (Odoom 2017; 2021).

The resultant increases in and the varied forms of the evolving nature of the growing importance of Africa-China relations has positioned China as a major actor in natural resources development, digitalisation, and infrastructural support and relations with universities as part of a broader development assistance to the region (Puplampu, 2023; Odoom, 2018; 2017; Oshodi, 2023; King, 2013; Hodzi & Amoah, 2023). Thus, the African university environment offers an important space for constructing discourses relative to China in Africa (Carayannis & Olin, 2012; Oshodi, 2023).

The emphasis on African universities has given rise to a diverse group of scholars specialising in Africa-China relations on the African continent, in China and beyond who are all contributing to a deeper understanding of Africa and China. The emanating knowledge from different academic centres across the globe, bring multiple disciplinary perspectives and has the potential to elevate the capacity of African universities to contribute to knowledge about Africa. The question is the extent

to which the implied mutual, win-win relations in Africa-China relations play out when it comes to knowledge production, specifically knowledge that can undermine misconceptions about Africa (Nyamnjoh, 2022). This is because knowledge claims about Africa, influenced by its history, have been dominated by unidirectional Western perspectives, which are insufficient for addressing the continent's development. The issue is that no single region, including China, should dominate the discourse on African development (Crawford et al., 2021; Owusu, 2006).

This chapter draws on the above studies to examine knowledge production and teaching about Africa in a manner that will undermine misconceptions and the negative representation of Africa. The chapter contends that any attempt to enhance knowledge production and teaching about Africa must pay attention to decoloniality. The chapter therefore argues that the diversity in backgrounds and perspectives amongst African institutions and African-China scholars, in a decolonial framework, can open-up interdisciplinary perspectives on teaching about Africa. The theoretical implications for knowledge production and teaching about Africa are not problem-free. Knowledge production on both Africa and China, funding sources, and institutional structures, unlock new questions about the decolonisation of knowledge production, autonomy, and institutional capacity in Africa and beyond. By adopting a perspective that is attentive to the politics of knowledge production, the chapter emphasises the significance and implications of positionality and agency of knowledge producers in Africa-China encounters and studies. To address the research question, the chapter employs several data sources, including peer-reviewed studies and the grey literature on the African academy to examine knowledge production and teaching about Africa.

The chapter has four main sections. Section one examines the literature on knowledge production, decolonisation, and positionality relative to the African academy and Africa-China scholarship. Section two surveys the explosion or expansion of Africa-China studies, with many African universities and

knowledge centres offering courses and research engagements in Chinese studies and similar efforts in several Chinese universities. The third section offers an analysis of the research question, engages with the challenges and opportunities in decolonising knowledge production and teaching about Africa. The final section contains a summary, policy considerations and concluding remarks.

## **Knowledge Production and Decolonisation: A Theoretical Overview**

The key elements in knowledge are beliefs, ideas, and values in a systematic and broader intellectual environment (Mannheim, 1952). For contemporary African universities, the utilisation of knowledge in public policy, teaching and learning are critical in demonstrating their relevance in society (Puplampu & Mugo, 2020). Given the colonial milieu of African universities, their role in knowledge production and teaching are inextricably linked to the colonial orientation, hence the need to decolonise the knowledge produced in postcolonial African universities, especially in an era of neoliberal globalisation (Andrews & Khalema, 2023; Oyedemi, 2020; Luckett & Shay, 2020; Hountondji, 2009; Puplampu, 2006).

Three main issues in the literature pertinent to this study are as follows: the changing landscape of higher education (HE) in Africa; knowledge production and decolonisation of the African academy; and finally, arguments around curriculum and pedagogical outcomes. One phenomenon in the contemporary higher education landscape in Africa is the emergence of education hubs. Education hubs are the intentional elevation or concentration of a “critical mass of education and knowledge actors aiming to exert greater influence in the new education marketplace and to strengthen relations between local and international counterparts” (Knight, 2014:84). These hubs are therefore based on the desire by national or local policymakers to showcase their country as a magnet or centre for collaborative forms of learning as part of a wider process of utilising global imperatives like the flow of international capital,

recruitment of foreign students to enhance the competitiveness of the local higher educational landscape in a knowledge and service economy (Knight, 2014). Several African countries, like Mauritius, are positioning themselves as worthy sites for education hubs and other private initiatives in higher education (Knight & Motala-Timol, 2022). The key question is whether education hubs can transcend colonial knowledge and produce knowledge in a decolonial framework and thus elevate teaching about Africa or become just another market product with minimal social relevance.

The issue is that academic knowledge, because it is legitimised by social forces, is never produced in a vacuum. Accordingly, the overriding attention is an interrogation of knowledge production and legitimation in a decolonised context. The colonial problem revolves around several features that define the lived realities of the colonised subject (Maldonado-Torres, 2017). Specifically, decoloniality “entails not only scepticism of the a priori superiority of Europe, but also radical doubt about the lack of the full humanity of the colonized” (Maldonado-Torres, 2017:118). In higher education, any attempt at decolonisation must begin with the curriculum. The curriculum, in both its stated and hidden dimensions, defines the pedagogical approach and invites a spotlight on the relationship between educators and learners (Lockett & Shay, 2020; Puplampu & Mugo, 2020; 2023). The curriculum is the ladder that sets the course for learners in terms of how they learn, including skills and knowledge, the material to study, and systems of evaluation or assessment (Villet, 2022:230). Decolonising the curriculum and any learning or training system requires an active role of the educator, as the academic faculty or knowledge content expert, the knowledge itself and its significance in the framework of university and society relations. The operationalisation of the curriculum is determined by the philosophical orientation of the African university.

Villet (2022) identifies two philosophical orientations of African higher education – the traditional status quo approach and transformative approach. The former approach is grounded on the colonial experience that informed the establishment

and operations of the African universities (Neave & van Vught, 1994). In the environment in which the university structure was modelled on that of historical universities in the 'mother' country, it was not surprising that the curriculum did not align with the interests of the communities that host the universities (Villet, 2022:230). The irony of the situation was that in the postcolonial era, many African universities were named after their nations and presented as a major actor in the development discourse, but the universities did not live up to expectation (Puplambu, 2005). Analysts have attributed the failure of the African university to play its development role to both the proclivities of the African state in its relationship with the university and problems within the bureaucracies that govern African universities (Puplambu, 2006; Puplambu & Tettey, 2000). Consequently, the complex interactions of internal and external factors have undermined African universities as a site for a transformative agenda.

The latter philosophical orientation, the transformation approach, calls on African universities to focus on changes to the curriculum and pedagogical approaches that can utilise teaching and learning processes; that way, learners can be introduced to a sophisticated understanding of the human experience and better apply knowledge to resolving problems in their environment (Villet, 2022:232). Puplambu and Mugo (2023:206) consistently mention "the role of the curriculum and, by extension, how that frames the relationship between educators and learners." The transformation approach calls for new forms of knowledge production and an attention to positionality and agency. According to Banks (1993:5), positionality reveals "positions and frames of reference from which scholars and writers present their data, interpretations, analyses, and instruction." The transformative orientation therefore calls for agency on the part of both faculty and learners and the larger institutional structure of African universities.

Agency highlights a significant role for African actors in shaping knowledge production and global engagements. The renewed interest in the notion of agency has given rise to two contrasting perspectives. On the one hand, some portray

Africa “as if all structural constraints had fallen away,” while on the other, there are those who argue that “nothing has changed,” asserting that global inequalities persist, Africa remains dominated (Brown, 2012:1903). These extremes often depict Africa as either “hemmed in” or “seizing the twenty-first century,” “hopeless” or “hopeful” (Brown, 2012:1903). This binary narrative and reductionist approach hinders an enhanced understanding of the complexities within the concept of agency and fails to effectively illuminate persistent multiple dimensions.

Recent research in African studies, which build on the work of Anthony Giddens, the British sociologist, present philosophical and sociological reflections on agency (Brown, 2012; Brown & Harman, 2013; Tieku, 2013; Odoom, 2021). These perspectives challenge victimising approaches and provide a more balanced understanding of local processes at play in Africa. This chapter recognises the agency of African actors and contends that understanding the role of the African University in knowledge production necessitates amplifying the voices of its primary stakeholders while acknowledging the internal and external structures within which they operate. Such an approach aligns the social environment and knowledge in complex agent-structure interactions. These interactions lead to the emergence of social structures in which agents can disrupt the system or challenge established structures. In post-colonial Africa, the university stands as one such capable agent. As agents of knowledge production and teaching, African universities have the power to influence the structures within which they exist, just as they are shaped by them.

While not wholly decolonised, the African university holds a vital role in shaping African-China studies and relations, and understanding that the agency within it is crucial. Exploring agency of the African university in knowledge production that can change the misconception narrative about the region becomes imperative when considering the deepening Africa-China relations in higher education. Before addressing the possibilities of the African university in the suggested context,

the next section sketches relevant aspects of Africa–China relations and the African university.

### **Africa–China Relations and African Universities: A Survey**

The historical relationship between African institutions of higher education and their counterparts in the Euro–American region has undergone significant changes in the contemporary global era. This does not imply the absence or declining influence of Euro–American universities in Africa. Rather, in the last several years, there has been a noticeable surge in the expansion of Africa–China studies in academic and non–academic institutions or programming in several African countries and universities. The deepening and varied forms of inquiry reflect the evolving nature and importance of Africa–China relations and African universities have become an important arena for Africa–China relations in producing and promoting knowledge (van Hoeymissen, 2021).

The initial policy framework was the 2009 Forum on China–Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) agreement in Egypt. As the cornerstone for educational collaboration, China’s Ministry of Education launched China’s ‘20+20 Cooperation Plan’, the blueprint for establishing one–to–one partnerships between 20 Chinese and 20 African higher education institutions across 17 African nations (Gu, 2017). The plan which initially called for two partnership universities each in Egypt, Kenya, and South Africa, was extended to institutions in Botswana, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guinea, Namibia, Nigeria, Morocco, Sudan, Tanzania, Tunisia, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. These partnerships, designed to foster capacity–building and sustainable development, set the stage for the 2011 trilateral UNESCO–China–Africa meeting in Paris, where 44 university leaders deliberated on the theme of future collaboration between Chinese and African universities (King, 2013; Oshodi, 2023).

The intersection of higher education and Africa–China relations has led Egypt to be amongst the early adopters of academic cooperation with China. Then the University of

Ghana, Legon, introduced a Bachelor of Arts in Chinese within the Department of Modern Languages (Oshodi, 2023:216). This bilateral partnership was further strengthened with the establishment of the Confucius Institute not only at the University of Ghana, but several other African universities since 2013 (Table 4.1). By 2021, when China released the White Paper, *China and Africa in the New Era: A Partnership of Equals*, Confucius Institutes could be found in many African universities (Table 4.1). With some countries having multiple centres, there are sixty-one Confucius Institutes in forty-six African countries (MFA, 2021), with The Djibouti Institute the latest one to open in March 2023 (China.org, 2023). These institutes, complemented by over 30 Chinese language departments or majors in African universities, signify China's deepening cultural and educational footprint on the continent. While France and the US have historically established several cultural institutes in Africa (Trines, 2019), China's efforts are predominantly university-centric, highlighting a strategic emphasis on higher education.

**Table 4.1:** Confucius Institutes in Selected African Universities, 2013–2023

Country	University	Location	Year
Angola	Agostinho Neto University	Luanda	2015
Cape Verde	University of Cabo Verde	Praia	2015
Chad	University of N'Djamena	N'Djamena	2019
Comoros	University of Comoros	Moroni	2018
Democratic Republic of Congo	Diplomatic University of DR of Congo	Kinshasa	2017
Equatorial Guinea	National University of Equatorial Guinea	Malabo	2014
Ethiopia	Addis Ababa University	Addis Ababa	2013
Gabon	Omar Bongo University	Libreville	2017
Ghana	University of Ghana	Accra	2013
Guinea	Gamal Abdel Nasser University of Conakry	Conakry	2017

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Country	University	Location	Year
Côte d'Ivoire	Univ. of Felix Houphouette-Boigny	Abidjan	2015
Kenya	Moi University	Eldoret	2014
Madagascar	University of Toamasina	Toamasina	2014
Malawi	University of Malawi	Lilongwe	2013
Mauritania	Nouakchott University	Nouakchott	2018
Mauritius	University of Mauritius	Port Louis	2015
Morocco	Abdelmalek Essaadi University	Tangier	2016
Namibia	University of Namibia	Windhoek	2013
Republic of Congo	Marien Ngouabi University	Brazzaville	2013
Seychelles	University of Seychelles	Victoria	2015
South Africa	University of Johannesburg	Johannesburg	2014
	University of Western Cape	Cape Town	2018
Tanzania	University of Dodoma	Dodoma	2013
The Gambia	University of the Gambia	Banjul	2017
Tunisia	University of Carthage	Tunis	2018
Uganda	Makerere University	Kampala	2014

*Source: Adapted from: Oshodi (2023:220-221)*

Another layer in Africa-China studies was the presentation of narratives, hence the Africa-China Reporting Project at the University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa (van Wyk, 2019). This project aimed to refine the quality of journalistic output on the interactions between Africa and China, providing resources and training to that end. The Africa-China Reporting Project partners with other media organisations such as The China-Global South Project and the China-Africa, Africa-China Research Network to provide training for African journalists and mentor graduate students on the reporting and writing on pertinent issues in sustainable development (Africa-China Reporting Project, 2019).

China's path in Africa's HE has not been confined to language and culture; it has broadened to include other sectors like construction, agriculture, and information and communication technology (ICT). This diversification of engagement is evidenced by landmark projects across several universities. For instance, a \$40 million university library funded at the University of Dar es Salaam was completed in 2018, and the Marien Ngouabi University library in the Republic of Congo with a dedicated Chinese section (Yang, 2018). Such projects, alongside the construction of the Malawi University of Science and Technology and a library at Lagos State University by Chinese entities, exemplify the tangible assets of this partnership (Oshodi, 2023). Similarly, Ghana and Nigeria represent contemporary milestones in Africa-China relations in infrastructural upgrades in higher education. They both host Chinese-built universities, with Ghana's first phase of the University for Health and Allied Studies completed in 2015 with the second phase ongoing at \$60 million. In Nigeria, a \$50 million Chinese-built Federal University of Transportation was presented as a gift in 2020 by the China Civil Engineering Construction Corporation (Oshodi et al., 2022).

Moreover, Chinese ICT firms, most notably Huawei and Zhongxing Telecom Equipment (ZTE), have established a major presence in African universities through collaborations in software technology, infrastructure, training, and certification programmes. For instance, Huawei has engaged in partnerships with South African universities, notably launching a fifth-generation (5G) course for postgraduate ICT students at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) and the University of Pretoria. Huawei presented this initiative, which started in 2019, as the company's commitment to advancing the technological capabilities of future African ICT professionals (Abubakar, 2019). China's ZTE has, since 2018, been providing annual financial assistance to South Africa's Wits University students facing economic challenges, enabling them to continue their education. Earlier, in 2016, ZTE undertook the construction of the Ethiopian Education and Research Network (EthERNET) at a cost of \$50 million. This network interlinks 36 public

universities across Ethiopia, with the aim of facilitating educational exchanges and promoting a collaborative academic environment (Oshodi, 2023).

Perhaps, the improvements in infrastructure have contributed to African universities establishing dedicated programmes and centres focused on Chinese studies and Africa–China relations (See Table 4.2). The Sino–Africa Joint Research Centre in Kenya serves as a site for scientific collaborations. The University of Ghana’s Centre for Asian Studies (CAS), with Director Lloyd Amoah, trained in Wuhan University in China, has the goal to be a premier centre for innovative research, training and exchange programmes in African and Asian studies. Other centres include the Institute for Nigeria–China Development Studies at the University of Lagos and the Centre for Africa–China Studies at South Africa’s University of Johannesburg.

**Table 4.2:** Africa and China focused research centres in Selected African Universities

<b>Institutions</b>	<b>Location/Country</b>	<b>Year</b>
Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology: Sino–Africa Joint Research Centre, Chinese Academy of Sciences (SAJOREC–CAS)	Juja, Kiambu County, Kenya	2013
University of Botswana: Chinese Studies Programme	Gaborone, Botswana	2013
University of Dar es Salaam: Centre for Chinese Studies (CCS)	Dar es Salaam, Tanzania	2018
University of Ghana: Centre for Asian Studies (CAS)	Accra, Ghana	2015
University of Johannesburg: Centre for Africa–China Studies (CACS)	Johannesburg, South Africa	2018
University of Lagos: Nigeria–China Institute of Development Studies	Lagos, Nigeria	2018
University of Nairobi	Nairobi, Kenya	1970
University of the Witwatersrand: Africa–China Reporting Project (ACRP)	Johannesburg, South Africa	2013

<b>Institutions</b>	<b>Location/Country</b>	<b>Year</b>
University of the Witwatersrand: African Centre for the Study of the United States (ACSUS)	Johannesburg, South Africa	2018

*Source: Adapted from Bolin et al. (2022)*

One-on-one institutional innovative collaborations have also emerged, like the joint degree programme between Kumasi Technical University in Ghana and Weifang Vocational College in China, offering students a blend of local and international educational and professional experience in Mechanical Engineering and Building Technology. The University of Botswana and Moi University in Kenya have partnered with Chinese institutions to facilitate student exchanges and convene symposiums (Oshodi, 2023). Conferences and round-tables on Africa-China relations have become common events on African campuses, from the China-Africa Round-table at Wits University to the China-Africa Research Network's conferences in Accra and Nairobi. These academic interactions solidify the role of African universities as critical participants in the discourse on China and position them as key locations for Africa-China studies.

Africa-China studies in Africa are not limited to universities. Building on the diverse array of universities contributing to the study of China-Africa relations, in 2013 the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, under the Think Tank 10 + 10 Partnership Plan, announced a plan to establish sixteen think-tanks, evenly split between Africa and China. Despite some of these institutions lacking dedicated programmes or departments focused on China-Africa studies, affiliated researchers have published on the subject. This initiative, akin to the China-Africa Think Tanks Forum, appears to be strategically aimed at strengthening elite networks and fostering high-level discussions between Chinese and African scholars and policymakers (Bolin et al., 2022).

Thus, there is an increasing number of research centres, non-profit organisations, and various non-academic institutions that are actively involved in generating and

disseminating knowledge on the China–Africa dynamic. As illustrated in Table 4.3, some of these entities, including think-tanks and research centres, have emerged post-2012.

**Table 4.3:** Africa–China think-tanks, and research centres in selected African countries

Institute/Centre	Location/Country	Year
Africa Policy Institute: China Africa Centre (API-CAC)	Nairobi, Kenya	2013
Afro-Sino Centre of International Relations (ASCIR)	Accra, Ghana	2021
Collective for the Renewal of Africa (CORA)	Dakar, Senegal	2020
South African Institute of International Affairs (SAIIA)	Johannesburg, South Africa	1934
Southern African Research and Documentation Centre (SARDC)	Harare, Zimbabwe	1985
The Africa–China Centre for Policy and Advisory (ACCPA)	Accra, Ghana	2022

Source: Adapted from Bolin et al. (2022:56–60)

Amongst the newer additions is the Africa–China Centre for Policy and Advisory (ACCPA), based in Ghana. They conduct in-depth analyses, generate policy recommendations, and foster dialogue between African and Chinese stakeholders. These institutions can decolonise stereotypes by challenging simplistic narratives and highlighting the complexity and agency within Africa–China relations. However, if their funding and research agenda are heavily influenced by Chinese interests, they might perpetuate stereotypes by promoting a one-dimensional view that prioritises Chinese interests and perspectives.

There are parallel initiatives in China on African studies. Several studies have shown that China, with a relatively advanced capacity for examining its relations with Africa, has therefore been building and extending the foundation on knowledge in Africa since the Cold War era (Carayannis & Olin, 2012; Bolin et al., 2022). The FOCAC 2009 partnership

agreement, China's 20+20 Cooperation Plan, also engendered significant changes in the academic landscape in China. Prestigious Chinese universities, such as Peking University, East China Normal University, and Jilin University, have forged partnerships with African universities. These centres, which include Peking University's Centre for African Studies, Zhejiang Normal University's Centre for African Education Studies, and Tianjin University of Technology and Education's Centre for African Vocational Education Studies, have made notable contributions to the scholarly examination of Africa from a Chinese perspective (Bolin et al., 2022). This growth has mirrored China's strategic engagement with Africa, coupled with China-based networks and institutions that conduct research on Africa. Table 4.4 shows a selected list of research centres and institutions in China involved in producing knowledge and insights on China-Africa engagement.

**Table 4.4:** Selected China-based Africa focused university, research centres and institutions

University	Centre and Location	Year
Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS)	Institute of West-Asian and African Studies (IWAAS) (Beijing)	1998
China Foreign Affairs University (CFAU)	Centre of African Studies	2009
Communication University of China	African Communication Research Centre (Beijing)	2012
Jinan University	Centre of African Studies (Jinan, Shandong)	2010
Nanjing University	Research Centre of African Studies (Nanjing, Jiangsu)	1964
Peking University	Centre for African Studies (Beijing)	1998
Shanghai Normal University	Centre for African Studies (Shanghai)	1998
Yunnan University	Centre of African Studies (Kunming, Yunnan)	2007
Zhejiang Agriculture and Forestry University	Centre for China-Africa Agriculture and Forestry Research (Hangzhou, Zhejiang)	2012

University	Centre and Location	Year
Zhejiang Normal University (ZJNU)	Institute of African Studies (IASZNU) (Jinhua, Zhejiang)	2007

*Source: Adapted from Bolin et al. (2022)*

The foregoing, based on knowledge production and teaching about Africa, has implications for institutional capacity, the nature of the partnership and teaching and learning dimensions of Africa in China and vice versa. These and other analytical questions are addressed in the next section.

### **Decolonising Knowledge Production and Teaching About Africa: An Analysis**

Decolonising knowledge production and teaching about Africa aims to reduce misconceptions and stereotypes. This process involves addressing several critical issues. Three main inter-related factors will be discussed: the institutional capacity of African universities and the prospects of producing decolonised knowledge, the politics of knowledge production in a context of positionality and agency, and finally the practical implications for teaching about Africa in an interdisciplinary framework. Institutional capacity is about the attainment of goals and thus it is performance oriented. One noticeable theme to augment institutional capacity and aid the transformation of African universities is technology and innovation (Agbebi, 2018; Ehizuelen, 2018). The assumption is that technology would elevate both knowledge production, teaching and learning systems. As stated earlier, Chinese ICT companies, Huawei and ZTE, have been active partners in African HE. The challenge is that technology can become either an enabling or constraining variable in digital learning systems (Puplampu & Mugo, 2020). The Chinese ICT companies not only provided infrastructural support, for example, donation of computers and software, to African universities, but they also established training centres and certification programmes, ostensibly, to address the human capacity development problems in Africa.

Two emerging dynamic relations can be identified. First, the donation of computers per se does not automatically translate into institutional capacity. The role of the African academic to engage with the technology becomes an integral part of knowledge production and the subsequent teaching and learning experience. The neoliberal edit of a minimal role of the state, notwithstanding, the African state has to reengage and rethink its relationship with African universities, improve the heavy teaching loads, inadequate compensation so that the African academic can utilise digitalisation in knowledge production about the African condition. The second dynamic is that the training centres built by Chinese ICTs would be geared towards the production of skilled labour or human capital for the company's national operations. This is because the training centres will only augment the skills of labour for workers in, for example, Huawei and other in-country information technology (IT) companies. While the employment opportunities of those working in the IT field will contribute to poverty alleviation, the argument is the absence of any concerted link between the infrastructural support and knowledge production and teaching about Africa. Put differently, the curriculum that will inform the training centres would not necessarily create knowledge for addressing misconceptions about Africa.

The fundamental problem is that partnerships, including Africa-China relations, are not problem-free. For example, as Table 4.3 shows, there is a geographical concentration of the knowledge production centres around the major cities in which many universities and research centres are located. The concentration of universities and research centres in major cities, such as Accra and Nairobi, can only give rise to urban clusters and with the knowledge created being disjointed from the wider social environment, the ability of the ensuing knowledge to transform society would be minimal. Furthermore, there is a growing spatial distribution of China-focused institutions across Africa, yet there seems to be minimal presence of such growth in North African and Francophone countries. To produce a better knowledge about Africa, the spread of learning or research centres requires representation

in all regions of the continent. The contention is the need for institutional capacity for knowledge production and teaching to benefit the larger African community (Hodzi & Amoah, 2023; Bolin et al., 2022).

Another related difficulty when it comes to capacity and sustainability of institutions is the nature and terms of the collaborative research programmes as well as bureaucratic politics. African universities actively engage in collaborative research projects with Chinese institutions and experts. These projects often involve joint research teams, addressing pertinent issues such as sustainable development, technology transfer, and environmental issues. One notable collaborative research initiative, between the Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology (JKUAT) and the Chinese Academy of Sciences, focusing on renewable energy solutions in Africa, showcases the practical implications of academic collaboration in addressing shared challenges. In an analysis of this partnership, Puplampu and Mugo (2023) draw attention to the aid package that the Government of Japan also offered to JKUAT, arguing that the partnership that Japan forged with JKUAT, from the perspective of institutional capacity, was different from the one that China extended to universities in Ghana and other African countries.

Considering the different types of institutions involved in Africa-China relations, both on the continent and in China, the problem of bureaucratic politics cannot be ruled out. This is because institutions in both places will be vying for resources to support their knowledge production work. In such a context, the problem of institutional turf and the associated struggle for resources will be worsened by the absence of any integrative approach to institutional performance. These problems are largely magnified in the case of the African countries, especially in the case of university-based institutions. At issue is the fact that many African universities are handicapped with the lack of long-term funding for both infrastructure and other learning needs of their institutions. Thus, the donor country will always be in the driver's seat, setting the parameters of the aid package for the recipient country. That means that the implied win-win ethos of China's role in African universities is subject to

severe theoretical and empirical barriers when it comes to knowledge production and teaching about Africa (Fasan, 2021; Anshan, 2005).

Perhaps the above constraints and the need to balance the terms of engagement account for the ensuing floodgates of departments and centres in China devoted to studying Africa from an interdisciplinary perspective (Education, Geography, History, Law, and Political Studies) (Table 4.4). While notable, the opening of the Chinese Association of African Studies and the Chinese Society of African Historical Studies in 1979 and 1980 respectively, provide an important historical framework for studying Africa in China (Anshan, 2005). The expanding interest in African studies within China, and the relatively new status of this field compared to Western-centric studies, offers Chinese institutions and scholars with unique opportunities to know and understand Africa. Despite this progress in African studies in China, the field faces several challenges, including the centralised nature of the Chinese higher education system, which imposes a top-down approach to academic planning and a shortcoming for the long-term sustainability of research projects.

The centralised control of higher education in China significantly influences the direction and capacity for African studies. All academic institutions, from those directly managed by the central government like the Institute of West Asian and African Studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), to prestigious universities such as Peking University and Fudan University, follow directives from their respective ministries. This centralised approach, strengthened under Xi Jinping, aims to consolidate African studies within a think-tank model, ensuring that the discipline aligns closely with the state's foreign policy objectives. Consequently, the capacity for African studies in China is deeply intertwined with governmental priorities, shaping the research focus and the very essence of the field in alignment with China's foreign policy strategies (Bolin et al., 2022). The argument is that both African and Chinese universities will experience difficulties when it comes to knowledge production on and about Africa.

The second analytical argument is the politics of knowledge production in an era of globalisation of HE relative to positionality and agency (van Hoeymissen, 2021; Zheng et al., 2021). Because of the historical origins of African universities, contemporary knowledge production in and about Africa, has always privileged Western knowledge (Ayandele & Oriola, 2023). As Afolabi (2020:95) rightfully states, any argument that colonisation “has no effect on the sociology of knowledge is to ignore the enforced knowledge acquisition mandated by the colonial authorities. The very basis of such ignorance, doubt and argument, especially by African academics, shows the success of the embedded liberal ideology and knowledge entrapment of colonialism.” Indeed, colonialism has created power imbalances which continue to inform the discourse on who produces what knowledge about Africa and the utilisation of such knowledge.

Thus, postcolonial African universities have been unable to decolonise the knowledge production systems on the continent, a failure that should not solely be attributed to the lack of infrastructure capacity in African universities, since lack of infrastructure cannot be equated to lack of mental capacity of the African academic (Fasan, 2021). The persistence of these challenges is also caused by the complexities of agency within knowledge production institutions. In the post-apartheid era, the Government of South Africa set out to improve equity in learning outcomes using technology in teaching and learning with connectivity speeds like European universities (Czerniewicz et al., 2014; Lwoga, 2012). Yet, students at the University of Cape Town were at the forefront of struggles to decolonise the curriculum (Lockett, 2016). Khalema et al. (2023), in great detail, used a decolonial framework to analyse the transformation of South African universities in a post-apartheid era and their findings offer a cautionary tale about the challenges of producing transformative universities even with clearly enunciated national policies on decolonialisation as a pathway to improve knowledge production and student learning. An impactful and decolonised production of knowledge needs to focus on rethinking how to translate historical processes into contemporary forms of teaching and learning. The overriding

lesson is that an “appropriate infrastructure, [and policies] though necessary, [are] not enough to deepen student learning” (Puplampu & Mugo, 2020:158).

Another crucial issue is recognising that China-focused centres in Africa are at the forefront of creating and integrating cultural knowledge about Africa-China relations into their academic programmes (Cheng, 2021). These Africa-China studies include courses and degree programmes that specifically address the historical, economic, political, and cultural dimensions of Africa-China interactions. For instance, the Centre for Asian Studies and the Department of Political Science at the University of Ghana offer modules on Africa-China relations within their international relations curriculum, providing students with a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics between Africa and China. Similar efforts are evident in the curriculum at the University of Johannesburg’s Centre for Africa-China Studies. These initiatives mark a promising beginning; if sustained and expanded, they have the potential to significantly enhance academic and cultural understanding, fostering more nuanced and informed perspectives on Africa-China relations.

Research produced by African universities on Africa-China relations can demonstrate agency and inform knowledge for public policy. Scholars from these institutions serve as valuable experts, providing insights that can influence government policies and public perceptions. The work of the Centre for Chinese Studies at the University of Dar es Salaam has influenced Tanzania’s foreign policy towards China, with research findings contributing to a more informed approach to diplomatic and economic engagements (Christopher, 2023). While there has been significant expansion in Africa-China knowledge exchange and collaborative partnerships, the landscape is complex and with challenges. For example, if Africa-based universities and research centres incorporate Chinese studies into their curricula, course offerings on Chinese language, culture and politics, these institutions can aim to present a comprehensive understanding of China. Such an approach can help to decolonise stereotypes

by equipping African students and scholars with the knowledge to engage with China on equal terms.

However, if these Africa-based programmes rely too heavily on Chinese perspectives and resources without a critical engagement, that may also inadvertently reinforce stereotypes of African dependency and lack of intellectual autonomy. While new research is being produced, it appears that some existing institutions lack active research or knowledge producing capabilities and just exist in name and on paper. Persistent obstacles such as funding limitations, the need for stronger connections between experts and government, and difficulties in integrating scholars with expertise in Africa-China relations or experience from Chinese universities and research centres into African academic institutions can hinder progress.

The third and final analytical theme is the implications of teaching and learning about Africa in an interdisciplinary framework in both Africa, China and beyond. On one hand, it is not surprising to note that studies about Africa and China have been approached from interdisciplinary perspectives. Thus, for example, a review of a course of the University of Johannesburg on The International Political Economy of Africa-China Relations, rightfully so, placed a significant focus on political and economic concerns. However, student learning, to be sustainable, must transcend disciplinary boundaries (Zezeza, 2006). That calls for new models of engagement between academics and learners in teaching and learning about Africa and China. One useful model will be to adopt a team-teaching approach in which different models of the course are presented by different experts, but in an integrated, collaborative, and coherent manner. The suggested model is a pragmatic approach, since it would be anchored by disruptive technology and digitalisation, issues that are central in the current educational landscape in several African universities.

On the other hand, a recurring question in Africa-China relations is which African actors are “spoken *of* or spoken *for*” (Mohan, 2013:1257, italics in original) and how that translates to the student experience (van Hoeymissen, 2021).

How can students as learners exercise agency in their learning experiences on Africa and China and not disengage from a pedagogical point of view when educators present knowledge that does not relate to their social context and experiences? The fundamental problem is the changing role of the state in funding African universities and the move by many universities to focus on knowledge areas that are amenable to quantitative performance indicators. The result is that knowledge areas that can contribute to a balanced understanding of the African condition, especially in the human and social sciences are the first to experience significant restructuring. However, the role of Confucius Institutes (Table 4.1) in several African universities is a reminder to have an equally robust cultural orientation in African universities. That is one way in which intercultural communication and understanding can be improved when it comes to learning about both Africa and China. The issue is not only what African universities must do, but the role of notable think-tanks in knowledge production about the African condition.

Some of the think-tanks shown in Table 4.3, as non-academic entities, in the powerful sense of the term, do have lines of support within Africa-China relations, and some experts in these think-tanks take on academic teaching in African universities. For example, the Africa-China Centre for Policy and Advisory (ACCPA) based in Accra has officers who were trained in universities in China. While that can be an asset, if ACCPA's research outputs focus on mainly the positive aspects of the Belt and Road Initiative in Africa, it can be seen as having an uncritical pro-China orientation (Frimpong & Tedeku, 2023). This highlights the need to critically assess the perspectives and agency of think-tanks, considering the potential influence of their funding sources on their knowledge claims (Mbadlanyana et al., 2011).

## **Policy Directions and Conclusion**

This chapter examined the complexities in knowledge production and teaching about Africa against the backdrop of globalisation of higher education and Africa-China relations. While the

relationship between Africa and China is often grounded on a win-win scenario, it is also obvious that discussions about knowledge production and teaching about Africa cannot be neutral and without implicit power dynamics. For African universities, one pathway at addressing the power relations might be to embark upon what Iheka (2023) characterises as new beginnings in the dissemination of knowledge and, by extension, learning about Africa. Such a beginning needs to factor in considerations such as ethics, responsibility, freedom of thought and using knowledge to empower learners and the community at large. Because higher education institutions can play a vital role in knowledge production and teaching about Africa, especially in a decolonised framework, there is need for a new form of relationship between the African state and African academics, especially those working on the continent. Even though the neoliberal globalisation touts the importance of a minimal state, the strides made by the Chinese state means a rethink in the relationship between the African state and African universities, particularly if the goal is to improve institutional capacity.

There are systemic issues in the higher education sector that influence the knowledge production capabilities of the faculty and researchers in African HE. One suggestion is strengthening institutional support in such a way that African governments can enhance funding and institutional support for research centres dedicated to both Africa-China studies and other area studies to ensure sustainability and independence. A renewed interest in developing and encouraging multidisciplinary approaches and programmes that integrate Political Science, Economics, Sociology, and language studies is needed to provide comprehensive insights into Africa-China relations. That means building research networks in a continental and regional framework to connect researchers, facilitate knowledge exchange, and disseminate research findings. Hence, the need to foster public-private partnerships between academic institutions and private sector entities interested in Africa-China relations to diversify funding sources should be part of the mix of options. Finally,

since larger changes from a geopolitical sphere are at stake, any attempt at addressing issues emanating from this study call for a “sustained and dynamic capital accumulation - development - in the developing world, ... that does not conform to neoliberal prescriptions [even though] ... any shifts away from neoliberalism are likely to have significant domestic and international consequences” (Kiely, 2007). Herein lies the importance of pursuing knowledge production based on a decolonial framework that also stresses the value of positionality and agency. It is through such a paradigm that knowledge production and teaching about Africa, in relation to China, can be better situated and actualised.

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## Part II

### Anti-Misconception Pedagogies, and Indigenous Knowledges







## Chapter 5

# Teaching Dis/courses about Africa: Epistemic Reflections and Active Pedagogies in Humanities Education

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### Introduction

In this chapter, we embark on a comprehensive exploration of epistemological observations using the Flipped Classroom model to contest misconceptions about Africa. Our study examines the impact of this active pedagogical approach on students' academic performance in South Africa and Nigeria. Analysing the comparative epistemic reflections of implementing this model in Humanities education allows us to understand its effectiveness in diverse educational contexts. The shared reflections draw on experiences with the Flipped Classroom model in first-year Literary Studies in English modules at Rhodes University in South Africa and Communication in English modules at Chrisland University in Nigeria. These insights are grounded in practical application and detailed analysis of how the Flipped Classroom model can challenge predominant stereotypes about Africa and enhance students' understanding of African literature and culture.

The faculties of Humanities at Rhodes and Chrisland Universities comprise students from various disciplines, including Arts (Fine Art, Drama and Music), Development Studies, Journalism and Media Studies, Literature, Linguistics, History, Political Science, Psychology, Philosophy, and Sociology. While Humanities disciplines are essential for fostering critical thinking, cultural awareness, and ethical understanding, the way these fields of study are currently taught and structured in many educational institutions in Africa is deeply flawed (Afolayan et al., 2021). The chapter argues that prevailing traditional didactic teaching methods, where students are passive recipients of information and the lecturer dominates the instructional process, are inadequate for addressing the complex realities of contemporary Africa. Our teaching methods move away from the hierarchical lecturer–student dynamics that promote rote memorisation, and focusing on experiential learning.

Notably, traditional teaching approaches fail to engage students actively or develop their critical thinking skills essential for understanding and addressing Africa’s multifaceted challenges. We recommend an urgent shift from traditional didactic methods to innovative and comparative student-centric approaches that utilise the digital age’s vast informational resources. This transformation enhances the relevance of Humanities subjects and empowers students to challenge prevailing stereotypes and misconceptions about Africa and its population. At the beginning of the semester, we instruct students to choose pre-class material from a wide array of textual sources and various mediums, including films, documentaries, memes, blogs, vlogs, newspaper articles, magazines, cartoons, news broadcasting channels (television and radio) and social media. The eclectic approach of incorporating multimodal texts that combine visual, auditory and textual elements is essential to demystify stereotypes, myths, and superstitions about Africa and Africans.

Instead of merely focusing on curated information from textbooks and academic journals, we encourage students to find relevant learning material on social media platforms. Students

are tasked with interrogating the motivations behind hackneyed stereotypes about Africa and Africans in different sources and made to assess the implications of these portrayals. Hence, we have considered how the historical, social, and political contexts influence how African cultures and identities are depicted. We argue that such a transition from passive transmission of information to active involvement is the hallmark of effective learning. In our teaching, we give precedence to student-centric and active pedagogies, specifically the Self-Mirror Method, Media-Assisted Method, and African-Author-Philosophy Method, all within the Flipped Classroom model. Improvising our application of flipped learning facilitates collaborative and experiential learning, which is vital for thoroughly analysing historical events, cultural representations, and contemporary issues through a decolonial lens.

Additionally, through a Flipped Classroom setting, students engage with a wide range of representations, including those that might be marginalised or misrepresented in mainstream media. During lectures, students would compare and share their findings from these diverse sources, establishing links with the primary texts that are studied in the course. This comparative analysis helps to identify departures and overtures in the stereotypes of Africa. Juxtaposing social media narratives with traditional primary texts, enables students to discern how contemporary depictions align with or diverge from historical and cultural realities. The chapter will discuss the active learning strategies employed in the Flipped Classroom, including pre-class reading assignments, in-class discussions, tutorial group activities, and interactive projects.

With regard to the audience, we aim to objectively examine the pedagogical opportunities and shared challenges of teaching undergraduate Humanities courses in tertiary institutions in South Africa and Nigeria. The epistemic reflections and Flipped Classroom pedagogy that we advocate are not only pertinent to the teaching of literature but also relevant to other disciplines such as political science and development studies. Addressing these broader academic contexts emphasises the versatility and transformative potential of these pedagogical strategies, while

also arguing for their widespread adoption to enhance student engagement and learning outcomes across diverse fields of study.

### **Aligning Culturally Responsive Teaching with Demographic-Sensitive Course Content**

We have been teaching English 1, which is an introductory course, at Rhodes University and Chrisland University for more than three years. The first-year course is structured into semester-long modules: ENG 101: Introduction to Genre and Academic Writing and ENG 102: Postcolonial Literature and Communication in English 101 and 102, respectively. This curriculum explicitly aims to confront and dismantle misconceptions about Africa in the twenty-first century. Employing the Flipped Classroom model, we actively immerse students in an interpretive analysis of the complex social, cultural, and historical contexts that frame the misrepresentation of Africa. At Rhodes University, the English degree programme allocates 40% of its coursework to African literature, primarily concentrated in the first year, with additional African literature courses available as electives in the second and third years. In contrast, Chrisland University allocates 50% of its coursework to African literature in the second semester of the first year, with the remaining 50% dedicated to courses in writing, linguistics, cultural studies, and communication that allow for a broader exploration of related disciplines.

Our research questions the epistemic valence caused by the lecturer-centric methods of pedagogy which tend to limit students' creativity and knowledge experience. We are aware that our cultural backgrounds and identities play a significant role in shaping our approach to teaching and research. As educators in South Africa and Nigeria, we bring our own experiences and understandings of African culture and literature into the classroom. This cultural context informs the selection of texts, the framing of discussions, and the interpretation of literary works. It also affects how we perceive and address

the diverse cultural identities of our students. The class sizes and student demographics at Rhodes University and Chrisland University highlight significant disparities that necessitate tailored approaches to instruction and curriculum development. At Rhodes University, class sizes fluctuate from 250 to 400 students, presenting challenges and opportunities for student interaction and instructional quality.

Likewise, Chrisland University maintains large class sizes, typically with about 350 to 400 students. On one hand, the demographics of students at Rhodes University, comprising 84% historically disadvantaged black students (including local and international students from various African countries such as Zimbabwe, Zambia, Lesotho, Swaziland, Botswana, Malawi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda and Namibia), 8% coloured, 6% white, and 2% Indian, highlight a heterogenous and multicultural student body. On the other hand, students at Chrisland University are predominantly black and hail from different ethnic backgrounds which brings a different dimension of diversity within the student population.

The teaching approach at Rhodes University consists of eight 45-minute lectures per week, divided into three sessions, followed by six weekly 45-minute tutorials with each small group comprising 15 students. The lectures and tutorials are ostensibly designed to blend direct instruction with interactive learning. However, such a structure does not fully exploit the potential for active student engagement and critical thinking. In stark contrast, Chrisland University maintains larger size classes, typically ranging from 150 to 200 students. These classes are conducted through hourly sessions or groups of two with a two-hour lecture per week cumulating into a total lecture-hour of 24 in a semester. Even so, the large class sizes and extended lecture periods at Chrisland University sometimes compromise the intimacy of learning. The hourly lecture format, without an accompanying tutorial session, fails to capitalise on the prospect for active learning and critical analysis that a segmented instructional approach could make available. The Flipped Classroom model provides a strategic solution to the

instructional challenges faced by both Rhodes University and Chrisland University.

To address these challenges, we employed a two-pronged approach. Firstly, we restructured our class time to prioritise active learning and collaboration. Such a move also propelled us to redesign the course content and ensure it bolsters educational outcomes. Secondly, we utilised a combination of observational methods, including self-reflection journals, direct observation during class, and focus group discussions, to assess the Flipped Classroom's impact on student learning and participation in South Africa and Nigeria. These observational methods were used over a period of three years (2021 to 2023) to determine whether our pedagogical strategies are effective and responsive to students' needs in Humanities education. Furthermore, our epistemic reflections are firmly guided by Paulo Freire's (2005) theorisation of Dialogic Education and Critical Pedagogy. Within this theoretical framework, we conduct interdisciplinary discussions that address the enduring consequences of silenced narratives, challenge power structures, advance social justice, and promote a nuanced understanding of Africa and its global position.

## **Historical Context and Thoughts on African Epistemic Emancipation**

There is no denying that variegated understandings of Africa abound in Humanities education. The intrinsic undercurrent shaping contemporary African epistemic consciousness presupposes a deliberate awareness of African colonial history, its enduring legacies of coloniality, and the ideological and policy hegemony that continue to affect the present. In this context, epistemic reflections pertain to the examination of the nature and scope of knowledge within the Humanities domain, while active pedagogies involve engaging students through participatory and hands-on learning methods. The first step towards epistemic decolonisation in Africa is for African instructors to candidly accept the fact that the Eurocentric epistemic model which is currently being used in many African

learning institutions is essentially problematic and ideologically slanted to the detriment of Africa.

This realisation will lead to the next step which draws from Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's (1994) concept of "decolonising the mind". Although Thiong'o (1994) makes his decolonisation argument from the standpoint of linguistic emancipation in the production of literary works, the self-awareness that shapes the ideation needs to be embraced and channelled towards a systematic approach with a non-standalone poise. It is essential to critique the dominating influence of Western ways of knowing and subjugation (Lopez & Rugano, 2018). This is important because "no single indigenous experience dominate[s] other perspectives, no one heritage informs it, and no two heritages produce the same knowledge" (Battiste, 2013:616). Correspondingly, Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2021:2) contends that merely deconstructing Western scholarship is insufficient. Therefore, we should harness the power of 'counter-stories' as potent forms of resistance and alternative futures.

The colonial project envisioned universities as tools for the conquest and domination of the colonised societies. These institutions were never neutral but strategically established to serve the interests of the colonial powers by providing the kind of education that aligned with their cultural, economic, and administrative objectives of social control. The curriculum, administrative structure, and overall ethos of these universities were designed to perpetuate the colonial narrative and reinforce the existing power dynamics. Since the problem is intrinsically tied to a hegemonic mindset, it is important that African educators in the Humanities come up with epistemic methods that counter the perpetuating Eurocentric mindset of global cultural dominance. An inclusive decolonialised approach, if deployed in tertiary education, could lead to the birth of what could be called epistemic hybridity.

The counteracting techniques will gradually develop a broader self-awareness and ultimately lead to what Dorothy Kertzner Lipsky & Alan Gartner (1999:12) call inclusive education. According to them, inclusive education comes from

a democratic culture, a consciousness which is “in recognition of the limits of our understanding, and particularly of the constraints of our own cultural and ideological perspectives”. Our use of the term ‘colonialism’ extends beyond geographical, political and financial domains to encompass knowledge production and critiques of thought leadership. Achille Mbembe (2015) criticises how Western epistemologies are legitimised and presented as the norm in African universities. We contend that privileging Western perspectives, theories, and paradigms has considerable influence on academic curricula but also permeates global conversations, shaping how issues in literature and Media Studies are framed and understood.

In our teaching, we first demonstrate to our students what we expect them to do when critiquing the negative portrayal of Africa in Western media and literature. The rationale for this exercise is to highlight how political rhetoric is a pervasive issue that contributes to harmful stereotypes and misperceptions about the continent. For instance, we project a PowerPoint slide of the famous photograph taken by Kevin Carter of a vulture perched near an emaciated young girl during the famine in Sudan in 1993 to show how it was used to selectively focus on extreme suffering. We then explain to students how Carter’s image portrays Africans as passive victims lacking agency and resilience to address their challenges. Furthermore, we ask students to objectively assess the underlying structural issues that are deliberately glossed over in Carter’s photograph, which perpetuate a superficial understanding of the continent’s challenges.

We also use an excerpt from the American-based *Economist* Magazine, which ran a headline declaring “Hopeless Africa” in the year 2000 (Economist, 2000) and ask students to draw connections with the negative sentiments echoed by President Donald Trump in 2018 when he referred to African countries as “shitholes” (Vitali et al., 2018). We explain how such sweeping generalisations and affronts create an “us versus them” mentality informed by a Western gaze. The focus here is to demonstrate how Carter’s photograph, the *Economist* headline, and Trump’s rhetoric stem from preconceived

notions that reflect lingering post-colonial stereotypes. These portrayals reinforce an inaccurate one-dimensional view of the continent. To help students to understand how stereotypes work, we assign tutorial work focusing on a close reading of Binyavanga Wainaina's (2005) satirical essay *How to Write About Africa* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's (2009) impactful TED Talk titled *The Danger of a Single Story*. This exercise deepens their awareness of misconceptions about Africa, particularly the representation of Africa as a monolithic entity that is commonly mistaken for a single country with a 'single story.'

The lesson objectives are twofold. First, students must critically interrogate the notions of 'historical truths' to highlight the dangers of relying on a singular narrative to represent a continent with diverse cultures. Second, they must demonstrate how language and communication innately normalise prejudiced attitudes, perpetuate historical legacies, and reinforce colonial power structures. According to Foucault (1975:30), each society establishes its own "regime of truth" encompassing the types of discourse that it considers truthful, the mechanisms distinguishing true statements from the false ones, and the status of those responsible for defining truth. Given this backdrop, discourses are not static entities but are active subjects that shape and are being shaped by the cultural and historical contexts in which they operate. The understanding here is that discourses reproduce power inequalities and cannot be isolated from the broader cultural and contextual influences that configure them. How students learn and apply knowledge is deeply connected to the discourses prevalent in their academic environment. Moreover, educational discourses are particularly relevant in the context of anti-misconception pedagogies, where the goal is to challenge and dispel myths, stereotypes and fallacies. To teach courses about Africa without misinforming students, educators must be intentional in incorporating anti-misconception pedagogies.

## **Reading between Cultures: Towards a Decolonised Humanities Curriculum**

The imperative to decolonise Humanities curricula at Rhodes University and Chrisland University represents a crucial step towards developing relevant educational experience for students. Both institutions face significant challenges and opportunities in addressing the legacy of Western-centric education and promoting a curriculum that reflects the diverse cultural contexts of their student bodies. This critical argument posits that decolonising the Humanities curriculum is not only necessary but also beneficial for achieving educational equity and cultural relevance in higher education. Literature as a scholarship is one fluid domain of the Humanities where people pander to various kinds of subjectivities. Literary Studies also holds the power to influence perceptions and challenge assumptions. Moreover, literature functions as a bridge between disciplines, creating interdisciplinary connections that enhance the overall educational experience. However, some of the prescribed texts in the Humanities curriculum inadvertently reinforce stereotypes and limited perspectives about Africa.

An analysis of the curriculum and its implications is crucial for a nuanced understanding of African identities. For instance, certain Western writers, such as Joseph Conrad, Enid Blyton, Rudyard Kipling and Karen Blixen, have faced severe accusations of veiling their racist biases in literary works through elusive metaphors and hurtful innuendos. Moreover, this body of work by Western writers collectively forms what Valentin-Yves Mudimbe (1994:ix) refers to as the “colonial library.” Its primary objective was to facilitate the understanding and exoticising of Africa, reflecting the power dynamics and imperialistic ambitions of the late nineteenth-century colonial enterprise. At its core, the concept of the ‘colonial library’ highlights the deliberate construction of knowledge aimed at reinforcing hierarchical relationships between the coloniser and the colonised.

Despite the potential psychological impact of Eurocentric texts, the detrimental aspect is the continued use

of educational curricula in many tertiary institutions in Africa that are tailored to Western models. The scale of the problem of Western-centric educational curricula dominating African tertiary institutions is substantial, as evidenced by the research findings of Cross and Govender (2021). Their examination of curriculum content, teaching methods, and educational philosophies in African universities reveals a pervasive influence and prevalence of Western content which not only marginalises Indigenous knowledge systems and cultural expressions but also perpetuates a Eurocentric worldview amongst African students (Cross & Govender, 2021). The university as a space for intellectual exploration and growth becomes a crucible for the synthesis of diverse knowledge systems, stimulating an environment where students confront, question, and broaden their understanding. Saleem Badat (2010) and Carol Bertram (2022) argue that the South African education system still suffers from the burden of Western epistemic hegemony and is in dire need of decolonisation, academic freedom, and gender egalitarianism. This kind of crisis is also present in many other African academic institutions.

Tertiary institutions tend to overlook the influence of socio-economic factors, unequal access to resources, and historical disadvantages that significantly impact learning. For example, financial constraints, and the need for sustained efforts to decolonise the university curriculum ignited a wave of student protests in South Africa, such as the “#RhodesMustFall” in 2015 and “#FeesMustFall” in 2016 (Hodes, 2016). These student-led protest movements questioned the entrenched institutional power structures within South African universities. While these movements achieved considerable milestones, the need for sustained efforts to decolonise education remains a focal point of discussion. It is therefore imperative for educators in the Humanities to adopt teaching methods and theories that consciously promote an African worldview and support cultural emancipation. Embracing these approaches is vital for dismantling entrenched colonial perspectives and cultivating an inclusive and culturally pertinent educational experience.

Although this study does not intend to promote a stand-alone pedagogical philosophy that could ultimately alienate Africans from globalisation, it deliberately encourages a careful conditioning of the mind towards decolonialised assimilation and learning. For this reason, there is an urgent need to re-evaluate and rethink how courses in the Humanities are curated and taught. When designing the Humanities curriculum, educators should factor cultural competency to accurately and ethically represent the Indigenous knowledge systems. Indigenous knowledge systems are embodied and not solely cognitive; they are deeply rooted in physical experiences and sensory perceptions. Western academic traditions, which have markedly influenced global education systems, usually prioritise written documentation and textual analysis. This tradition favours the written word as a structured and “objective” form of knowledge. The preference for the written word over embodied knowledge is evident in Western cultures, which have historically dominated academic discourse. For instance, these cultures place a higher value on written communication forms than on oral or embodied traditions present in other cultures.

However, the richness of African art forms affords unique learning opportunities through its various forms, such as folk tales, praise poetry, Griot performances, songs, chants, rock paintings, and sculptures. We observed that some lessons that incorporate folk tales could be effectively and practically taught through performances. It is noteworthy that the inclusion of canonical novels such as Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* (1958) and Tsitsi Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions* (1988) in many African institutions of higher education, especially at the first-year level, is strategic for several reasons. Unlike some literature that romanticises precolonial and colonial Africa, both novels present a nuanced perspective, showcasing the potential for development within African societies while also acknowledging their imperfections. In doing so, both novels encourage students to question ubiquitous stereotypes and to recognise the importance of counter-narratives in shaping accurate understanding of Africa’s past and present.

Our approach included the use of common literary texts taught in most universities in Africa. As an alternative to focusing solely on the paperback versions, we also allowed students to use audiobooks of the same texts. This enabled us to implement teaching strategies that proved effective across different educational settings. We observed that students at Chrisland University, for example, could better understand the proverbs and oral traditions used by Chinua Achebe, since his novel is steeped in the Igbo pre-colonial worldview. In contrast, students from South Africa, and by extension, Southern Africa, could readily relate to the chiShona customs depicted in Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*. The comparative approach highlighted the diverse cultural contexts within Africa and demonstrated how regional perspectives enhances the understanding of African literature. Incorporating multimedia sources and allowing students to study the material in different formats challenged the traditional focus on written texts and promoted a vibrant and inclusive learning environment.

## **Pedagogical Methods and Epistemic Dynamism in Humanities Education**

The intersection of epistemic reflections and active pedagogies in the Humanities education represents a progressive approach to learning in the digital age, which has transformed how information is disseminated and consumed, with social media platforms playing a central role in either shaping or dismantling stereotypes and fake news (Tian et al., 2023). Studies have shown that the constant barrage of information and the quick, fragmented consumption patterns promoted by social media platforms contribute to shorter attention spans and a reduced ability to focus on longer and complex texts (De Castell & Jenson, 2004; Lee, 2024). This phenomenon directly impacts the reading of literary texts, which traditionally requires prolonged concentration and deep cognitive processing. Recognising that the attention economy of students is deteriorating because of the influx of social media content, we have adapted our teaching strategies accordingly.

Engaging African literature through new media provides valuable insights into colonial and postcolonial politics and development in Africa. Furthermore, reimagining Humanities education should centre on active pedagogies that highlight the importance of re-reading texts and narratives. The Flipped Classroom approach goes beyond conventional methods of interpretation and encourages three objectives. Firstly, a Flipped Classroom disrupts singular, hegemonic narratives that are inherent in dominant discourses. It prompts students to astutely question dominant perspectives astutely, recognising that any narrative to create has multiple layers and dimensions. Secondly, it also encourages multivocality, allowing educators to invite students to explore and recognise the varied viewpoints within a text or narrative. The advantage of multivocality is that it includes voices that have been historically marginalised or silenced. Lastly, it highlights contextual sensitivity, enabling students to consider the intersectionality of identities and experiences.

Understanding the context in which a text or narrative is situated is essential, as interpretations often vary according to historical, cultural, and social conditions. In the complex dynamics of colonial encounters, literary texts produced on both sides of the colonial divide commonly participate in a process of appropriation and inscription, wherein elements of one culture are assimilated and integrated into the narratives of the other. This interplay reflects the entanglements of cultures during periods before and after colonialism, clarifying how various influences and exchanges shape the literary expressions emerging from both the colonisers and the colonised. Therefore, a liberal pedagogy should embrace the negative and positives from both ends.

Paulo Freire (2005) conceptualises education as a transformative and liberatory process that transcends the mere unidirectional flow of information from lecturer to student. Put simply, flawed systems of education treat students as passive receptacles of knowledge. In critiquing the prevalent “banking concept of education,” Freire (2005:247) laments its contribution to a hierarchical and oppressive education system,

hindering the cultivation of critical thinking and debate. This 'banking' approach, inhibits the development of independence, agency and intellectual curiosity. In contrast, an interactive and participatory educational model inspired by Freire's (2005) insights is a foundational element for Dialogic Education and Critical Pedagogy. The aforementioned educational approaches prioritise interaction, participation, and critical thinking as central elements of the learning process.

These active pedagogies align with the constructivist epistemology, which posits lecturers and students as active participants and co-creators of knowledge. We argue that Dialogic Education and Critical Pedagogy cut both ways and build upon the existing understanding and experiences of students. The Flipped Classroom model is a component of the Dialogic Education and Critical Pedagogy because it challenges the traditional pedagogical order that positions the lecturer as the sole repository and dispenser of knowledge. To overcome the limitations of traditional pedagogy, educators and students should participate in a reciprocal process of learning to create an environment where critical thinking is nurtured and reflexivity is encouraged. Global awareness is a necessary mien that every serious contemporary African literature should reflect in its characterisation, topicality, plot, and thematic preoccupation, yet its treatment and ideological engineering should necessarily be African. This is necessary because reading concepts like masculinity, feminism, cultural development, justice, liberty, individualism, sovereignty, democracy, nationalism, and identity in African literature with a Eurocentric lens and binoculars only succeeds in perpetuating the misconceptions of unbridled consumerism, credulity, slothfulness, barbarism, and dependency that the Western world has created about Africa. After coming to terms with the imperatives of the decolonised mind, educators in the Humanities should operationalise Afrocentric nuances of a pedagogical method like the Flipped Classroom. The integration of the Flipped Classroom model in education aligns with the *Ubuntu* philosophy, exemplifying interconnectedness, collaboration, and shared learning experiences. Moreover, the Flipped Classroom model creates

an intersectionality with the Western concept of teamwork, promoting an inclusive and cooperative educational environment. This collaborative or co-learning approach diminishes the performance pressure habitually associated with traditional teaching methods and mitigates the pitfalls of competitiveness and individualism. Dialogic Education and Critical Pedagogy challenge the commonly held notion that universities operate as impartial meritocratic institutions, where success is solely determined by individual effort and ability. Consequently, the focus on personal achievement and success in Humanities education is repeatedly at the expense of acknowledging systemic barriers and inequalities.

The chapter, while emphasising deviations in the teaching of Humanities education, also provides a schema for educators willing to meet their students halfway and improvise. This recognition of divergence from traditional approaches suggests an openness to alternative pedagogies that better identify with the diverse backgrounds and experiences of both educators and students. We submit that utilising epistemic reflections and active learning pedagogies in Humanities education meaningfully enhances students' agency. Flipped learning also works as a critical tool in the ongoing process of evaluating and questioning our teaching methods, especially when confronted with the notion of "sanctioned ignorance," as articulated by Giyatri Spivak (1999:30). What matters most is acknowledging and valuing the diverse backgrounds and experiences that students bring to the learning environment, specifically in the flipped mode of epistemic engineering.

The validation of their lived experiences and socio-dynamics allows students to discuss subjects of personal interest and relate them to course content. This key understanding propels us to share three key insights derived from our alternative teaching and learning methods, which aim to advance an inclusive, diverse, and culturally grounded approach to Humanities education. These insights consist of the Self-Mirror Method, the Media Assisted Method, and the African-Author-Philosophy Method. However, we want to clarify that the epistemic reflections put forth in this discussion

are not intended to be exhaustive; instead, they operate as a foundational starting point for further exploration and development of effective teaching methodologies.

### **Self-Mirror Method (Also, African Mirror Method)**

Firstly, we use the Self-Mirror Method, also known as the African Mirror Method. This model of Flipped Classroom pedagogy aims to help students identify with African literature on a personal level. We begin the class discussion by explaining the metaphor of the mirror to the students, discussing how a mirror reflects one's true appearance, including any blemishes, and how this analogy applies to reading literature. However, self-mirroring as a reading strategy should not be confused with epiphany, which is a narrative technique. In contrast to epiphany, which is a sudden self-awareness or consciousness affecting a character within a story, self-mirroring is a pre-structured reading consciousness that students use to better understand African literature, worldview, politics and history. It should also not be confused with the didactic function of literature, which presents the literary work as one that seeks to moralise or instruct the reader through its narrative essence and denouement.

Using the Self-Mirroring Method, we aimed to locate and address the potentially dislocated epistemic consciousness of students. Such an approach encourages students to carefully consider voices and perspectives that are commonly silenced in the multimodal texts that they study. During class discussions we asked students to share their initial thoughts and feelings about their selected multimodal texts, focusing on the personal connections that they could identify and whether these texts reflect their culture, experiences, and identity. We noted that students from Rhodes University and Chrisland University chose pre-class multimodal texts that identify with their study disciplines, cultural backgrounds and lived experiences. One striking feature observed during the presentations was the distinct differences in students' selections.

These variations highlighted the diverse perspectives and interpretations brought to the fore. The preference of Chrisland University students for Nollywood films highlights a regional affinity and a desire to see African stories told by Africans. Interestingly, the pre-class reading material that they chose was predominantly from West Africa. For example, *TikTok* videos by Charity Ekezie (Ekezie, 2022), who uses humour to dismantle stereotypes about Africa. They also utilised *YouTube* videos by Ghanaian freelance vlogger and travel influencer, Wode Maya (Maya, 2025), who travels across Africa challenging misrepresentations of African countries. Charity Ekezie's *TikTok* videos and Wode Maya's *YouTube* content provide African perspectives that counteract stereotypical narratives mainly perpetuated by Western media. Additionally, they highlighted how recent African movies (Nollywood movies) have shifted their focus from themes of violent crime, poverty, and witchcraft to showcasing success stories of West Africans across various fields.

Conversely, many students from Rhodes University focused on Hollywood films, *The Gods Must Be Crazy* (Uys, 1980), *Mr. Bones* (Schuster et al., 2001), *Tears of the Sun* (Lasker & Cirillo, 2003), and *Blood Diamond* (Leavitt & Mitchell, 2006), which stereotypically depict Africans as incompetent and helpless buffoons, while regularly presenting a white saviour narrative. Some students at Rhodes University opted to analyse movies like *Black Panther* (Coogler et al., 2018), *Coming to America* (Murphy et al., 1988), and the reality show *Young, Famous and African* (Hyde & Amankwa, 2022), which aim to portray Africa positively. The class was sometimes divided over particular movies. Some students argued that these narratives romanticised Africa in an idyllic manner and questioned why prominent roles in Hollywood movies about Africa are usually given to African American actors, suggesting that it implies that Africans are incapable of acting. For example, some students argued that *Black Panther* portrayed a positive representation of Africa, while others contended that Wakanda, as an isolated technologically advanced state, contradicted the principles of *Ubuntu*. The students who would have chosen *Coming to America*,

countered this by arguing that Africa's lack of unity necessitated Wakanda's secrecy. This difference in choices highlights the varied cultural lenses through which students view and analyse stereotypes of Africa. This exercise helps to establish nuanced connections with the canonical novels that they are studying as well. Comparing these approaches, we argue that the Self-Mirror Method encourages a personal connection with African literature and instills a sense of identity and cultural pride. This comparative analysis reveals how the Flipped Classroom model, when tailored to the cultural contexts of students, effectively challenges misconceptions and enriches their learning experience. The Flipped Classroom discussions that we had demonstrated the transformative potential of culturally relevant pedagogy in the Humanities, making literature accessible and meaningful for students across diverse educational settings.

### **Media-Assisted Method**

We noted that using the above-mentioned pre-class assignments helped to bridge the gap between students' media habits and academic requirements. Presenting literature through various formats, such as film adaptations, and interactive media, allows educators to capture students' attention effectively. This approach resonates with students' media consumption patterns and also enhances their understanding of literary texts through multiple perspectives and interpretations. Students from both universities were able to connect the continuities and discontinuities of these stereotypes across different media formats. Particularly, students from Political Science and Journalism critiqued the reportage of news by Western media outlets like BBC, France 24, and CNN, juxtaposing it with Bird, a new Africa-based story agency. They observed that Western media regularly recycled images of war-torn regions, malnourished children, and empty shop shelves to perpetuate a singular narrative. Nevertheless, they did not initially realise that their engagement with these multimodal texts was a form of critical discourse analysis. Their lack of this awareness reflects Freire's Dialogic Education and Critical Pedagogy,

which emphasise a dialogue of critical perspectives for better learning outcomes.

Through the Media-Assisted Method, students collaboratively annotated texts and co-authored essays that retell African stories misrepresented by outsiders. The use of a combination of written literary texts and media-assisted methods in literary pedagogy proves to be particularly effective when engaging with students who learn at different paces. For instance, the 1987 TV series *Things Fall Apart* (Achebe, 1987) broadened appreciation of Achebe's work and affirmed Africans' capacity to produce and share knowledge in both written and visual forms, once regarded as the prerogative of Western civilisation. For effective literary experience in contemporary African learning institutions, the written literature which is the tier one level of literary literacy should be strictly seconded by the Media-Assisted Method.

Using a Media-Assisted Method, we look beyond the affordances of learning management systems and their communication tools in a contemporary university classroom, such as asynchronous resources, discussion boards and chats. The Media-Assisted Method caters to diverse learning styles and uses multimedia's power to enhance comprehension and retention. Digital storytelling, in conjunction with audiobooks and documentaries, becomes a valuable tool in prompting students to reassess and critically reconsider the prevalent and evolving representations of Africa. Educators should incorporate a multimodal approach to create an immersive learning environment, which is highly relevant in the current push for digital Humanities. For example, they can assign students an in-class exercise that focuses on assessing narratives portraying Africa on various online spaces such as *TikTok*, *X*, and *Meta*, and analysing their authenticity and biases. The overarching goal is to ensure that when students encounter African epistemic materials across contemporary media spaces, their visual experiences actively challenge internalised stereotypes and promote a gradual, reflective process of learning. The same principle applies to students of Political Science and

Development Studies, who stand to gain extensively from the full utilisation of interactive media.

### **African–Author–Philosophy Method**

The African–Author–Philosophy Method positions every literary production by an African writer as a potential solution to African snags. African literature is primarily utilitarian in its orientation and narrative structure. The latter is the case because of the enormity of despoliation performed by the erstwhile Western colonisers. This entails studying traditional literary forms such as myths, legends, folk tales, fables, invocative poetry, heroic poetry, dirges or elegies, rituals, masquerades, war songs, and praise poetry from different parts of Africa. Indeed, many African writers are socially committed to the mission of liberating Africa from the shackles of Western epistemic violence and colonialism. Authorial philosophy also enable students to read literary texts to identify and unpack the solutions a writer proposes to African problems, whether past or contemporary. This method distracts the mind of the reader away from the Eurocentric characteristics in the text that prove misleading and misrepresenting.

The decolonising consciousness is important because it directly addresses the psychological trauma and cognitive dissonance inflicted on the colonised subjects who are forced to internalise a sense of inadequacy while simultaneously struggling to conform to an identity that is not their own (Treacher, 2005). The method umpires the student's subjectivities and prepares them, psychologically to believe that the African literary text is imbued with the African philosophy of patriotism and togetherness. For instance, Chinua Achebe's novel, *Things Fall Apart* (1958), is better understood with this African–Author–Philosophy Method. The reader first sees Achebe as a writer on a decolonisation mission from the cautionary note of the title *Things Fall Apart*. This cautionary metaphor in the title is then expatiated in the narrative of the novel.

The method also dispels nationalist subjectivities which are likely to hamper a seamless and broad solution-based interpretation of an African literary text. To see Achebe, a Nigerian writer, first as an African ultimately helps the African reader who could be Kenyan, South African, Ghanaian, Zimbabwean, or Algerian to see *Things Fall Apart* (1958) as a story about Africa and Africans. Similarly, *Nervous Conditions* (1988) is most effectively interpreted using the same approach. The reader sees Dangarembga as an African writer, who embarks on a protest mission to expose and challenge the intersectional layers of oppression, highlighting how African women's struggles are compounded by both gender and societal inequalities. By and large, the Author-Philosophy Method helps the reader to localise or situate African stories within their own contexts which invariably unravel the cultural correspondences and subtle tinges which achieve the sole aim of productive criticism.

In a classroom situation where a lecturer wishes to teach their students a text whose focus is on the representation of Africa in Western media, the lecturer could ask the students to create an imagined context of media representation of Africa and Africans. The lecturer asks them what they think about the way Africa is represented in many Western media. The students' answers might variably indicate that many Western media portray Africa and Africans as a place and people that lack robust mental capacity, progressive thinking, democratic culture, scientific innovations, honesty, social capital, cleanliness, technological drive and development and so on. This wrong portraiture becomes the problem. Then, the lecturer might proceed to ask the students to juxtapose their feedback on the Western portrayal of Africa as a place of backwardness with their portrayal of the West as a place of prosperity, modernity and progressive ideas.

Subsequently, the lecturer could invite a student to come forward. The student volunteer will then be introduced to the class as an imagined African author, tasked with writing a piece of fiction that addresses the disturbing representations discussed. The lecturer prompts the class to envision the

student as the specific writer of the text under scrutiny. During the class discussion, students propose solutions to the negative portrayal of Africa that the experimental author might address in their work. They are then instructed to approach the focused literary text with the mindset that the student-author is providing solutions to the issue of poor Western media representation of Africa discussed in class. As they explore the literary text, their focus extends beyond its entertainment value alone to its utilitarian function as conceived by the African author. It is worth noting that the African-Author-Philosophy Method differs from the Self-Mirror Method; it centres on the author as a writer, a social surgeon, scholar, political scientist, and philosopher. Scholars and students of Political Science focusing on Africa can utilise this method to explore the political philosophies and decolonisation efforts of prominent African leaders using auto/biographies of Nelson Mandela, Kwame Nkrumah, Jomo Kenyatta and Robert Mugabe, amongst others.

### **Instructional Synergy: Bridging Educational Boundaries**

Towards the end of the second semester, we prompted students to participate in an in-depth discussion by asking them what constitutes a good representation of Africa and what elements it should include. This exercise went beyond simply summarising their learning; it was a vital part of our pedagogical strategy to facilitate critical thinking and self-reflection. Firstly, this question pushed students to synthesise the diverse perspectives and materials that they had encountered throughout the course. Examining different representations, whether from literature, film, social media, or news outlets, enabled students to identify common stereotypes and misrepresentations. This comparison allowed them to critically assess how these portrayals influence global perceptions of Africa and Africans. Secondly, the question encouraged students to articulate their own visions and versions of an authentic and respectful representation of Africa.

They discussed the importance of highlighting Africa's diversity, rich cultural heritage, and contemporary

achievements, rather than perpetuating the narrow negative narratives seen in mainstream media. This part of the discussion was necessary to empower students to think beyond the passive consumption of media and consider how they might contribute to accurate and positive portrayals of their continent. Moreover, asking this question at the end of the semester helped to reinforce the Flipped Classroom model's emphasis on participatory learning and student involvement. Students were actively involved in constructing knowledge and developing critical perspectives, rather than passively receiving information. They were encouraged to draw on their own experiences, making the learning process personal and meaningful. Evidently, such a question challenged students to become critical consumers of media and proactive agents of change.

Grappling with what constitutes a good representation of Africa helps students question dominant narratives and to appreciate the complexity and richness of their own cultures. This, in turn, equips them with the critical tools necessary to navigate and challenge the biased and superficial portrayals of Africa in mainstream media. We exchanged our epistemic observations as educators, which remarkably enhanced our understanding of diverse learning strategies and pedagogical approaches. This exchange formed a fundamental comparative exercise that highlighted the strengths and weaknesses of our respective teaching methods. Firstly, we recognised that the Flipped Classroom model allowed us to cover substantially greater ground than traditional lecture-based approaches. The revelation became particularly striking when we compared our experiences at different universities, and the comparative perspective revealed an intriguing paradox. Even though the Flipped Classroom model facilitated greater content coverage and deeper interaction, it also inundated us with new information and insights from our students. This duality was both overwhelming and enlightening. On one hand, it challenged our preconceived notions and forced us to confront the vastness of our students' media consumption and its impact on their learning. On the other hand, it expanded our pedagogical

toolkit, equipping us with new strategies to foster critical thinking and cultural awareness. Moreover, our comparative analysis highlighted the varying degrees of familiarity and comfort that students had with different media. At Chrisland University, the integration of *TikTok* videos and *YouTube* content provided a contemporary, relatable context for discussing stereotypes and cultural representation. In contrast, students at Rhodes University initially gravitated towards Hollywood's problematic portrayals of Africa but gradually began to critique these representations with increasing sophistication. This cross-institutional dialogue heightened our understanding of how different contexts shape active learning and emphasised the necessity of adapting our teaching strategies to meet the unique needs of our students. It became clear that while the Flipped Classroom model is universally beneficial in promoting active learning, its implementation must be context-sensitive to maximise its impact.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, our comparative exchange of epistemic reflections highlighted the dynamic and reciprocal nature of the Flipped Classroom. These epistemic reflections revealed how this model enhanced our pedagogical effectiveness and also challenged us to continuously learn from our students. This process of mutual enlightenment is essential for championing an inclusive and critical education that respects and utilises the diverse cultural backgrounds and media literacies of our students. However, this study does not intend to advocate for a radical pan-African or continental epistemic awareness that isolates the African education system from the rest of the world in response to the disruptive influence of Western colonialism.

Instead, the impetus behind the search for active learning pedagogies aims to re-engineer the African literary knowledge system, reflecting the unique African personhood, cultural diversity, civilisation, dynamism, and innovation. Such is an imperative that should not be trivialised by the educators and learners of African literature. Educators are able to initiate this transformative process by employing epistemic reflections as

a proactive practice in education, enabling them to dismantle sanctioned ignorance. A vital starting point in transforming how we teach the subject of Africa in the Humanities is incorporating new teaching strategies, diversifying instructional materials, and creating an inclusive curriculum, which are essential steps in this educational transformation. This chapter has shown the importance of embracing multiple perspectives to achieve a comprehensive understanding of Humanities education. Fundamentally, knowledge-making is not singular or fixed; rather, it emerges through the interplay of diverse viewpoints, highlighting the need for approaches that recognise complexity and contest assumptions. Insisting on a single perspective dismisses the possibility of other viewpoints that could be in play. However, acknowledging diverse narratives allowed us to move beyond the limitations of a single story, encouraging an accurate, empowering, historically grounded, and culturally informed representation of Africa. It also drew on Paulo Freire's (2005) Dialogic Education and Critical Pedagogy to foreground epistemic hybridity and multivocality as resources for teaching about Africa in ways that resist misrepresentation. This approach treated the classroom as a space of dialogue that encouraged students to interrogate and repudiate stereotypes embedded in dominant discourses. The epistemic reflections further highlighted the efficacy of the Flipped Classroom model in empowering students to question received knowledge, counter disinformation, and construct authentic understandings of African realities.

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## Chapter 6

# Using Role Plays and World-building Exercises to Challenge Misconceptions of Africa

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### Introduction

Students often have partial and almost entirely negative pre-conceptions about African politics that are simplistic and monolithic. These pre-conceptions derive from popular and media portrayals and a political science curriculum in which, if African polities feature at all, it is to provide examples of bad governance and political ‘pathologies’ that are explicitly or implicitly contrasted with Western models of ‘good governance’. Although the current generation of students are more aware of Eurocentricism in knowledge formation and the curriculum, and engaged with issues of structural racism, they lack the analytical tools and pedagogic space to deconstruct what they know and rebuild their perceptions in light of a more complex and nuanced understanding. This chapter suggests that creative exercises can be an effective means to enable students to do so.

The reflections presented here are based on the experiences of using creative world-building exercises and role-plays to challenge negative pre-conceptions about African politics in a final year undergraduate module that I have been teaching for the last ten years at Trinity College Dublin. The class size has varied from 12 to 40 students and is taught via a two-hour seminar over 24 weeks. The majority of the students



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are white and Irish, with very few students from minority or specifically African backgrounds. While some students have travelled to, volunteered in or have family connection to some part of Africa (for example, in the Irish context, relatives who are missionaries), very few have any in-depth prior knowledge or understanding.

To begin the process of making their preconceptions visible to them, in the first class of the module, students are asked to write down the first three words that come to mind when they hear the term African politics. I use an online platform, like Mentimeter, to create a word cloud capturing the class's collective perceptions. These give students the anonymity needed to honestly express their perceptions and emphasises that the process of uncovering and examining them is a collective one. As illustrated in Figure One, invariably, the words that dominate reflect the preconceptions that they have been exposed to: corruption, colonialism, conflict, underdevelopment, poverty. We repeat this process at the end of the module, by which point the most commonly used words have changed, with complex, diverse, nuanced, contestation dominating and neopatrimonialism replacing colonialism as their main analytical framework for understanding politics.

What three words come to mind when you think of African politics?  
63 responses





2007), international political economy (e.g., Boyer et al., 2006) and comparative politics (e.g., Marsh & Bucy, 2002). While some use fictional countries, these are usually pre-designed (e.g., Enterline & Jepsen, 2009). While there are some examples of role plays in African contexts in the literature (Youde, 2008; Langfield, 2016), they are usually embedded in broader survey courses that do not concern Africa specifically and therefore generally focus on using these cases to understand more general phenomena, like democratic transitions or ethnic conflict, rather than deepening students' understanding of African states specifically. Some role plays of 'fictional' states bear resemblances to African states and even though supposedly fictional, use the name of a real ethnic group (Shaw, 2006). Collaborative world-building is a more novel pedagogic tool, more commonly used in design and creative settings (King, 2007; Hergenrader, 2019).

While these interactive exercises are often the catalytic component in challenging pre-conceptions, they depend on being embedded in a curricular design that gives students the knowledge that they need to make them meaningful and a continual process of reflection fostered by in-class discussion, an assessment design that promotes student ownership and a classroom culture of trust. The next section describes how these aspects are designed and fostered. Following that, I describe each exercise in turn: its goals and design; and the experiences of conducting and refining it iteratively over the last ten years. The chapter concludes by reflecting on why these exercises may be particularly effective in challenging misconceptions.

### **Curriculum design**

The exercises are embedded within a curriculum design that is aimed at exposing students to the complexity of politics in African states and to a discussion of how knowledge production itself can be distorted by stereotypes. After an introductory class that makes the theme of uncovering and interrogating stereotypes explicit, the course begins where popular and student preconceptions of the origins of African politics begins – with colonialism. Using canonical texts and standard arguments

(Amin, 1972; Ekeh, 1975; Mamdani, 1996), the experience and legacy of colonialism is examined, followed by independence and the character of post-colonial regimes. Students have a strong pre-conception that colonialism is almost solely responsible for the challenges that African states face today and an uncritical and romanticised view of the pre-colonial period. While not denying its influence, in the discussion I push students to more precisely locate its effects, how its legacy persists and the agency of African actors.

We then return to the pre-colonial period, using different means of learning in order to disrupt their expectations and challenge their misconceptions. Knowing very little about the pre-colonial period, students usually assume, in common with influential arguments in the literature (Herbst, 2014) that politics in this period was dominated by stateless communities. Sometimes, in line with a worldview that has emphasised colonialism as the key negative turning point for post-colonial states, they assume pre-colonial politics was 'better' than what came after: featuring more prominent roles for women, more gender fluid identity, greater harmony, less destructive human relationships with nature. Despite their sensitivity to coloniality, their pre-conceptions of pre-colonial politics reflect 'noble savage' tropes used by colonial powers to legitimise their rule (Bonsu, 2009; Gabay, 2018). These pre-conceptions obscure their ability to understand the complex political realities of this historical period. Finally, their understanding of slavery reflects the focus of contemporary debates: they know more about its consequences in the Americas, than its effects on African states.

To challenge these pre-conceptions I show students extracts from documentaries about the Zulu kingdom and the Asante empire that demonstrate how these polities engaged in extensive political centralisation. We discuss the drivers and dynamics - trade, slavery, warfare, identity formation - noting how similar these are to state-building dynamics in Europe. I then ask each to read a different chapter from the UNESCO History of Africa (Niane & Ki-Zerbo, 1998; Ajayi 1998), with a view to identifying the political features of the polities in a particular region. In groups, they discuss their region with

others who have read different chapters. This serves to illustrate the diversity of political forms and developments in the pre-colonial period. Finally, we look at the effects of slavery on Africa, on enslaved individuals within Africa and on the global economy. Students are often surprised to learn that slavery was a common indigenous institution, that it had profound effects on political centralisation and fragmentation, and gendered dynamics and consequences. A central aim of the discussion is to nuance their prior understanding and demonstrate the complexity of the issue. In order to prevent the discussion from becoming an abstracted analytical topic disconnecting from individual lived experience, we also read and discuss first-hand accounts by enslaved people.

Having disrupted their pre-conceptions and misconceptions of pre-colonial politics we then reconsider the legacy of colonialism. While this does not necessarily lead to a total revocation of the importance of colonialism, they no longer see colonialism as the 'beginning' of African politics. The non-sequential structure - starting with colonialism and then returning to the pre-colonial period allows for an explicit discussion of the biases in knowledge production and popular perceptions. The rest of the course then follows the political trajectory of African states through the post-colonial period and then in the latter stages, spotlights particular issues such as China's role, environmental crisis, migration, and gender. These topics are deliberately chosen to avoid issues such as conflict, that play into common stereotypes. Further, as these issues are live and are currently unfolding, without a settled literature or interpretation, they offer students an opportunity to fully confront the complexity of politics in African states as it is happening today. Throughout the curriculum there is an emphasis on: identifying both common themes and diverse experiences; examining the relative power and agency of both external and internal actors; and identifying pre-conceptions and examining them.

## **Assessment strategies**

The module contains both standard and alternative assessment strategies, and formative and summative assignments designed both to allow the students to demonstrate what they have understood and to apply it in ways that push their analytical and communication skills further. Reflection on their own positionality in relation to the material is embedded in the assessment design.

The formative assessment consists of weekly response papers that usually take the form of a critical overview of one of the key readings which they have signed up for the week before. This component, marked on a pass or fail basis, is mainly used to encourage the students to take a first step at internalising the content for that week. In class, we then work towards a synthetic understanding. First, students work in small groups, with one person who has performed each reading, and peer teach the key points of their reading to the others. We then come together as a class to discuss the readings in relation to an overarching substantive question. However, the formative assignments are also used to introduce students to the alternative forms of assessment that they may not be as familiar with. For example, after watching documentaries on the Asante empire and Zulu kingdom, students are asked to write a reflection piece with their thoughts on pre-colonial politics, their own preconceptions, and the canonical readings on colonialism in light of what they learned.

There are three pieces of summative assessment, at different points in the term, fulfilling different purposes. The first is a more standard essay asking students to discuss an overarching statement on one of the key periods in African political development in light of a detailed case study. This assignment aims to, first, provide students with a chance to consolidate and demonstrate what they have learned in terms of the broad patterns of development. Second, it aims to enhance their understanding by going beyond the necessarily high degree of generalisation involved in the delivery of the

material and in this way challenging their misconception of undiversified polities.

Having tested their broad basic understanding in the first piece of summative assessment, the subsequent assignments aim to achieve the higher-order goals of the course: to provide them with pedagogic space to reflect on their misconceptions, and how what they have learned changes or challenges their broader worldviews; and to demonstrate how what they have learned enables them to understand African politics as it is playing out today in greater nuance and complexity than standard media accounts.

The second summative assignment is a reflection piece linked to the in-class exercises described in the next section. The assignment asks students to reflect on their experience in the exercise – how they designed their country or world; how they approached their role; what they took from the exercise in terms of understanding; what surprised them and what it uncovered about their own attitudes; whether it prompted to see any of the readings or issues studied differently; and how their experience would have been different if they had undertaken this exercise at the start of the module. In other words, the assignment asks students to make clear what they have taken away substantively and personally from the exercises.

The third and final assignment asks students to identify a contemporary event or news story happening in any African state and use what they have learned to explain why it is happening, firstly in an academic essay and secondly in an accessible format. Over the years, students have chosen a great range of events and stories, from climate justice protests in Madagascar, to China's vaccine diplomacy during the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic to women's villages in Kenya. They have chosen an impressive array of media through which to communicate their arguments in the second part – from podcasts to illustrated children's books, video games to graphic stories and poems. The key challenge of the second part is to communicate a complex academic argument in a way that is

accessible but does not resort to stereotypes or simplifications that could reinforce misconceptions.

As a whole, the assessment strategy provides students with opportunities to regularly internalise the course material, consolidate and deepen their understanding, reflect on their positionality, and practice understanding and explaining the rich depth of African politics to themselves and others.

## Classroom Culture

While some have found that role plays can lead to greater interactivity between students in the longer term (Oberhofer, 1999), and suggest using these exercises at the start of modules to establish classroom culture (McCarthy, 2014:402), my experience has been that an already-established level of trust and interactivity is essential. The thought experiment happens in week 14 of the course and the role play in week 17. By this point, students are familiar with each other, especially as each week they are placed in groups with different peers depending on the reading that they have signed up for. It also gives me the chance to build their trust in me by creating a non-judgemental environment where they feel safe to take risks and be vulnerable. This is important as the exercises are asking them to not only leave their comfort zone but engage in a process of revealing and examining their own biases.

In order to do this, I use active listening, share my own experiences of confronting bias, and encourage collaboration. Active listening involves trying to drop your *reactions* to what is said, focusing instead on what is being communicated – both the words and non-verbal communication – and responding by first reflecting back to the speaker what you have heard. This looser, more attentive approach enables a more equal dialogue and first reiterating back to students what they have said builds their confidence and trust that they can speak without meeting judgement. Second, as I am asking students to confront their biases, I also share my experiences of uncovering my own. I make visible to them the ways in which I have tried to

implement decolonisation in the curriculum, making changes from the one which I inherited when I first started teaching.

Finally, these exercises work because they are embedded in a constructivist approach to knowledge and learning and a classroom culture of collaboration. This approach sees learning as a collaborative act of co-creation between students themselves, and between the educator and the students. It is guided by 'the idea that expertise does not rest with a single individual such as the teacher, rather, it is spread throughout the classroom' (Brown & King, 2000:246). This idea is realised through the repeated structure of asking students to peer teach each other in small groups, then synthesise their collective knowledge in the facilitated discussion. It is further reinforced by the collective production of class notes: each group fills in a table with their notes in a shared file that everyone in the class has access to. Cumulatively, these small acts help to foster a classroom culture where students feel safe enough to take the leap outside their comfort zones that the exercises ask them to make.

### **World-building exercise: Design and Goals**

The world-building exercise is usually conducted mid-module when the students have already completed the part of the curriculum which follows the broad commonalities in the political trajectory of African states from the pre-colonial period to the present. The week prior, I introduce the exercise. I show students clips from popular media and the Afrofuturism movement – for example the *West Wing* episode on Kundu (Sorkin et al., 2003) and a clip from *Black Panther* (Coogler et al., 2018) – in order to stimulate discussion of the common tropes used to make fictional countries identifiably African and the embedded power relations that they portray between Africa and the West. This pre-briefing, as well as the debrief discussed below, is important in order to frame the experiment and to not push students into their panic zone. As Tosey has discussed, the 'learning zone' lies between students' comfort zones and the 'panic zone' (Tosey, 2006). As the exercise pushes them

considerably outside of their comfort zone, it is important to give enough support so that they do not feel overwhelmed.

I then ask students to divide into groups of four to five students and introduce the challenge: to create either a fictional African country that is recognisably African but avoids stereotypes or to create a fictional world in which African states are dominant. For the first, students have to give their country a geography, a history, and a contemporary political context and have to think carefully about design and the interactive effects of their choices. Students are instructed to try to avoid stereotypes for two reasons. First, because of the classroom context, with the majority of students being non-African, it is important to avoid subjecting African students to harmful stereotypes. Adjusting the instructions to each particular class context is an important part of creating a context conducive to meaningful discussion of sensitive topics. Second, the challenge deliberately sets the students a very difficult task as there is an inherent tension between avoiding stereotypes yet making their country realistic. In doing so, it provides them with a chance to experience this tension, rather than simply being told about it, and sets up a meaningful discussion about why this tension exists and what is problematic in stereotypical portrayals.

For the second exercise, students have to change something in world history and identify how it would lead to an alternative world where African states are not dependent, as well as explaining what politics in African countries looks like in this world. It is designed in the spirit of Afrofuturism, challenging them to use creativity in order to imagine alternative futures, but here for the goal of identifying more clearly the roots of dependence. In order to determine how to arrive at a different outcome, students need to pinpoint what they think were the vital factors or moments in leading to our current reality. As with the first exercise, this one also makes them more aware of what they do not know, and better able to identify the gaps in their understanding – and their ability to imagine different futures – because of Eurocentric stereotypes in African knowledge production, perception, and consumption. In both cases, students have to present their fictional country or world

to the class through a creative medium. There are no limits to what this can be, but cannot entail a PowerPoint presentation. The second option – of building a fictional world – itself grew out of discussions where we recognised that it was difficult to imagine different outcomes for African states without imagining an entirely different world. The exercise emphasises the interconnectedness of African and global political development.

The goals of this exercise are both analytical and reflective. Analytically, this is a challenge in design thinking and counterfactual reasoning. I have given students an outcome and they have to figure out what factors would be needed in order to arrive there. It illustrates the interlocking nature of challenges: if students give their country a geography that is arid and hard to rule, in order to make it less attractive to colonial powers, it will have food security issues in the post-colonial period. Reflectively, the challenge directly holds a mirror up to their conceptions of African states – they have to identify them, discuss them, try to avoid them. The assignment reinforces this process as it is a reflective piece, written after the exercise.

The creative element of the exercise was included to enhance both of these learning goals. Students have used a wide variety of media to present: short plays, mock news items, re-enactments of key events, political cartoons, mock TV quiz shows, haikus. By asking students to engage their imagination, they are more inclined to think holistically. It is also part of the ‘decentring’ of the students’ perspective that is designed to help them unlock alternative ways of seeing. Further, by having to present it in a creative way, they encounter the constraints of mediums of communication that can often lead to stereotyping. For example, in presenting a mock *Newsnight* special on their country, they have to confront the challenges of presenting their country in an engaging, newsworthy way to audiences that have little prior knowledge. Finally, the creative aspects makes the exercises more fun, which enhances their learning.

In order for students to integrate their experience in the exercise and begin the process of reflection, careful debriefing is needed. The threats of simplification in role plays have been

noted (Alden, 1999). Students have put themselves out there and there is a need for delicate inquiry in order to hold up a mirror while recognising that they may feel self-conscious. Therefore, after all the presentations, we have a collective discussion where each group explains the reasoning behind their choices and reflect on the experience. I try to keep to straightforward questions probing their design thinking and invite others in the class to provide feedback to clearly defined questions.

## **Experiences and outcomes**

When I first designed this thought experiment it was itself a teaching experiment. I did not know what to expect. I did not know whether the students would embrace the challenge or if it would be a pedagogically useful tool. I was inspired by one of my colleagues who had used creativity in teaching science. I simply decided to have a go. Over the years, I have refined the set-up, expanded the premise, updated the media clips that we discuss, and added the reflective assignment. What is now a carefully thought-through class design, came out of my own process of creative experimentation with the students.

Over time, from observation, I have slowly come to understand why it works to achieve the analytical and reflective goals that are outlined above. I quickly came to see its utility as an analytical tool, as it elevated students' reasoning and integrated their understanding in ways that would have been difficult to achieve through other pedagogic approaches. Simulations and role-plays are well-established as ways to encourage students to draw on their experience from across the course and integrate it holistically (Alden, 1999). In some cases I could see that students had not only achieved understanding, but also insight. For example, one student commented that they did not want their country to have conflict – to avoid a common stereotype of African states – but the factors that would prevent conflict (such as lack of resources, and a fragmented ethnic structure) would also make famine more likely. Students have talked about drawing on countries that they knew something about as inspiration, but were surprised at how little latitude they actually had to imagine, given the factors that had to be

there for their country to be believable. Some students said that the exercise made them less sure that colonialism was the root cause of economic underdevelopment in Africa, while others said the opposite, and some felt that it made them realise that no one factor could be identified as the singular cause.

The exercise has revealed interesting insights, as the students confronted their own pre-conceptions. In many cases it has revealed layers of pre-conception even amongst students actively seeking to combat their own internalised stereotypes. For example, one student commented on the reluctance of some students to engage with the exercise out of fear of stereotyping, but based on assumptions that were themselves problematic:

I was interested and surprised by my classmates' scepticism of this assignment. Their scepticism was rooted in professions of a lack of understanding of African cultures and a fear of perpetuating cultural stereotypes. However, the assignment focused on African state formation and political structures, which we had spent the prior 14 weeks discussing. The linking of African politics with 'African culture' is in and of itself stereotypical and common. Although there is certainly a link between culture and politics I would be surprised to learn that anyone would collapse political structures into culture in either America or Europe. I understand my classmates' hesitation, given the rampant stereotypes that persist in Western depictions and understandings of Africa, however I think this hesitation to engage in discussions on African politics further excludes these states, and treats them as some kind of an anomaly.

Many groups have tried to avoid stereotypes by inventing countries that were not colonised, but this has sometimes led them into deeper reflection on questions of internal and external agency. For example, one group created a country that had avoided colonisation because of its impenetrable terrain and military prowess. They tried to imagine what politics would look like today, and in doing so realised that they had leaned

in to ‘noble savage’ tropes of pre-colonial politics as a kind of utopian alternative political reality. As one student observed:

Paradoxically, our idealism in the attempt to design the alternative, itself reproduced African stereotypes. Namely, the stereotype of an organic, idyllic, utopian pre-colonial past, that if only had been free to grow in its own fashion, might have preserved its values of fairness and co-operation at the modern national economic level. Our idealisation of precolonial African politics took agency away from political actors who in a more realistic account, may have been more prone to error than our assumption of their predestined ‘libertarian-socialist success’.

Confronting their biases about African politics also enabled students to reflect more broadly on the Eurocentricism in their entire worldview, and in their very conception of concepts such as development. As a student observed:

Overall, what struck me most in completing this exercise was the fact that our temptation to equate a world in which Africa is a superpower to one in which Africa “looks like the West” had to be consciously and consistently combatted. This illustrated quite strikingly my own internalisation of Western superiority in my conceptualisation of development.

Another pointed out how the exercise led him to a more general understanding of the determinants of political development:

I questioned whether some common assumptions are perceived as particular to Africa or whether they are essentially most visible there (e.g. degree of neopatrimonialism). Consequently, the process of determining the features/characteristics of our country made me evaluate what factors contribute to the creation of a country in general which we attributed in our context to the country’s geography, trading practices, social composition and character of politics.

I believe that one of the reasons why it works as a tool of self-reflection is that it enables students to position themselves more clearly in relation to what they have been studying. For example, over the years a couple of groups have invented a country colonised by Ireland and had to think through what that would have looked like. As Irish people generally identify as coming from a country that was itself colonised, putting Ireland in the position of coloniser directly challenges their self-perceptions. However, one of the interesting outcomes has been both to spotlight blind spots – students often reported in the response papers that they found it very hard to avoid stereotyping – and to lead them to question the basis of a particularistic sense of identity. In the above example, students concluded that Ireland would have ruled no differently, given the prior conditions. In the world-building exercise, by noting the difficulty of creating a hegemonic power without recourse to coerced labour, it opens space for a more universalistic understanding of the underlying drivers of power. It enables discussion both of how our current global power hierarchy emerged, and how any power hierarchy emerges.

While we might hope or expect a decolonising research design, such as in the world-building exercise, to encourage ways of thinking that avoided recreating colonialism, this has not been my practical experience. Frequently, students struggle to find a path to an alternative reality that does not mimic aspects of our current world, with power hierarchies simply inverted. As one student outlined: *'we made Africa the epicentre for economic innovation and we continued to choose capitalism as the process by which the African industrial revolution took place. I was particularly surprised by how difficult it was to envision an alternative economic system to capitalism.'* Others have imagined a world where African states colonised Europe and created a causal story as to how and why this happened. Their struggle in imagining non-capitalist, non-colonised worlds could be seen to indicate how entrenched this way of understanding modernity and politics is and therefore illustrate the scale of the decolonisation challenge. However, it could also be interpreted to illustrate the universal dynamics of politics, that are not specific to any

one culture. The debrief provides an opportunity to discuss these themes.

An unanticipated outcome that identified with my broader teaching goals, was that it allowed different students to shine. While highly analytical students who perform very well in standard academic essay writing sometimes struggled with the assignment, overthinking and overdesigning their countries and worlds, the inclusion of the creative component allowed students with other strengths to play a more active role and use their creativity. For example, the first time that I ran the exercise I noticed that some of the students who are normally quiet in class were all in the same group, and worried that they would find the performative aspect challenging. However, they ended up doing one of the most creative presentations: they invented a country that had been colonised by Japan and presented the history of their country entirely through the medium of haikus. Their choices enabled a deep discussion on the differences between Japanese and European colonialism.

A further, somewhat unanticipated outcome, was the almost existential questions that the exercises raise. For example, the world-building exercises have led to discussions on; what drives history – chance events, or structural predeterminants; whether we are capable of imagining a non-capitalist modernity; whether hierarchical global power relations are inevitable; the nature of politics and how our understanding of it is shaped by the ways in which we have been taught. If using decentring is a powerful means of teaching African politics, it has the potential to not only disrupt their pre-conceptions about Africa, but also to challenge their worldview, and understanding of politics itself.

### **Simulation: Goals and Design**

The second in-class exercise involves a simulation of a meeting between a community in Sierra Leone and a European palm oil company that wants to renew its lease on a large amount of community land. It happens as we are approaching the final quarter of the module, after a number of weeks devoted

to studying topics such as aid, environmental crisis and gender that relate to the substance of the simulation.

The simulation was originally designed by an NGO (non-governmental organisation) worker based on her experience of working in Sierra Leone. It involves dividing the class into a number of groups, with each one representing a village, and assigning each student in each group a role (e.g., the paramount chief chairing the meeting, the district councillor, the deputy minister for land, a member of a local community-based organisation). Each village contains representatives from the palm oil company and from different levels of governance – traditional authority, local and national politics – and therefore from both formal and informal institutions. Some villages contain civil society representation, others do not. Students are sent a character description summarising their actors' incentives and attitude towards the meeting. Knowing the personalities of the students well by this stage in the course, I assign roles bearing in mind what will be needed to make the simulation work and the role that I think might be interesting for that student to examine. For example, I often assign students who I know aspire to work in the development sector to one of the civil society roles.

In putting together the participants in each village and assigning the roles, I deliberately vary the composition, gender balance, and leadership incentives in each village so that we can examine their effects on the outcome of the meeting. The students are asked to read a briefing document beforehand, which outlines both the institutional context in Sierra Leone, and the background of the hypothetical situation. They are asked to think in advance about what their character would want out of the meeting, how they might achieve it and who their allies and sources of opposition might be.

When students arrive in class they are given ten minutes for pre-meetings where they can speak to their potential allies. The paramount chief then convenes and chairs the meeting. They are given forty to fifty minutes to try to conclude a deal on whether or not the lease will be renewed and under what

conditions. The literature has emphasised the importance of debriefing in order to allow students to express their emotional reactions, insights, group processes and to allow the instructor to relate the material back to the course (Wedig, 2010). In the case of this exercise, this is achieved by comparing the deals reached in each village and discussing the factors that influenced the outcome.

The learning goals of this exercise are to give students a chance to reflect on some of the overarching questions from the course and the immediate weeks prior from an experiential perspective. These questions included: the differential sources of power and legitimacy in formal and informal political institutions, and how they interact to produce political outcomes; the agency and power dynamics between internal and external actors; the influence of personalised power on community welfare; and the extent of NGO influence over development outcomes at the local level. As with all simulations, by allowing students to step into the shoes of actors in a realistic scenario it is hoped that this will 'decentre' them and enable them to see the issues from an alternative perspective.

In terms of challenging pre-conceptions, students often approach the material with quite an uncritical approach to traditional authority, underestimating the agency of internal actors, and over-estimating the ability of international NGOs to have a positive effect, irrespective of local power dynamics. The role play is specifically designed to enable students to confront these preconceptions.

## **Experiences and outcomes**

While in some years it has been a struggle to encourage students to truly embrace the challenge of 'embodying' their role (for example, continuing to use their laptops to take notes rather than actively taking part in the meeting), generally they embrace this opportunity to 'practice' politics rather than simply learn about it. As with the thought experiment, this exercise gives different students a chance to shine – for example, those with more practical experience of negotiation and persuasion

– and gives all students a chance to practice real world skills that are often overlooked, such as how to advocate, negotiate, compromise, and strategise. Role plays have been shown to improve skills, such as communication, public speaking, as well as students' sense of self-efficacy (Krain & Lantis, 2006; Kensicki et al., 2022).

The set-up of this simulation, compared to the thought experiment, is more controlled and therefore the outcomes have been more predictable. The different constellations of village actors produce reliably similar agreements year to year that provide the basis for interesting discussion. The villages with self-interested leadership and no NGO presence produce the agreement with the least concrete benefits for the community, while the agreement with the best terms for the community is usually produced in the village with the most pro-social leadership and no NGO presence. The village with self-interested leadership and strong NGO presence produce agreements between these two points – with some concessions but far less than the NGOs aimed for. Better outcomes for women are more likely where villages have a specific representative of a women's village group. Through comparing the drivers of these outcomes and comparing the villages, in the discussion we are able to explore where and on what power resided in each village.

These outcomes challenge their pre-conceptions in a number of ways. First, students often have a simplistic, generally positive view of traditional authority, rooted in respect for indigenous institutions. The role play forces them to confront a more complex reality than traditional authority, in representing a more personalised form of power, can be both capable of more pro-social outcomes and open to capture, depending on the personality of the chief, and in all cases is in essence patriarchal. Second, given the outsized role that they give to external actors in their understanding of African politics, students are often surprised at the limited extent of NGO agency. This identifies with Youde's findings that an unanticipated outcome of role plays can be their effect in tempering student idealism (2008), an important outcome given

that some students taking the module wish to pursue a career in international development.

One striking feature of this simulation has been student's emotional reactions, and in particular the frustration of the women and those placed in civil society roles when faced with the strength of patriarchal authority embodied by the paramount chief. To reflect reality, the paramount chief and head of the secret society are always male. While students are often highly aware of analytical framework of patriarchy, the simulation gives them a very concrete and concentrated experience of it. As a latent concept that is often hard to measure and see clearly in operation, the role play gives students a lived experience of power dynamics on a micro-scale.

As with the world-building exercise, the role play, both deepens their knowledge of African politics specifically, and of politics in general. An interesting observation is the frequency with which they recognise aspects of their own experience in different institutional settings in their experience in the role play. Drawing parallels like this helps to give students embodied experiences of universal aspects of politics, particularly at local levels. Therefore, it 'de-exoticises' African politics and spotlights what is common. As one student wrote in their reflection piece:

The reality of our negotiations was that they were far more informed by the incentives of the individuals at the table than almost any other factor. The interpersonal took precedent over the institutional. Significantly, this has largely been my experience of chairing meetings elsewhere. Although not disconnected, who one likes tends to be a better indicator of behaviour than who one agrees with. To me, this challenges the assumptions we have about 'African Politics' being radically distinct from any other kind of organisation in its operations.

Overall, my experience has been that students were more open to changing their minds and shifting their views in this class than in others, where I have used methodologies like moving

barometers at the start and end of class to try to give students space to re-evaluate in light of discussion.

## **Concluding discussion**

Role plays and simulations have been noted in the literature and have many pedagogic benefits (Shellman & Turan, 2006) that can last longer than other active learning approaches (Bernstein & Meizlish, 2003). This chapter has suggested that an overlooked aspect of their value lies in their role in challenging student misconceptions about parts of the world outside of the West. Part of the challenge of teaching African politics at a European university is that the students and the curriculum that they have been exposed to comes from a Eurocentric perspective. They can, consciously and unconsciously, project their values and assumptions onto politics in other parts of the world. How can we enable students to move beyond these limitations? While learning more about the complex contextual realities of African politics is obviously fundamental, I suggest that using creative world-building and role plays such as the ones described in this chapter can be very effective tools in both allowing students to integrate their knowledge and reflect on positionality. By decentring students and engaging their empathy and imagination, they enable misconceptions to become clearer, make space for self-reflection and create an emotional connection to abstract issues. While this chapter has focused on Africa, the problem of misconceptions is a broader one that most, if not all, educators teaching about regions outside of the West will face. The potential of these pedagogic tools may equally travel to teaching area studies on other regions.

Why do they work? So ingrained are Eurocentric perceptions that there is perhaps no fully effective way to make misconceptions clear without decentring students, as the media and curriculum that they have been exposed to so firmly centres on the West. Decentring involves pushing students outside of their comfort zone. First, the role play and world-building exercises intrinsically do this as they disrupt the normal ways in which they are used to learning, asking them to use skills

not usually engaged in a social science classroom. They are, in their format, a visceral 'disruption' to the norm. Second, they ask students to put themselves in the position of African actors, seeing the world from their point of view and understanding their motivations and perspectives on their terms. As one former student expressed it in relation to the world-building exercise, it forces students to strip everything back to basics, put themselves in the position of states or world-builders and figure out what is possible and what is not, how one choice informs and constrains the next. In the role play, students are directly assuming the roles of people in a fictional village in Sierra Leone.

The process of decentring enables students to take a further step - empathy: 'the ability to experience the values, feelings, and perceptions of another' (Stover, 2005:207). There are a few ways to give students the opportunity to practice and experience empathy within standard social science pedagogic approaches, that focus on knowledge acquisition and critical thinking skills. While imperfect, simulations and role plays offer a way to provide students with this opportunity, although this has most often been applied in relation to conflict negotiations (Baylouny, 2009; Stover, 2005). The long-term benefits of engaging empathy were made clear to me in a follow-up conversation with a student who took the class two years ago. She was working in the European parliament when a representative of the African Union (AU) was being subjected to heated questioning by MEPs (Members of the European Parliament) asking the AU to align more closely with the EU (European Union) in supporting Ukraine in its war against Russia. She said she identified with the AU representative's perspective, rooted in an African worldview, more than she did with the European point of view, despite being European. She linked this back to the world-building exercise where her group had invented a new world, and drew a map of their world 'upside down' compared to the typical orientation with Africa at the centre. The emotional resonance of this act of inversion lasted longer than the details of the exercise, or even the course as a whole.

This identifies with what has been noted in the literature: if the role play has gone well, one of its outcomes is that students are 'emotionally involved' (Smith & Boyer, 1996:693). For example, Stover uses a historical role play of the Cuban Missile crisis to give students a sense of the emotional experience of the Cold War (Stover, 2007). When students are emotionally involved, they are more likely to care, take interest, and, as the example above illustrates, this can last longer than the knowledge that they retain from the course: Africa comes to matter more to them.

While role plays, simulations and alternative world-building exercises are powerful pedagogic tools, it is important to note the challenges in undertaking them and the particular conditions needed to make them a success. These exercises rely on a high-trust, interactive classroom culture and an educator who is engaged in the process of reflective anti-misconception work themselves. They may be more challenging to undertake in large classes, where the students do not know each as well and consequently where the trust may not be as high. Crucially, students need to be willing to take a leap of faith. Group dynamics can play a significant role in this, and with some cohorts, more explanation and engagement with the terms of the exercise may be required. For the educator, there must be a willingness to drop the role of 'expert' and meet the students in the place of inquiry into the entrenched ways in which they too may be influenced by and holding misconceptions.

Overall, this chapter has suggested that creative exercises, such as world-building and role plays, are a valuable pedagogic tool that function on a number of levels to challenge students and achieve higher order teaching goals. They decentre students, challenge their worldviews and can cultivate empathy. When embedded within a curriculum and assessment strategy that encourages reflection, and are encountered in a classroom context of trust, they can have a catalytic effect on understanding and perception and enable misconceptions to be identified and deconstructed.

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## Chapter 7

# Engaging Students as ‘Country Specialists’ to Counter the ‘Africa is a Country’ Misconception

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### Introduction

Students do not enter into their study programmes with blank minds about the subject to be studied. This is particularly credible for courses focusing on Africa, a continent which is highly stereotyped despite receiving unprecedented attention in the turn to global education in a highly interconnected era. Students come into their courses on Africa with preconceptions; some factual, some inaccurate. A misconception of Africa that is notorious not only for its blatant inaccuracy but also for its pervasiveness is the well-known ‘Africa is a country’ stereotype (Randolph & DeMulder, 2008; Faloyin, 2022; Knight et al., 2022). For instance, in a written anonymous preconception quiz on Africa administered in September 2023 in a module titled “International Politics of Development in Africa” (IPDA) which I teach in a Sino-British joint venture university in China, 14 out of 88 (15.9%) participants in the quiz portrayed Africa as a country. IPDA is a foundational module in the Bachelor of Arts in International Relations programme at Xi’an Jiaotong-Liverpool University (XJTLU). It is particularly pertinent to redress misconceptions in introductory courses before students move-on to senior undergraduate courses.



Left uncorrected, misconceptions can hamper transformative learning and impede transformative behaviour. Misconceptions pose obstacles to student progression from lower- to higher-order categories of learning, from novice to expert, from surface to deep learning, from knowledge consumers to knowledge generators, from descriptive to critical thinkers, and from concept memorisation to concept application (Engelmann & Huntoon, 2011:465). Holding on to the specific 'Africa is a country' stereotype potentially translates to unsubstantiated Africa-wide generalisations in student assessments, risking poor grades, and ultimately upon graduation, risking undifferentiated attitudes to foreign policies vis-à-vis African countries. If a Chinese student views Africa as a uniform monolithic entity and goes through their studies - including on scope and consequences of Chinese engagements in Africa - without developing sensitivity to the diversity of Africa and its institutions, the student may struggle to critically analyse and substantiate foreign policy development and debates relating to Sino-African relations. Specific reference is made to Chinese students here because of the context of IPDA's delivery in a China-based university, but the same could be said in relation to students in courses on Africa in non-Chinese contexts. The fundamental point being made is that a variegated understanding of Africa is necessary for any student who may eventually participate in Africa-related foreign policymaking, implementation, and discussion.

While it is vital to dismantle the misconception of Africa as a country, theories on operational dynamics of the brain suggest human inclinations to 'resist' remedial conceptual change. Cognitive theory of belief perseverance highlights vulnerability of misconception-discrediting information to be resisted, including through ignoring, downplaying, and even challenging the incoming discrediting information. This resistance is problematic as it allows the misconception and its detrimental effects to persist. How can module delivery of content on Africa be designed to mitigate student resistance to information correcting the misconception of Africa as a country? Using the author's own teaching experience in the Sino-British

transnational higher education context of XJTLU and drawing on Freirian principles of dialogic student partnership, this chapter proposes an anti-misconception pedagogic model wherein the traditional divide between teachers as lecturers and students as passive listeners is blunted, with students contributing to interactivity in the classroom as ‘country specialists’.

In the proposed misconception-targeting model, each student is required to choose one African country, develop specialist knowledge on the chosen country, and apply that knowledge in seminar discussions of how themes covered in the module and related readings are corroborated or contradicted by institutions and historical and current events in the selected countries. The model integrates pedagogic features of problem posing, co-investigation, and shared reflection (based on student podcasts and structured discussions) to mitigate incentives for resisting corrections and holding-on to the ‘Africa is a country’ misconception.

Based on data collected through a survey of students’ subjective perceptions and more objective pre- and post-module delivery misconception assessments, I argue that the above-mentioned multidimensional pedagogic approach to engaging students as country specialists helps to ultimately (by the end of the semester) reduce the number of students who misconceive Africa as a country. Incentives to resist correction of the ‘Africa is a country’ inaccuracy at the start of the semester are ultimately subdued in the proposed anti-misconception pedagogic model via various but not unrelated channels, including through: triggering curiosity for learning about Africa’s diversity; inspiring rational evaluations of cognitive bases for engaging in anti-misconception learning activities; and exposing students regularly to multiple sources of mutually reinforcing information evincing Africa’s diversity for nuanced and critical thinking learning outcomes in relation to Africa.

## **Contributions to Related Education Literature**

This chapter makes a few contributions to literature on political science and development education. First, much of the existing political science and development education literature illuminate and discuss pedagogic methods for supporting learning on related discipline concepts such as anarchy, bureaucracy, democracy, elections, foreign aid, human rights, and power, while ultimately targeting transformation of students into critical thinkers, problem solvers, and civic activists (e.g., Latimer & Hempson, 2012; Bogaards & Deutsch, 2015; Mulcare & Shwedel, 2017). However, the existing literature largely overlooks the potential of students' preconceptions and misconceptions to hinder transformative learning and action, as noted earlier. Through its theoretical framework and pedagogical model, this chapter contributes towards mitigating the deficit on anti-misconception scholarship.

Second, limited anti-misconception education studies are largely confined to the natural sciences (Zeilik, & Bisard, 2000; Limón, 2001; Robbins & Roy, 2007; Sadler, 2009; Wrinkle & Manivannan, 2009; Engelmann & Huntoon, 2011) which typically confront misconceptions by using teacher-centred experiments or discrepant events with adaptability challenges in the context of political and social sciences which deal with relatively more abstract concepts. Very few non-natural science education studies deal with misconceptions (Goldsmith, 2006; Baylouny, 2009; Milleret et al., 2010; Abboud, 2015; Çavdar et al., 2019), and these few studies illuminate only a few anti-misconception pedagogic strategies, notably case-based learning, simulations, and lectures. By using a multidimensional pedagogical approach to deal with the 'Africa is a country' stereotype, this chapter contributes to expanding illustrations of possible pedagogic methods for overcoming misconceptions.

Third, this chapter contributes to the literature on student partnership in higher education. Much of the literature on student partnership reports various partnership practices and related challenges in the areas of curriculum planning and course design (Bovill et al., 2011; Bergmark & Westman, 2016;

Bovill & Felton, 2016; Bovill et al., 2016; Woolmer et al., 2016), generating feedback on teaching and learning (Seale et al., 2015; Jensen & Bennett, 2016), and institutional strategy and academic administration (Healey et al., 2010; Carey, 2013; Deeley, 2014; Deeley & Bovill, 2017). Relatively less is published on student partnership in teaching delivery and learning assessment (the few studies in these areas notably include Healey et al., 2014; Bain, 2010), particularly with respect to dialogic partnership in anti-misconception teaching and learning. Basing its theoretical framework on Freirian principles of dialogic partnership, this chapter contributes to literature on students as partners with specific respect to the role of students as partners in dialogue in the multidimensional anti-misconception pedagogical model used in the IPDA for countering the 'Africa is a country' stereotype.

Furthermore, while most of the extant political and social science education research relating to misconceptions were done in Western (American and European) tertiary institutions with long-established cultures of liberal interactive learning (Goldsmith, 2006; Miller et al., 2010; Çavdar et al., 2019), the IPDA study reported in this chapter is in a China-based university (XJTLU) with transnational ties to a British university (University of Liverpool). Given linguistic and learning culture differences in transnational contexts such as XJTLU's, risks of classroom reticence – especially amongst Chinese students who are typically accustomed to teacher-centred classroom cultures in their pre-university education experience (Ergenc, 2020:4) – pose a peculiar challenge to IPDA's anti-misconception pedagogic model which engages students as country specialists and requires verbal interactivity in the classroom. While I have previously highlighted the utility of student podcasts for overcoming the challenge of classroom reticence (Che, 2023), the anti-misconception effectiveness of engaging students as country specialists, including in podcast tasks, remains underexplored. In addition to data previously collected from a survey of student perceptions from January to March 2022, this chapter innovatively draws on misconception pre-tests in September 2023 and post-module delivery of mechanical

reviews of student essays in January 2024 to substantiate the utility of IPDA's misconception-targeting pedagogical model.

The rest of this chapter proceeds in a number of sections. First, I outline the chapter's theoretical framework and related misconception-targeting multidimensional pedagogical model, building on insight from Savion's (2009) cognitive theory on misconception persistence and Freirian principles of dialogic student partnership (Freire, 1996; Peters & Mathias, 2018) relevant for detecting and dispelling stereotypes. Because Savion (2009:89-90) places 'dialogue' at the top of her list of recommended student-centred pedagogic strategies for overcoming persistent misconceptions without elaboration, I draw on Freire's (1996) pioneering philosophy on active learning through student-student and student-teacher dialogic partnership for wisdom on principles suitable for anchoring classroom dialogue and alleviating anxieties which sustain misconceptions in Savion's cognitive theory. Second, I discuss application of Freirian principles in the anti-misconception delivery design of IPDA, which engages students as country specialists. Next, the chapter reports its evaluative research design and related findings on utility and challenges of engaging students as country specialists for overcoming the misconception of Africa as a country. The chapter concludes by highlighting key takeaways and guiding principles for instructors interested in adapting this chapter's anti-misconception model.

## **Theoretical Framework**

Colonial Western-centric views of Africa, including in modernisation theory of development, typically portray Africa as a homogenous entity belonging to a so-called 'underdeveloped world' or 'third world'. Such a reductionist aggregative depiction of Africa ostensibly underlies ubiquity of the 'Africa is a country' misconception given conventional dominance of modernisation theory in development studies. However, modernisation theory's aggregative view of African societies cannot explain why a person may maintain such a view in the face of discrediting information from multiple

sources (books, films, social media, etc) in a highly globalised and interconnected era. Savion's (2009) cognitive theory of perception perseverance seems more appropriate for explaining why a person may continue to stereotype Africa as a country despite probably having previously encountered factual information to the contrary.

According to Savion's theory, when a person encounters information discrediting a long-held misconception, a cognitive disequilibrium is created as the brain experiences a conflict between the new information and pre-held ideas. This state of cognitive conflict is accompanied by fears of: i) losing control over use of preconceptions to find coherence, meaningfulness, and order in the world and to predict behaviour and events; ii) losing rapidity processing large amounts of information, including about diversity of the world, with little cognitive effort; and iii) losing sense of self or bruising own ego from admitting inaccuracy of the pre-held perception (Savion, 2009:83). Interpreted in the context of the 'Africa is a country' misconception, these fears are ostensibly supported by apprehension over complexities that diversity of the African continent poses for variegated analysis, necessitating substantial cognitive investment for nuanced and substantiated information analysis contrasting processing rapidity proffered by reductionist references to Africa as a country. Fear of bruising ego is particularly pertinent in the context of the 'Africa is a country' misconception because discrediting information potentially challenges not only inaccuracy of the misconception but also provides a basis for doubting and questioning other opinions or perceptions held about the so-called country.

Because the state of cognitive conflict and fear is uncomfortable, there is a human disposition to try to restore equilibrium by actively or passively resisting the discrediting information. Modes of resistance include conveniently misinterpreting, deliberately challenging, passively avoiding discussion, downplaying, and attaching little value to the discrediting information, or at best confining its validity to a "convenient paradigm" (Savion, 2009:82). Albeit void of empirical tests for validity, Savion's (2009) theory cogently

provides an innovative shift from explaining universality of misconceptions to highlighting cognitive resistance to discrediting information as the driver of misconception persistence over time.

### **Partnership in Anti-Misconception Pedagogy: Engaging Students as Country Specialists**

If cognitive resistance to information discrediting misconceptions is supported by certain fears as outlined in Savion's theory above, then a pedagogical model oriented towards overcoming the 'Africa is a country' misconception amongst students should confront those fears. Hence, a traditional teacher-centred lecture-based approach for dealing with the 'Africa is a country' misconception becomes unappealing. In a teacher-centred approach wherein the teacher is 'sage on the stage' (King, 1993:30) doing all the talking, including via misconception-targeted lectures about the diversity of Africa and using various African countries (despite the teacher's possibly limited expertise on some of the countries) to substantiate lectures, students' fears may be strengthened rather than weakened, increasing risks of resistance. Dominating the stage with anti-misconception lectures leaves students powerless, with limited to no influence over using the classroom to explore and test (in)effectiveness of their pre-conceptions for finding coherence, meaningfulness, and order in the world. This sense of powerlessness can be counterproductive for anti-misconception teaching as students may misinterpret misconception-targeted lectures as attempts by the teacher to impose their views on students.

Moreover, fear of losing rapidity in processing large amounts of information relating to the diversity of Africa without much cognitive investment is not alleviated in a teacher-centred approach. Misconception-oriented lectures leaves limited or no opportunities for students to actively engage their senses, to emotionally connect and collaborate with each other in anti-misconception learning, and to orally interact with each other (Tusmith & Reddy, 2002). Limited

student engagement in the teacher-centred approach to anti-misconception teaching and learning potentially results in a concentration of the burden of detecting and confronting misconceptions around the teacher. This concentrated burden is especially problematic if the teacher's own knowledge on Africa is limited, or even worse, if the teacher holds misconceptions of their own or is unable to correctly judge misconceptions in students' prior knowledge. Given the risk of misjudging students' misconceptions without interactive opportunities to rectify such misjudgements and given the risk of transmitting and reinforcing misconceptions through the traditional lecture-based approach, students may feel frustration (Savion, 2009:89) including by the lack of interactivity, leaving fears of losing information processing swiftness afforded by Africa-wide generalisations unbroken.

Compared to the traditional teacher-centred approach, a student-centred pedagogical approach - which engages students actively in the teaching and learning process while displacing the teacher from 'sage on the stage' to 'guide on the side' (King, 1993:30; Sarkar Arani et al., 2019:233) - seems more promising for alleviating fears underlying resistance to information discrediting misconceptions. Savion (2009:89-90; 2005) proposes a list of student-centred, anti-misconception instructional techniques, at the top of which 'dialogue' is emphasised.

The prominent role of student-student and student-teacher conversations in active teaching and learning is fundamentally rooted on renowned transformative education thinker Freire's (1996) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* which criticises the traditional divide between responsibilities of the teacher and the student. According to the traditional divide, "the teacher teaches and the students are taught ... the teacher talks and the students listen" (Freire, 1996:54). Restricting students to passive listeners hinders student contribution to knowledge generation, facilitating conformity to the political and socio-economic status quo. Conversely in Freire's (1996) transformative pedagogical model, the student not only listens but is a collaborative partner, functioning as a teacher, even if

only temporarily, by vocally participating in teaching through dialogue. In the transformative model, the teacher becomes a teacher-student and the student becomes a student-teacher.

Enacting dialogic student partnerships necessitates teaching and learning methods which allow for problem posing, co-investigation, and shared reflection, amongst other Freirian principles (Peters & Mathias, 2018:63). Consistent with these Freirian principles, the anti-misconception pedagogical model used in IPDA is multidimensional whilst fundamentally engaging students as country specialists. Essentially, each student in the module had a chance to act as a 'student-teacher' by specialising on one African country, researching how each topic and related readings apply to the specific country, making a real-time or recorded audio presentation (podcast) which is collectively listened to in class, and participating in seminar discussions of points derived from the presentation. Country choices were confirmed by the teacher on a 'first-come, first-served' basis. Because of much larger class sizes (over 100 students), the presentation component was excluded from the delivery design of IPDA in the last two academic years (2022-2024), albeit retained in another module taught by myself with more administrative and teaching support at the same foundational level of the Bachelor of Arts in International Relations at XJTLU.

### **Application of Freirian Principles of Dialogic Partnership in IPDA**

Although Savion (2009:89-90) prescribes 'dialogue' as a leading student-centred pedagogic strategy for overcoming persistent misconceptions, very little additional information is provided by the cognitive theorist to elaborate attributes or guiding principles of a classroom dialogic approach for overcoming misconceptions. Hence, as noted earlier, Freire's (1996) pioneering philosophy on active learning through student-student and student-teacher dialogue is relevant for wisdom on principles underlying the potential of dialogue to weaken fears associated with misconception persistence. This

section discusses how the already-mentioned Freirian principles of dialogic partnership (problem posing, co-investigation, and shared reflection) are applied in IPDA's 'engaging students as country specialists' model for confronting the 'Africa is a country' misconception.

To start off, IPDA incorporated the Freirian principle of problem posing by using quizzes and questions before and during module delivery to generate curiosity and test knowledge on the diversity of Africa. In the first week of module delivery I typically administer a quiz to gauge students' prior conceptions and identify possible misconceptions about Africa. Prior to the 2023-2024 academic year, questions in the quiz were posed orally to the entire class, and often only the most confident and least reticent students responded. However, at the start of the 2023-2024 academic year, I administered the quiz in written format and each student was required to write down and submit their answer sheets without including their names and registration numbers for purposes of anonymity in reviewing responses.

Following the pre-test, I usually highlight correct answers discrediting misconceptions and then introduce students to the module and its delivery design, emphasising student-teacher responsibilities of students as class country specialists and the importance of using specific countries to substantiate presentations, discussions, and assessment essays in IPDA. This initial session serves, in part, to trigger student curiosity and attention to the anti-misconception orientation of IPDA while inspiring students to re-evaluate cognitive processing rapidity afforded by Africa-wide generalisations as being costly in unsubstantiated end-of-semester essays and in the long-run for engagement with the policy world following graduation.

Sustaining problem posing throughout the semester, each topic in the module is accompanied by specific questions or problems designed to pool ideas of country specialists while allowing for diverse case-based substantiation of abstract learning. For instance, on the linkage between colonialism and underdevelopment, IPDA poses the problem: "How did

colonialism weaken the development of African states?” On ethnic patronage and underdevelopment, the module asks: “How does ethnicity affect provision of public goods in African states?” Posed problems and seminar discussions were expected to keep students exposed to regular and recurrent evidence (from country specialist student teachers) discrediting the ‘Africa is a country’ stereotype.

Problem posing and shared reflection are bridged in IPDA by co-investigation. As clarified by Peters and Mathias (2018:63), co-investigation does not necessarily entail working together in groups but must involve a sense of collective purpose. In IPDA, co-investigation involved all module participants reading certain texts prescribed by instructors and undertaking additional country-specific research for the collective purpose of determining if, and in what ways, concepts and issues in required readings apply or do not apply to chosen African countries. Through co-investigation, students encounter scholarly literature containing empirical references to specific African countries which equip students for nuanced, substantiated analysis of themes in the module, and by extension mitigate the fear of discarding the ‘Africa is a country’ myth based on cognitive inclinations for information processing swiftness.

Finally, the Freirian principle of shared reflection is strung into IPDA’s pedagogic model of ‘engaging students as country specialists’ by requiring brief (5–10 minutes) student presentations and group discussions. To mitigate oral reticence in class, students can record their presentations as audio podcasts which are then played in the classroom by the teacher for collective listening by the class. Whether conducted live in person or recorded, the presentation task facilitates student engagement as student-teachers, allowing each student to voice their interpretation of module readings with respect to their specific country of specialisation, providing a basis for group-based discussions of variations (or the absence thereof) in dynamics of underdevelopment challenges across different African countries.

Through the presentation task, it can be anticipated that each student's sense of value expectation (as a partner in teaching) would be fostered, inspiring them to read extensively, reflect critically, and substantiate knowledge application with nuance, all values which bode well for building self-confidence and discarding long-held misconceptions without fear of losing analytical processing swiftness. Collectively listening to audio podcasts and/or in-person presentations potentially fosters emotional bonding, facilitating development of friendly, collaborative learning relationships which can help to cushion the fear of bruising self-ego in otherwise embarrassing circumstances of admitting misconceptions. Discussions in IPDA are structured based on content of presentations and in relation to problems posed on each topic in the module. Through the weekly discussions, students become recurrently exposed to the use of diverse specific countries in substantiation of arguments, sustaining consciousness about redundancy of the misconception that 'Africa is a country' while potentially inspiring application of more contextual nuance in analyses of issues relating to development in Africa.

## **Methodology**

To evaluate the effects of engaging students as country specialists to rectify the 'Africa is a country' misconception, this pedagogic research relied on mixed methods involving: a survey in January to March 2022 of students' subjective perceptions; and more objective measures entailing a preconception quiz on Africa in September 2023 (prior to module delivery in the 2023-2024 academic year), and mechanical reviews of end-of-semester assessment essays (in January 2024) for references to specific African countries in substantiating arguments (as opposed to generic references to Africa). This study focused on the IPDA module in XJTLU which I have taught since September 2021 using similar course materials.

The survey data is drawn from a study which I conducted in 2022 as part of a pedagogic action research (Che, 2023). Upon taking charge of the IPDA module in 2021, I introduced student audio podcasts in module delivery to foster interactivity and

active learning in the module. The podcasting task required each student to record their views on how assigned readings relate to specific African countries chosen by students in the module. While Che (2023) largely focused on examining perceptions of students about the pedagogic utility of student podcasts, some of the feedback collected in the survey highlighted anti-misconception learning gains. Much of the feedback relating to anti-misconception learning is not reported in the 2023 publication.

In addition to the previously unreported survey data, the present chapter draws on a written pre-test (preconception quiz) on Africa and post-module delivery mechanical review of essays to gauge persistence of the 'Africa is a country' stereotype. Administering a preconception quiz helps towards detecting stereotypes and inaccurate views prior to module delivery. In previous academic years (prior to September 2023), I administered the quiz orally by voicing questions to the class, and after a few response attempts from students, I clarified the correct answers. A challenge that I have observed with this oral approach to the preconception quiz is that very few students, mostly the least reticent tend to participate, making it difficult to confidently ascertain the number of students with Africa-related misconceptions.

To rectify the above challenge, I administered the preconception quiz in written format at the start of the 2023-2024 academic year. In the first class session in September 2023, every student who attended received a typewritten question asking whether Africa is a country or continent. Students were instructed not to communicate with one another, and not to write their names or other identification details on their answers. The duration of the quiz was five minutes after which all answer sheets were collected by the teacher for purposes of checking how many students misconceived Africa as a country.

A key limitation of this study's design is that evaluation of the (in)effectiveness of engaging students as country specialists did not specifically target only students who had expressed the 'Africa is a country' stereotype in pre-module

delivery misconception quizzes. To increase response rates, the misconception pre-test was designed to be anonymously answered. Because of this anonymity, it was impossible to identify and target only misconception-holding students in the post-module delivery research evaluating persistence of misconceptions.

However, IPDA's design engaged all students as country specialists. Thus all IPDA student module participants in the academic year 2021-2022 were targeted for participation in the survey which was administered as a written questionnaire online (Lime Survey). Settings in the Lime Survey were configured to ensure anonymity in student responses. Thus, although I shared the survey link exclusively with students in the module, answered questionnaires did not contain the identification details of students. Students were also given assurances that participation in the survey will not affect their grades in conformity with ethical clearance for the research from XJTU's Ethics Committee.

To gauge student pedagogic perceptions of engaging students as country specialists, I included a closed-ended question in the questionnaire requiring students to rate on a Likert attitudinal scale the extent to which they agree with pre-explained utility of country specialisation for developing critical, variegated perspectives about Africa while challenging the misconception of Africa as a country.

## **Findings and Discussion**

Thirty-five students answered the questionnaire out of a total of 47 students in the 2021-2022 cohort (74.5% response rate). As shown in the graph below, the majority (31) of the 35 responses either agreed or strongly agreed that engaging students as country specialists was useful for cultivating nuanced differentiated perspectives about Africa.

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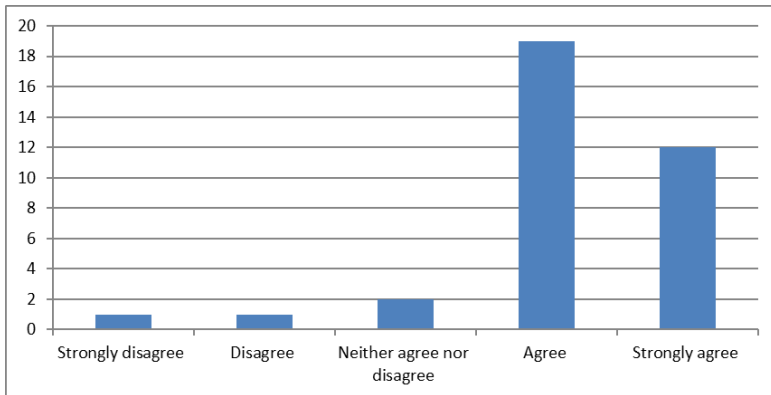


Figure 7.1: Extent to which students (dis)agree with pedagogic utility of engaging students as country specialists for countering the 'Africa is a country' misconception. Source: Author's conceptualisation

Immediately following closed-ended answer options in the questionnaire, students were given the opportunity to enter open-ended comments to substantiate their ratings. Students' comments were diverse and pointed to variegated learning gains about Africa from the various teaching and learning activities in IPDA. Most of the comments reveal an enhanced sense of value expectation associated especially with the presentation and discussion components of the module as a pertinent factor underlying affirmative perceptions of IPDA's multidimensional engagement of students as country specialists. Some revealing excerpts:

Before taking the module, we had very little information on any African state, so specializing on specific countries was a useful way for effectively linking what we learn in the module with the real world.

I think the idea of allocating one student one country is really useful for corroborating our views in the podcasts. I wanted my podcast to sound really academic so I read a lot about my chosen country which increased my confidence to substantiate discussions on the challenge of corruption to development.

## Chapter 7

Initially I was worried because of my limited knowledge on Africa...To avoid making mistakes and incorrect claims in my podcast, I did the readings carefully and researched my [chosen] African country a lot.

[Through the podcasts and discussions of specific countries] we get different ideas from all classmates and this made us to understand that Africa is a very diverse continent.

The tasks in this module pushed students to use more private time in reading, researching specific countries, and preparing to explain one's views in the seminar.

During the seminar discussions students encountered different perspectives relating to the countries we chose for analyses. Students could also ask questions which allowed us to get comprehensive answers and knowledge about Africa.

I think my podcast was somewhat relevant in helping me to research and learn more about my [chosen] African country.

Getting us [students] to discuss applicability of ideas in the podcasts to various countries is a good way for us to learn about different development experiences and different cultures in Africa.

In a section of the questionnaire asking about students' perceived challenges in IPDA module delivery, responses flagged a few concerns relating to variations in quality of podcasts, repetitive podcast recording, difficulty in sourcing reading materials, underestimation of class knowledge about Africa's diversity, and overestimation of capacity of students to act as teachers. Some representative excerpts to substantiate these concerns:

It was difficult to understand some of the podcasts, especially because of the different accents of students. This is worsened because of the lack of visual supporting material. Making a [powerpoint presentation] isn't that

## How We Teach Africa Matters

much more difficult but I believe it will help increase understanding significantly.

Too much time was wasted on improving my recording as I wanted it to sound good for the class.

Only [a few days' notice] was given for choosing countries in the module. I did not get enough time to search information on different countries before choosing. I think students should be given a longer [notice] period to minimize uncertainty about their choices.

The readings are difficult. And finding readings on my [African] country of specialisation is not easy.

There is very little information in the media about some of the African countries. I struggled to find information on [my chosen African country].

I think [the teacher] underestimate[s] how much the students know about Africa. It would have been better to let students freely decide how they want to illustrate their arguments.

... the burden of teaching is partially moved from the very capable and experienced lecturer to a student. I believe that in a worst-case scenario, this can negatively affect the learning and motivation for the rest of the class.

However, the concerns raised were few and none of them challenged the asserted utility of country specialisation in the module for teaching-back the 'Africa is a country' misconception. Evidence from the mechanical review of essays in the module further corroborates the usefulness of engaging students as country specialists in countering the 'Africa is a country' misconception. As a less subjective measure of the anti-misconception effectiveness of engaging students as country specialists, I mechanically reviewed end-of-semester essays for substantiating references to specific African countries as opposed to naive generic mentions of Africa without nuance. The summative essay required students to use development theories and experiences of any African country to discuss one contemporary development challenge.

Given IPDA's anti-misconception emphasis and formative feedback on application of specific country cases in student presentations and group discussions, I expected that each essay will mention the name of at least one country at least once, reflecting empirical nuance that defies the 'Africa is a country' stereotype. To pass the essay assessment, there were additional requirements, including traditionally tested abilities to write coherently, clearly, critically, and convincingly. Mechanical reviews of essays in the context of this pedagogic research only served to determine if any student still misconceived Africa as a country and was unable to mention an African country by name following IPDA's misconception-oriented delivery.

Of 43 essays submitted for assessment in the 2021-2022 academic year, only one student failed to mention one or more specific African countries to substantiate analysis, compared to three students who had admitted in the survey questionnaire that they held misconceptions of Africa as a country prior to joining the module. Regarding the misconception quiz administered at the start of the 2023-2024 academic year, 88 students answered the quiz. Of the 88 responses, 14 (15.9%) portrayed Africa as a country rather than a continent. While 9 of the students simply specified 'country' in response to the quiz as to whether Africa is a country or continent, 5 students elaborated their inaccurate perceptions of Africa as follows:

Africa is one of the largest states.

Actually, I don't know much about Africa, but I think it is a big country.

It [Africa] is the second largest country in the world.

I guess it [Africa] is a country, one of the biggest.

Africa can be considered a country.

Although 14 students expressed the 'Africa is a country' stereotype in IPDA's misconception pre-test in September 2023, only one student's end-of-semester essay evinced misconception persistence as the essay failed to mention a specific country to substantiate arguments following application of the module's anti-misconception design. I am, however,

not certain if the author of the essay was one of the students who inaccurately depicted Africa as a country in the pre-test as some students did not attend the first lecture in which the preconception quiz was administered.

The remarkable decline in the number of students holding the 'Africa is a country' misconception at the end (relative to the start) of the semester bears evidence to effectiveness of engaging students as country specialists towards dispelling fears underlying cognitive conflicts between long-held misconceptions and encountered discrediting or corrective information. According to Savion's (2009) cognitive theory of belief perseverance reviewed earlier, communicating corrective information after the misconception pre-test at the start of the semester could only have served to trigger a cognitive disequilibrium for students holding the 'Africa is a country' misconception.

A misconception-oriented module delivery design was necessary if students were to become equipped with the enthusiasm and confidence needed to overcome fears motivating resistance to discrediting information and sustaining misconceptions in Savion's theory. Engaging students actively as country specialists in teaching and learning about Africa, including through student podcasts and podcast-based seminar discussions, helped to boost students' sense of value expectation in the classroom which in turn inspired enthusiasm to conduct the module's readings and substantiate thematic views with empirical details drawn from experiences of specific African countries.

In hindsight, recurrently participating in module activities as 'student-teachers' while drawing on developments from selected African countries gave students opportunities to express thoughts, pose questions, obtain answers, and discuss similarities and differences in experiences of African countries on various themes. Ostensibly, as students performed their roles as country specialists on a weekly basis, they became more conscious about Africa's diversity and more confident to jettison the stereotypical 'Africa is a country' monolithic approach to

analysis for differentiated approaches requiring much cognitive investment for nuanced substantiations. Moreover, through researching their countries of specialisation, students with prior misconceptions of Africa as a country had opportunities to develop analytical coherence within the context of their chosen countries, boosting confidence to discard the use of misconceptions in making generalisations about Africa whilst seeking to articulate order, coherence, and meaningfulness in perceptions of the continent.

## **Conclusion**

While the challenge of misconceptions to education and misconception-oriented pedagogies are well documented in the natural sciences, there is a deficit of studies dealing with misconceptions in the social and political science education, in part because of the constructivist nature of the latter disciplines. Contributing towards curbing this deficit while focusing on the infamous yet persistent 'Africa is a country' misconception, this chapter has shared an anti-misconception pedagogic model engaging students as country specialists. The model builds on cognitive theory of misconception persistence and Freirian principles of dialogic partnership to actively involve students in module delivery for purposes of tackling anxieties underlying human dispositions to resist information discrediting long-held misconceptions.

After reporting application of the model to IPDA, an undergraduate International Relations module in a China-based transnational university, the chapter documents empirical evaluation of pedagogic utility of IPDA's anti-misconception model. The evaluation involved both a survey of student perceptions and mechanical reviews of student essays for references to specific African countries as opposed to generic Africa references. The survey notably revealed an increase in students' sense of value expectation – owing to partnership responsibilities in the module's anti-misconception model – which boosted students' motivation for and engagement in differentiated learning about Africa, ultimately enhancing

confidence and capacity for nuanced substantiation of analysis using specific African countries.

Findings from the mechanical reviews of essays revealed only two students (one in academic year 2021–2022 and one in 2023–2024) failing to substantiate analysis with one or more specific African countries and instead portraying Africa as a country. Testament to the usefulness of the IPDA’s anti-misconception model, this chapter reported a decline in the number of students depicting Africa as a country at the end of the semester following the engagement of students as country specialists. However, the effectiveness of the IPDA’s model could be further researched by investigating whether students previously engaged as country specialists continue to hold or revert to the specific ‘Africa is a country’ misconception long after graduation.

Nevertheless, given the drop in number of students misconceptualising Africa as a country in the IPDA by the end of the semester, some takeaway principles could be highlighted from the IPDA’s anti-misconception model and related research for purposes of inspiring and facilitating adaptation by interested teachers. First, inquisitiveness: even before adapting the model, it is important to find out (e.g., through misconception pre-tests, surveys, and informal chats) if some students actually misconceptualise Africa as a country, otherwise misconception-oriented course delivery is not justifiable. Second, transparency: for students to collaborate as partners in anti-misconception teaching delivery, it is essential to be open and communicative about why and how students are expected to participate as country specialists, including in the course or module handbook. Finally, resourcefulness: as some students may struggle to find credible academic material by themselves, especially in the foundational year of undergraduate studies, adaptation of the IPDA’s model will benefit from the resourcefulness of teachers in sourcing and sharing with students relevant readings.

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## Chapter 8

# Elders Critical Teachings (ElderCrits): The Epistemic Gift for De/Anti-Colonial Turn in Teaching Africa

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### Introduction

Let us prefix the chapter with a story: Not too long ago, one of the authors of this chapter had a conversation with a colleague at their workplace about wasteful spending amongst some politicians when it comes to using public funds. During the conversation, the colleague spoke about a bridge that has been constructed to a road that leads to nowhere: “the government is building a bridge that is taking us to Timbuktu!” It was the first time *Author Two* has heard Timbuktu being used as a metaphor, so he asked the colleague what they knew about Timbuktu. The response was surprising. The colleague explained that Timbuktu is a fictional place, and it is used metaphorically to imply things that do not exist. *Author Two* had to explain to the colleague that Timbuktu was actually a city in Mali Empire (Africa) in the fifteenth century, and it was the hub for Islamic intellectualism with its famous Sankore University and other Madrasa attracting scholars from all over the world especially

during the reign of Mansa Musa. The colleague was surprised by that information and wondered why they have not learned it in school. Such is the viciousness of Western education to take a notable accomplishment of Africa and make it a mockery in Europe and North America.

This story of treating Africa's accomplishments as mythical and fictional stories is consistent with how Europe and North America have historically constructed Africa. Africa is the cradle of civilisation where humans first evolved and has produced some of the great empires and kingdoms – Egypt, Abyssinia, Mali, Songhai, and Ghana to name few – whose accomplishments laid the foundation or contributed to human civilisations (Steel & Gardiner, 2025). Yet, Africa is talked about in Europe and North America as the “dark continent,” where “crisis” exists in everything that happens in the continent. The misconstruction of Africa as a crisis continent not only erases Europe and North America's complicity but also successfully portrays Africa as a helpless continent without the ‘imperial Western saviour's support’. Through this discourse, Africa is rendered impure in white Western gaze, and in the process, Africa's achievements and contributions to human civilisation and development are erased to serve the European agenda. Chabal (1996) laments about the ‘politics of the mirror’ and ‘the tyranny of causalities’ (Chabal, 1986) in the Euro-American education system, where Africa is being held up to be what it is not. We refer to Chabal (1986; 1996) because his conceptual analyses offer a critical lens about the structural implications of Eurocentric education, in particular, the mischaracterisation of Africa as a crisis continent and the power of such educational politics to constrain thought, imagination, and possibilities for Africa.

In contemporary times, many African scholars are retelling Africa's stories in its complete form, highlighting how Africa has contributed to events, ideas, and worldviews that have shaped and continue to shape human growth and development (see Adjei, 2014; Dei, 2011; 2004; Dei & Adjei, 2014; Mbembe, 1997; Nyamnjoh 2004; 2012; Parker & Rathbone, 2007). These scholars and many others not named are reclaiming Africans

Indigenous knowledges to inform and shape how we think, talk, and teach Africa. This chapter adds to the conversation by drawing on African Elders Critical Teachings (*ElderCrits*) to guide how we talk and teach Africa in the schooling and education in the Global North. *ElderCrits* are epistemologies of Indigenous Elders anchored in the shared voices, experiences, history, cultures, and viewpoints of Indigenous communities over generations because of sustained attachments and relationship to the land, culture, and nature (Adjei & Dei, 2024; Dei & Adjei, 2024; Dei et al., 2024). *ElderCrits* are traditional knowledges and cultural wisdoms treasured and held in highest esteem by Indigenous communities, and they often inform, shape, guide, organise, and regulate how Indigenous community members uphold to the promise of a better future. In Africa, *ElderCrits* are expressed in folklore, proverbs, symbols, artefacts, sculptures, artistic expressions, and storytelling and their formulations and uses represent an opportunity to talk and teach differently about Africa. The data for the chapter was collected amongst Indigenous Asante Elders of Ghana, leading scholars, and education practitioners from Ghana currently engaged in transformative educational work. The chapter concludes with important lessons on how educators can draw on African *ElderCrits* to impart invaluable lessons about Africa as seen through the eyes of Indigenous African Elders.

The data for this chapter were taken from Memorial University's Vice President Research-funded study of 25 Asante Elders from Koforidua and Kumasi of Ghana. Four major questions guided the literature review, individual conversations with Asante Elders, and inquiry-based workshops: How does *ElderCrits* exist by way of literature in Africa, Australia, Europe, and North America's contexts (objective 01)? What are the ways and forms that Asante Elders (as cultural custodians and local educators) understand, interpret, reflect, and articulate *ElderCrits* in everyday social interaction (objective 02)? In what ways can this body of knowledge from Asante Elders be used to teach critical thinking education in Ghana and Canada (objectives 03-04)? We drew on Jo-Ann Archibald's (2008) *Indigenous storywork* as a methodology to explore

African *ElderCrits* amongst the Asantes of Ghana. Archibald (2008:373) conceptualises storywork as “the process of making meaning through stories, whether they are traditional or lived experiences”. Karen Martin (2006:21) describes storywork as a “meta-process that enables the many smaller stories ... to be woven together in the overall research process”. Storytelling is an integral part of Asantes’ daily realities, and it is a process through which Asantes share intergenerational knowledge, the history of the land, local experiences, and cultural worldviews to young ones. Cajete (1994) argues that storytelling in the form of image-making, ritual drama, proverbial sayings, riddles, artistic expression and others forms the basic foundation of Indigenous peoples’ learning and teaching. By utilising Archibald’s (2008) storywork, the research team employed research methodology consistent with Asantes’ tradition of storytelling.

The methods honoured traditional oratory protocols of the spoken word to engage with the Elders and enstooled Asante Chiefs in traditional settings for the interviews. African Indigenous engagement protocols are varied and culturally bound depending on rank and leadership structure. Honouring the cultural protocols includes small token gifts, offering drinks for the pouring of libation, and hearing the responses from the traditional Chiefs using linguists who transmit using the power of oratory (i.e., riddles, proverbs, fables, and idioms), synthesising complex issues in simplistic and relatable ways. The conversations were around varied forms of *ElderCrits* relevant to Asantes, their meanings and uses in everyday conversations. All conversations were carried out in Twi to enable fluent and easy discussions. With the permission of Elders, each conversation was recorded. In addition, adequate notes were taken. Data analyses were performed throughout the phase of conversations with Elders to allow for modifications to questions asked as needed, as well as to allow room for clarifications from Elders. Two local research assistants helped with the transcription and translation of Elders’ conversations. Elders were consulted to ensure that no meanings were lost in transcription and translations. In consultation and collaboration with Elders, we manually used open coding to acquire Elders’ primary thoughts

and experiences. Our analyses were collaborative as we moved back-and-forth between transcripts, initial findings, existing literature, field notes, photographic images, and consultation with community leaders to identify themes and storylines. In our collaborative analyses, we identified multiple ways that Asante Elders' critical teachings are transmitted to learners. We reproduced samples of such teachings to show how one can think, talk, and teach Africa.

### Teaching Africa through symbolism

African symbolism is an Indigenous mythopoetic tradition rooted in artistic creation to convey essential teachings, wisdom, values, experiences, and the interconnectedness of all things. African symbolisms are ideographic and pictographic writing systems that have existed in traditional African society for a long time (Adagbo, 2014; Adjei 2015; 2018; Seidu et al., 2022). They carry aphorisms, proverbs, and metaphors expressed through visual form, and they have capacity to safeguard cherished truths, spirituality, history, values and ethics of nature, culture, and community. Here are few examples of the symbols.



**Symbol 8.1:** Symbol of prudence and thoughtfulness. Source: Paul Adjei's research lab on African ElderCrits.

The symbol of prudence and thoughtfulness depicts three individuals in a seating position performing three different actions with their hands. One is covering both ears with both hands, the second is covering both eyes with both hands, and the last person is covering their mouth with both hands. The message in the actions is simple: *What I have not heard with my ears; what I have not seen with my eyes, my mouth will not speak*

*about it.* The symbol implies that one is not expected to attest to things not witnessed nor heard personally. The symbol carries the proverbial saying “*Se ano patre a eyehu ekyen anamɔn*” which literally translates as, “A slipped tongue does more damages than a slipped foot.” The proverb is a caution against those who are quick to speak of issues that they have limited knowledge and facts about. The Asante Elders use this image to teach the importance of being prudent and thoughtful in life. One must only speak of issues of which they have personal knowledge, and should not rely on rumours and hearsay to make judgement calls about situations and people.



**Symbol 8.2:** Mpuasa Ntiamoah – the metaphor of three mythical haircut. Source: Paul Adjei's research lab on African ElderCrits.

*Mpuasa* in the Twi language means three-hairlocks. *Ntiamoah* is an Asante name of a person. In a loose term, *Mpuasa Ntiamoah* means *the three-hairlocks of Ntiamoah*. *Mpuasa Ntiamoah* is a special haircut with three similarly shaped hairlocks with each strand of the hairlock strategically positioned on a cleanly shaved head. One hairlock is positioned at the front, the other hairlock at the back right and the last hairlock on the back left. Each strand of hairlock is coded with a special meaning. Together, the three mythical hairlocks convey wisdom and lessons about life. The first lock (in the front) carries the message “some secrets are not meant to be shared”; the second lock on the back right carries the message “blood is thicker than water” and the third lock on the back left means “a sleepy eye does not know when one is sorrowful.” There are several versions of the story behind the mystery haircut of *Mpuasa Ntiamoah*. This is a version shared by an Elder interviewed:

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The man called Ntiamoah was married to a single-mother with a 10-year-old child. Although hardworking, Ntiamoah was still poor. Due to his poor status, Ntiamoah was ill-treated at home and received little to no respect from his family. One day, Ntiamoah went to farm and discovered treasures of gold hidden in a secret cave. He brought the treasures home and revealed the source of the treasures only to his wife. They sold the treasures to change their fortunes. The treasures, however, belonged to the King who has hidden them at that secret place. When the king realized his treasures were gone, he offered a reward of unimaginable wealth to anyone who could help identify the persons who took them. Enticed by the promise of unimaginable wealth, Ntiamoah's wife went to the King and told him everything she knew about the treasure including his husband's complicit role in the missing treasure.

The king ordered his executioners to arrest Ntiamoah. In the early morning, when the executioners went to pick Ntiamoah, he was wearing a piece of cloth belonging to the stepchild. The stepson, knowing Ntiamoah's impending execution, retrieved the piece of cloth, leaving Ntiamoah naked. While waiting for the King's judgement, Ntiamoah was seen dozing off. The King asked Ntiamoah of his final wish before his execution. Ntiamoah requested a barber to give him a special haircut. Ntiamoah asked the barber to cleanly shave off his hair and leave three locks that sit apart from each other according to his direction: The first lock should be positioned at the front of his head, the second lock should be positioned at the left back of his head, and the last lock, should be positioned at the back right of his head. The haircut was unique and never seen before in the entire Land. When the King saw the haircut, he asked Ntiamoah to explain the meaning of the haircut. Ntiamoah explained that the first lock (in the front) means "some secrets are not meant to be shared"; the second lock on the right back means "blood is thicker than water" and the last lock means "a sleepy eye does not know when one is sorrowful." The King, then asked

Ntiamoah to explain the messages. Ntiamoah proceeded to explain that if he has not revealed the secret behind the treasure, his wife could never have betrayed him. Second, he is convinced his own biological child will treat him better than the way his stepchild did. Finally, in spite of his sorrowful state, he could not resist sleepiness. This means a sleepy eye does not know when one is sorrowful. The King was impressed with the wisdom of Ntiamoah and ordered his immediate release.

This particular haircut has since been immortalised in the Asante Kingdom as *Mpuasa Ntiamoah* in honour of Ntiamoah. It is worn on special occasions by selected royal members to convey the lessons and wisdom of Ntiamoah. The symbol of *Mpuasa Ntiamoah* carries the wisdom that an enemy within can be more dangerous than those outside. More reasons in our daily dealings, that one must take precaution against not only those who can harm us from outside but also those who could harm us within. Trust is one of the most valuable gifts that one could ever have; therefore, one must be careful who one shares such a valuable gift with. Some secrets are better off kept to oneself than trusting others with them. Not that one should not open up to others with their secrets but one should always be advised that a secret shared by more than one person has a higher risk of being revealed to others.

Further, the symbol also cautions against those who act with selfish interest in mind. One Elder states this proverb to explain the last point, *se obi bepoli wo wo mpoma akyi, n'amaneba mu no, wo din mpa mu da*. This literally translates to “when someone trips behind your house, do not expect your name to be left out in the incident report.” The proverb suggests that one should be mindful of not being instrumental in situations which leads to negative consequences. As noted from the proverb, victims of mischievous acts will never forget those responsible for their harms. *Ntiamoah*'s wife and stepchild acted selfishly and their greediness and inconsiderate behaviours are always remembered whenever Elders talk about *Mpuasa Ntiamoah*.



**Symbol 8.3:** The Power of Unity: Together we are strong. Source: Paul Adjei's research lab on African ElderCrits.

The symbol of togetherness symbolises the power of unity and its strength to accomplish the unsurmountable tasks. As depicted in the image above, five individuals are joined together by the power of their hands. The symbol exists in multiple forms. In some images, there are three people in one; sometimes, there are seven people in one; nine people in one; eleven people in one, and thirteen people in one. Regardless of the number of people in the image, the craftspeople always use one tree trunk to craft it, further affirming the old saying “out of many are one body.” The symbol is used to teach that though we may be different, when we are united by a common goal, nothing will stop us from accomplishing any task. The symbol of togetherness carries the proverbial saying, *dodoɔ ɛso a won bere*. This literally translates to when the crowd are carrying together, they are never tired. Asante Elders use this symbol to emphasise the importance of unity in building a society. The symbol also emphasises the essence of team work, mutual interdependence, co-operation, social responsibility, solidarity, collective existence and the traditions of mutuality. One’s action reverberates not only on oneself but also on others. As one will notice from the symbol, each image in the symbol relies on each other to stand firmly despite leaning back. The insight is that when we trustfully rely on each other, even in our vulnerable state, we remain firm and strong. The sense of togetherness does not imply that differences do not exist but rather to emphasise the importance of focusing on shared goals and collective responsibilities. The symbol affirms our basic humanness as the ability to relate to rather than to dominate others.

## **Elders Critical Teaching through Linguistic Staffs**

The Linguist (Okyeame) is the spokesperson of the King or a chief. Within Asante culture, the words of the king or a chief are deemed to carry the powers of the Ancestors and the deities. Therefore, the King or a chief cannot address his people directly but rather uses a low tone in his message for the Linguist to amplify them to the hearing of the people. Even if someone was standing near and actually overheard what the King or a chief said, they will ignore what they overheard and only trust what was heard from the Linguist's mouth. The responsibility of a Linguist is to listen to what the King or a chief is saying and reword them appropriately and pleasantly to the people. Thus, if the Linguist fails to reconstruct a message of the King or a chief before speaking out, and chaos arises because of the message, then the blame will be on the Linguist and not the King or a chief. A Linguist must have the gift of oratory. In fact, a common sign that one is an excellent candidate to be a Linguist is the ability to exercise control over words and particularly to know public speaking. A nineteenth-century explorer, Freeman (1958) observes that the art of oratory amongst the Asantes carried a remarkable pitch of perfection. At the public palavers, each Linguist stands up in turn and pours forth a flood of speech the readiness and exuberance of which strikes the stranger with amazement. These oratorical displays appear to afford a great pleasure to the audience. It seems that for every African native, there is a born orator and connoisseur of oratory. "I have seen little boys of eight and ten years hold forth to the court with complete self-possession and with an ease of diction that would have struck envy unto the heart of an English member of parliament" (Freeman, 1958:13).



**Symbol 8.4:** Description. Paul Adjei's research lab on African ElderCrits.

Each Linguist carries a staff (*Okyeame poma*), which is a badge of office. The Linguist staffs are carried in public processions and official businesses. Each staff has specific meaning and is at intentionally selected events and occasions for the coded messages it delivers to the King, a chief, and the audience. In the image above, there are three Linguist staffs with each carrying a unique message. In the first image on the left, two heads are joined together. The symbol carries the message *Eti koro nko agyina*, which loosely translates to, "Consultation requires more than a single head." An important aspect of African democracy is to seek full citizenship participation in governance and decision-making processes that affect ordinary lives. The approach to traditional governance starts with a 'bottom up' and emergent process that allows ordinary citizens to access discussions on matters and making informed decisions. In such deliberations, minority voices are given due consideration and the objective of seeking consensus is to ensure that no one is left out in whatever decision is arrived at in the community. The practice is not to impose a course of action but to collectively arrive at a decision. This symbol stresses the essence of community-building, solidarity and belonging. This particular staff is held up during arbitration at the King or a chief's palace. The linguist holds this staff to remind the King or a chief of the danger of acting arbitrarily. A true King or a chief must be willing to consult with the council of Elders in decision-making. The staff also communicates to the King or a chief that wisdom does not reside in the mind of one person but through consultation and brainstorming, one would be able to arrive at richer and deeply reflected outcomes.

In the second (middle) image above, two people are sitting by a big earthenware bowl. Only one person's hand is in the bowl while the other is watching with interest. The symbol carries the message *nea ade wɔ no na odi, nyɛ nea kɔm de no*, which loosely translates to, "Inheritance can only be passed onto the one entitled to receive and not necessarily those who desire it." This particular staff is used during enstoolment of a chief or when there is an arbitration over inheritance. The staff is a reminder that inheritance must go to the rightful heir and not to people who think they are better suited for it. However, in a broader sense, the staff cautions against people who court things that do not belong to them.

The last staff (third from the left), is an image of a person climbing a tree while another is pushing the person up. The image of the staff carries the message, "*Woforo dua pa ɛna yɛpia wo*", which loosely translates to, "One who climbs a good tree deserves a push." This particular staff is used for events such as project commission or a situation where an individual is being celebrated or honoured for a good deed or an accomplishment. The staff makes a distinction between people who have risen with the community and whose accomplishments have helped the community to improve and progress, and the individuals whose accomplishments have come at the huge physical, ecological, and economic cost to the community. The former is celebrated and the latter is shunned by the community. The image of the staff sends a message to the people that society will always support good initiatives and honour people's accomplishments.

### **Teaching Africa through Proverbs**

Proverbs give a deeper meaning to sentences and make sentences complete and interesting to hear. They offer a brevity of thought in ways that cannot be fully produced even in long speeches. Bonsu (1994) defines proverbs as a compressed wise saying or a figure of speech which has been deduced from several experiences and observation of events in life. Proverbs are normally short and pithy sayings to capture metaphorically certain general truths about life. They are a very effective mode

of communication, and their persuasive and correct use in speech is always taken as a sign of sound education, maturity, cultural sophistication, and wisdom amongst Asantes. Appiah et al. (2008) argue that no individuals could appreciate the philosophy and beliefs of the Akans of Ghana without studying their proverbs. Here are some of the few proverbs shared by Asante Elders in our conversations (also see Dei et al., 2018):

*Kyemfere se ɔdaa hɔ akɔɛ, na onipa a ɔnwenee no nso nka sɛn:*  
“If the potsherd claims it is old, what should we say about the potter who moulded it.”

Potsherd is a broken pottery fragment that has archaeological value. Potsherd is very common in traditional Asante communities because they rely so much on pottery products. In the past, archaeologists have relied on the potsherd to determine the history of a place and the people who have ever lived in such a place. Whereas potsherd can be useful in dating a community, it could be misleading if archaeologists rely solely on it to date the timeline of community existence because potsherd cannot outgrow the potter who moulded it.

Metaphorically, the proverb is used to teach the importance of humility and graciousness in everything that we do. Like the potsherd which becomes the centre of archaeological inquiry, and in the process the potter who moulded it is forgotten, so it is that individual accomplishments can overshadow those behind the scene whose efforts paved the way for the individual's successes. The proverb reminds us that individuals, regardless of their accomplishments, are nothing without the community behind them. No one is an island onto oneself. Community helps to create an individual's success; thus, while we should celebrate individuals for their accomplishments we should also not forget those who contributed to the success.

*Kwaemu anomaa na ɔka sɛ ɔnnim sɛ ɛmo yɛ aduane a, yɛbɛ tease, ɛnyɛ ɛserɛmu anomaa:* “Only forest birds, and not savanna birds, are forgiven if they do not know rice is edible”

Rice is the most popular edible food for birds that live in Savanna areas in Ghana. In the forest where rice cannot be cultivated, birds rely on other plants and fruits as their main sources of food. Thus, it is understandable when a bird hatched and raised in the forest area insists that it does not know that rice is edible because it has not seen rice before. However, the same excuse cannot be extended to a bird hatched and raised in grassland (Savanna area), which is a rice-cultivating area. The proverb is a caution to those who wilfully break societal laws, norms, values, and worldview, reminding them there is a limit to societal leniency especially for people who chose wilful ignorance over their decision to act right. Claiming ignorance of one's own culture, values, norms, and worldviews is not an acceptable excuse in Asante communities.

*Nsuo a yɛde gye nkwa no, yɛn nsoma abrewa:* “We do not send an old woman to fetch water when we need it to save life”

Normally, an aged person may be limited in the ability to move faster compared to a younger person. Thus, when a task requires an urgency of response, it is important to assign such a task to the person capable of completing the task in time. The proverb stresses the importance of separating “pressing matters” from “trivial things.” It teaches us to be guided by priorities, and things important cannot be left to linger longer while inconsequential matters take up attention. Further, when we decide to act on an urgent situation, we should be guided by the task at hand and who is capable of completing it on time. The proverb is used to remind the younger generation about the need to set one's priority to avoid doing what is expedience over what is right.

## **African ElderCrits as Epistemic Gift for Teaching Africa**

Within the Asante culture, there is a method of telling a riddle. The process begins with the riddle-teller stating “Agya rekɔ, ɔgyaa me adie bi,” meaning “When my father was leaving, he left me something.” The audience immediately respond with

the question “*ɔgyaa wo adiε bεn*; meaning, “what exactly did he leave you?” At that point, the riddle-teller can start giving clues to help the audience to determine the item left behind. Although the use of a fatherly figure in the riddle, in a matriarchal society that inheritance passes through a mother’s blood line is another subject for conversation. The import of the riddle is that a departing father left a secret present, and the speaker is indulging the audience in a guessing-game to identify the present.

In the article *What is Hospitality in the Academy? Epistemic Ignorance and the (Im)possible Gift*, Kuokkanen (2008) notes that Indigenous epistemologies are gifts to the academy. Using gift-giving practices amongst the Sami people of Norway and Sweden, Kuokkanen (2008) notes that gift-giving is an active relationship between human and natural worlds based on a close interaction of sustaining and renewing the balance between them. As common amongst Indigenous communities across the globe, there are intimate and interrelated relationship between the Dead, the Living, and the Unborn. The survival and continuity of life is contingent on reciprocal and cyclical relationship amongst the Tri-spheres (the Unborn, the Living, and the Dead). The twin notions of ‘life after death’ and ‘life before birth’ – the continuation of the world of living and the world of the dead. The spiritually held belief that the dead does not leave the living alone but closely monitor, supervise, and interface with the living (Mazrui, 1983; Okwu, 1979; Onyewuenyi, 1982). The complex but cyclical relationship between the Dead, the Living, and the Unborn requires new and different ways that gifts are conceptualised and operationalised within Indigenous system of thoughts. The reciprocal relations in gift-giving are not so much about the expectations that receivers will also counter-gift to givers in later dates, but rather that the receivers will actively appreciate and respect the coexisting relationships between themselves and the givers. As the custodian of cultural knowledge and the conduit between the Dead and the Unborn, Indigenous African Elders offer a discursive prism through which the Living can make sense of their complex cyclical relationships with the Dead and the

Unborn. So, when the Asantes begin a riddle by acknowledging the source of the gift as the “departed father” (implies the Dead), the riddle-teller in a way is inviting the audience to help to decipher the puzzles leading to what the father bequeathed. However, once a gift is received, it may not anymore be a gift but becomes an obligation, a response-ability to honour the words of departed father – what Jacques Derrida refers to as the “impossibility of a gift” (Derrida, 1992:7). We argue that African *ElderCrits* are epistemic gifts to the academy, but as Kuokkanen (2008:66) suggests, these epistemic gifts should be looked at differently. They require a certain level of responsibility.

We argue that the first responsibility of receiving African *ElderCrits* as epistemic gifts is to use them to centre African voices in retelling the history of Africa. Chinua Achebe, in the *Tale of Fiction*, recalled his early education and how he became interested in writing stories. Achebe spoke about stories that he read in which European invaders were depicted as saviours, excellent, and fine people while the Africans were portrayed as savages, stupid and ugly. As he grew older, it became clearer that in these adventurous stories, he (Achebe) cannot be on the side of European invaders but must rather empathise with the savage Africans. Achebe (1994) concludes with an African proverb, “until the lions have their own historians, the history of the hunt will always glorify the hunter.” In a racist and colonial education system that continues to glorify European invaders, counter-narratives are needed to also reflect the agony, the bravery, agency and resistance of the lion. As it has become a pattern, wherever Eurocentric education exists, be it North America, Africa, Asia, or Europe, the European invaders are celebrated as heroes and heroines while the Indigenous Africans who stood up and resisted colonialism, or who were murdered in many of the genocides, are forgotten or pushed to the outskirts of dominant history. Therefore, the history of Africa needs to be taught from local people’s perspective as a necessary anti-colonial intellectual exercise. African Elders can be used to retell Africa’s history from the vantage point of local people.

In Seixas's (2002) thought-provoking essay, he argues that the historically marginalised voices are re-telling their histories from different vantage points. This has resulted in re-examination of stories of the past in particular those histories that positioned European invaders as heroes and heroines. Teaching Africa is, therefore, about envisioning a different understanding of Africa while challenging how Africa has traditionally been constructed to reinforce the colonial and racist agenda of the West. We cannot teach Africa for the sake of teaching. In developing curriculum, what processes are used to consult with community leaders and Elders to ensure a holistic understanding of history as the totality of a people's lived experiences? How can official procedures engage community-based approaches to teaching and learning whereby educational policies acknowledge the relevance of African history for transforming schooling and educational outcomes? The teaching of Africa's history must continually search for ways, both in pursuit and practice of education, to contest the Western hegemony of history. African Elders' critical teachings offer counter-narratives to the Eurocentric version of history.

The second responsibility of receiving African *ElderCrits* as epistemic gifts is to use them to teach what values are important for the survival of society. African *ElderCrits* are knowledge associated with long-term attachment and nurtured relationship to a place that allows a people to reference their own established cultural knowledges as a way of resisting imposition of 'external' ideas, values, and worldviews. They are cultural metaphors that immortalise the wisdom, values, worldviews, philosophies, and cultural norms to help develop learners' reasoning, power and skill. When used strategically, they become an important knowledge base from which educators can teach differently about Africa. African Elders' critical teachings focus on communal values and norms through storytelling, proverbs, idioms, fables, myths, symbols, legends, riddles and others. The strength of African *ElderCrits* lie in their application to the lived realities of people. They are knowledges that address the practical and mundane issues of social existence. In the face of entrenched hegemonic relations and

global economic and ecological threats, knowledge is relevant only if it strengthens learners' capacity to live well. They can be useful to teaching issues of respect, responsibility, honesty, trustworthiness, compassion, empathy, justice, fairness, civic participation or service, kindness, integrity, work ethic, and caring social skills as central to building a positive society. Here is an example of using the *Symbol of Prudence and thoughtfulness* to teach character education in the class: 1) The educator can introduce the symbol to students and invite students to discuss amongst themselves what they make of the symbol; 2) Open the discussion to the broader classroom – the discussion can cover the name of the symbol, where it comes from, and the meaning that students make out of the symbol; 3) The educator should share the context and the meaning of the symbol to the class; 4) Invite students to discuss what values they derive from the shared context and meaning in the symbol; 5) Invite students to discuss the virtues of 'prudence and thoughtfulness'; 6) Assign students the task of researching into their own cultural and communal backgrounds, symbols and stories that also address the virtues of prudence and thoughtfulness; 7) The students' assignment can be discussed in the next classroom lesson. African *ElderCrits* are therefore cultural resources and visionaries, offering insights into what are pedagogically possible if Indigenous African Elders are allowed to play significant roles in education about Africa.

The third responsibility of receiving African *ElderCrits* as epistemic gifts is to use them to bridge the gaps between Africans in Diaspora and those living in the continent. Western education must not trivialise nor unduly criticise attempts to draw connections between Africa and Diasporic Africans, as bridging the connection is fundamental to the survival of Africa and Africans in Diaspora. Issues affecting Diasporic Africans are inextricably linked to the issues affecting the continent of Africa. For example, we cannot separate the racist discourse of mischaracterising Africa as a crisis continent from the racist mistreatment of Diasporic Africans in the Global North. The statement "go back to Africa if you do not like it here" are often thrown at Diasporic Africans whenever we demand fair

and equitable treatment in the Global North. If Africa is viewed in positive light in the Global North, the descents of Africa will receive respectful treatment in Europe and North America. Therefore, the teaching of Africa must make the connection between similar struggles over social injustice, colonialism, re-colonisation and imperialism in the Global North and the Global South. These movements must find workable grounds to address common problems.

Further, teaching Africa must revive the memories of Diasporic Africans. The Late American literacy writer James Baldwin observes, “to be an African American is to be an African without any memory and an American without any privilege.” James Baldwin’s comments suggest that many African Americans, and one can include Diasporic Africans in Europe, Caribbean, Canada, and elsewhere, struggle to connect to Africa because official national memories have erased Africa’s connections. The crisis of black peoples in North America and Europe is the crisis of memory against forgetfulness. This mental crisis is the consequences of transatlantic enslavement when the enslaved Africans were stripped of anything African when they arrived in Canada, the United States, the Caribbean, and Europe. One of the traumas of transatlantic enslavement was the efforts of Europeans to render the enslaved Africans timeless and spaceless – people with no history or places of origin. Yet, Diasporic Africans should not have to live in North America or Europe without a memory. The Yorubas of Nigeria have a proverb, “The she-goat does not suffer the pain of parturition when an Elder is at home.” The proverb emphasises the responsibilities of Elders to help community members in periods of crisis. As custodians of tradition, history, wisdom, and cultural memories of communities, the present and future generations of Africans living at home and the Diaspora must never suffer the frustration of understanding who they are in relation to Africa if African Elders are available. Teaching Africa, therefore, must help Diasporic learners to reinvent their Africanness. There is a complex tapestry of Blackness and Africanness that our Elders teach us. It is multidimensional, expansive and malleable. Blackness is Africanness and vice

versal. Yet we know not all 'claims of Blackness and Africanness' is authentic; meaning the kind of claim rooted and grounded in African ancestral heritage and spiritual memories. Blackness and Africanness are non-negotiable. We must continually embody it. It is also important to understand black and African responsibility – as beyond mentorship to include working with humility, generosity, healing and appreciation of sacrifices of Diasporic and home-grown African Elders along the way. Our Elders teach us to be proud to claim Blackness and Africanness, to honour our Blackness and Africanness by embracing our cultural traditions, ancestral wisdoms, and spiritual ontologies. African *ElderCrits* are about developing the consciousness of black people's existence (individual, social and collective). Through African *ElderCrits*, we know that Africa does not leave the body even with a re-location to diaspora or obtaining citizenship on another continent, but rather, it remains in the blood memory and can be summoned upon any time to deal with pressing issues in a different time and space (Adjei & Dei, 2024; Dei & Adjei, 2024). African *ElderCrits* can be used as cultural resources to offer educational consciousness of one's embodied existence as Africans rooted in self-definition, self-pride, self-dependence, and the shared bonds with Africans in the continent and in Diaspora.

There are however challenges of teaching African *ElderCrits* in Western academy. First, we admit to the difficulties of translating from local cultural contexts and the dangers of situating African *ElderCrits* in Western context wholesale, given the local contexts that these words of wisdom are evoked. Further, culture and language are very central to Indigenous African society and without them, African *ElderCrits* are meaningless. All African *ElderCrits* are embedded with cultural meanings, and one cannot say them without first understanding their Indigenous context. As Purcell (1998:260) rightly notes, there is a culture of science that is arguably unique to Western societies. Such a culture of science is too abstracted from any specific cultural genesis to be considered 'Indigenous' today. There are perils of reformulating Indigenous African *ElderCrits* using Eurocentric scholarly theoretical frameworks

and assumptions which become the defining grid to evaluate Indigenous knowledges. Much of on-going intellectual discussion on education in the Global North is located in the dominant culture of science. This makes alternative worldviews such as Indigenous African *ElderCrits* difficult to engage in the Eurocentric learning environment. In fact, a major contemporary challenge that we face in teaching African *ElderCrits* in the Western academy is to address the trivialisation and devaluation of Indigenous African knowledges. Thus, critical educators must address the problem of bringing Indigenous African *ElderCrits* from their appropriate contexts into Western education. Perhaps, the starting point is for educators to identify the lessons contained in the *ElderCrits* and offer interpretations in the wider sense to teach Africa.

Second, African *ElderCrits* are conveyed in local languages. Therefore, to fully understand and appreciate the wisdom and values in African *ElderCrits*, one must first understand the local language used to convey them. There are limitations of teachings such cultural knowings using the dominant language. Further, learners not conversant with the local language used to carry *ElderCrits* cannot in effect appreciate their full meaning and social context within which they are evoked. The temptation of educators is to simply engage in a broad translation of African *ElderCrits* from the local language to English language but such efforts run the risk of having the social context lost in translation. The best approach therefore is for educators to first evoke the *ElderCrits* in the local language before adding the English language translation. Such approach not only offers the social and cultural contexts of the *ElderCrits* but also can be seen as a form of resistance to English language dominance in the academy.

Third, amongst the challenges of drawing on African *ElderCrits* to teach Africa are the issues of documentation and intellectual property rights (IPR). Most African *ElderCrits* exist in orality and symbolism and transmitted through modelling, practice and animation rather than through written words (see Battiste, 2002). There is a need to critically examine the processes through which African *ElderCrits* in their oral forms

survive the transition into a written literate and corporeal forms. For example, IPR is normally viewed as cultural and group rights. Using this particular notion of collective rights, Indigenous groups across the globe have had some form of control over their knowledge systems (Shiva, 1997; Brush & Stabinsky, 1996). This is important given that African *ElderCrits* as they exist in varied forms such as healing, medicine, cosmetics, plants, foods, folklore, stories, arts, crafts, songs, dances, and rituals have highly commercial value, which throughout history have been misappropriated, misused and patented by people with no embody connection without the consent of appropriate Indigenous authorities. Thus, when African *ElderCrits* are brought into the Western academy, the issue of IPR cannot be ignored. A critical discussion of African *ElderCrits* in the academy must also maintain ownership status to Indigenous Africans.

### **Conclusion**

Africa has always been an important source of rich information for knowledge production. There has always been a curiosity about Africa that has served different imaginations and interests. How we teach and talk about Africa matters if learners are to appreciate Africa's rich cultural knowledges, complexity history, and promising futures. The chapter provided pertinent issues confronting education about Africa and the implications for Africans in Diasporic schools. The chapter also demonstrated the educative opportunities of drawing on African Elders' Critical Teachings to rethink different ways to teach and talk about Africa in the education system. As embodiment of local cultural knowledges and wisdom, African Elders offer learners poignant cues to problem solving, conceptual thinking, and practical wisdom to navigate the complexities and nuances of every world. African Elders' rich cultural knowledges are yet to gain the attention that they deserve in the education system in the Global North. Education is about empowerment of people. Therefore, teaching Africa should help to create and strengthen Africa's image in Europe and North America. The teaching of Africa must empower learners with functional educational

skills and tools to challenge Western hegemonic knowledge about Africa.

The concerns raised are not the basis to abandoning the whole projects of using African *ElderCrit* to teach Africa in the Global North. If anything, they are an invitation to think critically about decolonising academy, as Dei (2004:294) argues elsewhere, “We owe it to our children and the future generations to ensure that we have in place an education system that can equip all learners with the tools and resources required to be responsible members and participants of society”. As African educators, we carry what Kobena Mercer (1990:61) calls “the burden of representation” and we must never shy away from the responsibilities of carrying the voices of our African Elders. The late Maya Angelou talks about how we Africans bear the gifts of our Ancestors. Our thoughts, words, knowledges, and values are gifts passed down by them through their teachings to our generation and beyond. We honour their memories by using their teachings to create a better view of Africa.

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## Part III

### Education Regulation, African Publications, and Philosophies





## Chapter 9

# Teaching History of Africa in Brazil based on Law 10.639/03

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### Introduction

Law 10.639/03 was promulgated in Brazil in 2003. This law makes it mandatory to teach African history and Afro-Brazilian culture in the basic education sector throughout the country. The main point regarding the establishment of Law 10.639/03 in Brazilian society is that, because of the instituted obligation, educational teaching has a legal framework to discuss the histories of the African continent and black peoples in the formation of Brazilian society. At the same time, this discussion is extremely important for addressing the epistemic and social racism that has been present in this country for years. In this way, education can be a pathway to confront prejudiced views. With these guidelines in mind, this discussion aims to make some remarks on how this law impacted the teaching of history in Brazil. I emphasise that the implementation of this law needs to be understood alongside political and social demands, with prominent participation from the Black Movement. Even today, it is possible to find racism ingrained in Brazilian society, as a factor that makes the struggles for a more equal society necessary and persistent, because racism is a deep problem. It is important to note the significance of understanding the writing about the past, which reveals how history is also a product of the social context to which it belongs. Considering this information, we can understand how history was, for a long time in Brazil,



an elitist and exclusionary discipline, and how the opening up of universities attributable to the implementation of public policies allowed for new questioning and the necessity to transform the teaching environment.

Circe Bittencourt (2018) has demonstrated how History is a discipline in constant transformation, because it meets the needs of the society in which it operates. As we will demonstrate, in the Brazilian case, this discipline received different names throughout its institutionalisation, and spent long years representing the interests of elites as a way of perpetuating and justifying spaces of privilege, focused on Christianity, above all, white men and their political and social interests. Over the years, with the inclusion of demands of social subjects, the discipline became more reflective and started to add other points of view, such as those Africans and Brazilians in all their social diversity. But the teaching of history has a relationship with understanding between times, understanding the past from the present, in which societies, groups and individuals seek their referents. In this way, thinking about teaching requires certain attention to the context in which this teaching is inserted, the audience with which it dialogues and which elements are used to portray the past (Silva & Fonseca, 2010). It is in light of these conditions that we can think about teaching African history in Brazil.

It has been 20 years since the promulgation of Law 10.639/03. In that time it has been possible to observe many gains and issues that still need to be improved. In this discussion we will demonstrate some important processes for the promulgation of Law 10.639/03, its insertion in the Brazilian curriculum and the social dialogues carried out with these obligations, with awareness that the enactment of a law needs to go hand in hand with other public policies, actions and attention to school environments so that it can have a more satisfactory development. It is also difficult to understand the history of Africa in Brazil without connections with the past, with the representations and links that connect the society, academically, socially and culturally, with the African continent. The teaching and writing of history need to consider the context

in which we find ourselves, which is why it is so important to take these elements into consideration when dealing with the history of Africa within Brazilian society.

## **Intersections for the formation of education in Brazil**

African studies in Brazil have an important cultural and political involvement which directly impacts school culture. It is important to remember that Brazil was the principal place in America when enslaved people arrived during the period of transatlantic slave trade. The institution responsible for reporting about the country 's demographic data, Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística (IBGE), estimates that around four million African people arrived in slave conditions in this territory. João José Reis (2020) highlights the complexity involved in trafficking and the arrival of slaves, as a process that lasted approximately 300 years, between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Reis analyses relations of these demographic estimates and their importance for the construction of Brazilian society. Based on this argument, we return to another reflection that points towards a geographical and imagined area of Um Rio Chamado Atlântico (One River Called Atlantic), of Alberto da Costa e Silva (2003), which is essential for understanding contemporary Brazilian society.

Um Rio chamado Atlântico is an important metaphorical expression that encompasses the relations established between Brazil and regions of the African continent, especially on the West coast, from where many slave ships departed. There is a variety of research that seeks to focus on these relationships, built through incessant exchanges, because the Atlantic as a space of interaction for Brazilian society is an enlargement of the work of Paul Gilroy in *The Black Atlantic* (1993), demonstrating characteristics that resemble a general context, but that also demonstrate specificities depending on the excerpts given in the approaches for South American realities. There is a strong historiographical tradition inside Brazil that addresses the relationships that arose with the slave trade (Verger, 1987; Costa

e Silva, 2002; Cunha, 2012; Ferreira, 2012; Marquese, 2019) and studies that focused on social organisations, revival movements and cultural and symbolic expressions that developed throughout Brazil's period as a slave society (Nascimento, 1977; Slenes, 1999; Mattos, 2008; Abreu, 1995; Wissenbach, 1998; Santos, 2017). These studies reflect the social necessity of understanding this dense past, filled with difficult stories, yet so important for identifying present society. The pursuit of marginalised narratives becomes an incessant exercise in academic environments and is reflected in the education of many professionals today.

In addition to receiving a large number of people who were enslaved, Brazil was one of the last countries on the American continent to abolish slavery. Studies covering the post-abolition, after 1888 when slavery was abolished, have demonstrated how important Flux and Reflux, as Pierre Verger called it, of people, cultures and knowledge in the Atlantic were for the formation of Brazilian society. Brazil was constituted as a result of these meetings, from people in the past who donated part of themselves to give the current formats in Brazilian places, culture and diverse society, taking into account the genocide of Indigenous peoples and the forced labour of African groups who were placed in the condition of enslavement. But when we look at the past, especially at the writing of history, power projects that camouflaged or mythologised the participation of subjects in its entirety is part of the debates, and an interest, which lasted for years, in telling a story with only white protagonists. And what the most recent historiography has demonstrated is that there are many interests in disputes, many elements and narratives that come together to remember past events (Pollak, 1989).

The teaching of history proves to be fundamental in this process, as it is one of the links between what we research in academia and what is discussed in scholar formation. When we deal with the past, we cannot avoid this political function that the historical discipline performs, as remembering the past is a close relationship with the present. Selecting themes, narratives and writing about events are always in dialogue with current

demands (Rusen, 2001). When we ask about the reason why we should study the history of Africa in Brazil, we are confronted by this political factor, an urgent need in the present to study narratives that were distorted or silenced in the past. We can remember the political and academic aspect of the intellectual Beatriz Nascimento (1977) that relates to this relationship with the continent of Africa, so that people in Brazil seek its symbolic, cultural meanings and organise themselves as social groups.

In some spaces there is also the reinforcement of myths and stereotypes, which reinforce the image of a static Africa, of romantic relationships, with the other side leaning towards the construction of reductionist narratives. But what we would like to highlight is the importance of the representations of African studies for the composition of Brazilian society, which looks back to the need to recompose family trajectories, ancestral groups and the construction of their references (Munanga, 2015). Racism and stereotypes linked to the African continent also affect these histories and make knowledge of the continent's regions, in their diversity, pluralities and capacity to establish positive dialogues. On this side, closer to the networks and relationships, we realised that the stories are connected and that the racism that affects the African continent also affects the people in its Diaspora and those who consider themselves descendants of Africa, known as African Americans, in the specific case study of Afro-Brazilians.

It is very complicated when textbooks or classroom approaches only cover themes related to transatlantic trafficking and contemporary conflicts that have developed in parts of the African continent. In certain aspects, the history of Africa is displaced from approaches to global history, or temporal scales that mainly contemplate European history, being functional to tell narratives of suffering or create myths of overcoming, as this continues to tend towards reductionism. Between the two points there are multiple themes that also need to be addressed and deserve attention. Students' identification with these stories can be based on the understanding of social organisation and disposition, as events in which we ourselves are inserted, according to the time and space. It doesn't make much sense

for African history to fit into European history, based just on slavery, imperialism and liberation struggles. This approach, so commonly seen in Brazilian classrooms, imprisons other stories about the continent (Pantoja, 2004).

On the other hand, it's important to say that the implementation of Law 10.639/03 was a political decision that stemmed from social demands. Amilcar Araujo Pereira (2011) highlights the demand for a more inclusive education, one that brought the participation and contributions of black people to the history of Brazil as a part of the agenda of the Black Movement actions in the 1970s, with prominent involvement from the Movimento Negro Unificado (MNU). The establishment of Law 10.639/03, which made the teaching of African history in Brazil mandatory, was an important step to review reductionist approaches. When we have structural problems, such as racism, the establishment of an elitist education based on Eurocentrism, we need to consider the time for things to change and be persistent so that these changes are possible. Exclusionary teaching methods can be observed in the establishment of the Brazilian education system itself, which was initially dominated by the elites. Ruckstadter and Ruckstadter (2010) argue that the first efforts towards teaching models similar to Western structures were applied by Jesuit priests at the beginning of colonisation, beginning in the sixteenth century.

During the territory's colonial period, which lasted from the 1500s until the establishment of independence in 1822, the establishment of educational centres had a trajectory with specific characteristics, which is not the object of this chapter. However, it is worth noting that there was greater decentralisation in the handling of formal education, which was concentrated in the hands of Jesuits, private instigators and interference from the colonial government, mainly from the eighteenth century onwards. The arrival of the Portuguese court to Brazil, including the King of Portugal, D. João, fleeing the Napoleonic attacks on Europe, was a landmark moment for the restructuring of the colony. Banks, establishments and the National Library were created. In 1808, Brazil became the seat of the Portuguese government, intensifying the circulation of

people, ideas and intellectual thoughts in the territory, it also encouraged the creation of educational institutions (Sampaio, 1991). Furthermore, the nineteenth century is deeply marked by the need to build national symbols. The independent country was under the political regime of the monarchy, until the proclamation of the Republic in 1889. In light of all these events, which lasted approximately three centuries, the need to build a history for the recent country became more intense. History, not by chance, is focused on the political achievements of elitist agents who, in many ways, exclude the majority of the population. This model, even today, needs to be questioned and criticised as it has become a reproduction standard, that does not always dialogue with social demands in dealing with knowledge of the past, in the search for guidance, references and representation (Fiorin, 2009).

The Constitution of 1988, which is followed to this day, ratified education as a right for Brazilian citizens, in other words, it is the state's duty to guarantee this right. Based on the guarantee of this right, there are laws that aim to unify the parameters that are used throughout the national territory. In 1996, the National Education Guidelines and Bases Law - *Lei de Diretrizes e Bases da Educação Nacional*- (LDB) was sanctioned, establishing the minimum criteria that must be followed in the area of education, involving states and municipalities. And since 2003 there has been an important movement towards the development of African studies in this country. Signed by the President of the Republic Luís Inácio Lula da Silva, in January of that year, Law 10.639/03 established the mandatory teaching of the history and culture of African and Afro-Brazilian peoples throughout the country's basic education system. The promulgation of this law was the result of intense movements in search of anti-racist education. The measure suggests the social need to teach the history of Africa, study and combat the strong stereotypical views that are still found in many narratives today.

According to the BNCC, there are different moments to work with the history of African peoples in the area of human sciences, more specifically in the History discipline, since ancient Egypt, African kingdoms such as Ghana, Mali

and Songhai, up to the independence and formation of new countries. There is also a need to work on themes related to transatlantic trafficking and its dynamics in the formation of Brazilian society. From this moment on, we cannot lose the axis of connected history, between the representation of Africa, with the movements of imperialism and post-independence, and the meaning of this for students who build their references with the past with the formation of a Brazilian society, deeply marked by African knowledge. We need to pay attention to contemporary times, with people who find themselves, in some way, with that past time, without falling into a romantic and static vision. What Law 10.639/03 also proposes reflects the political dimension that African studies gain. Having not studied any history by itself, we do not study slavery as a static movement, or the actions of people in the condition of enslaved people, but we revisit events as an exercise in understanding the present itself, where teachers and students find understandings and explanations. When we mythologise stories, our own references become blurred.

For many educators, it is a great challenge to deal with the history of Africa in the classroom, because of various circumstances. It is not uncommon for the history of Africa to appear in a fragmented form, both in the BNCC, where themes are placed more separately than in connection, and in teaching materials. Many textbooks, for example, fail to combine themes about the history of Africa within connected narratives. It is important to understand that the African Kingdoms and Empires were connected to an entire network of trans-Saharan trade routes, which expanded relations between the African continent and many other territories, from Europe to Asia (Ross, 2011). The Indian Ocean also played a prominent role in the circulation of people, goods and knowledge, connecting distant areas with routes that existed even before transatlantic trade (Pouwels, 2002). These stories are sometimes not told because we are still very close to Eurocentric approaches, and approaches that contribute to racism, from dating to event selection (Goody, 2008). Africa is not merely a big piece of land where people went there and did things. It is important to think about the

relationships, the social organisations of millennia, that donated more to our global formation, than were a specimen of victim to exogenous movements.

We add to this debate that the constitution of the school curriculum is permeated by fields of dispute. Recently, Brazil has been the stage for debates on the reform of the high school curriculum, which gained strength in the debate since 2016, a period in which the country was the target of a political manoeuvre that removed from power the democratically elected president, Dilma Rousseff. The proposal for the New High School, as discussed by Jenerton Arlan Schütz and Vânia Lisa Fischer Cossetin (2019), came into force with the format of Law 13.415, generally thinking about the job market and reducing the reflective potential that comes with a more comprehensive, non-sectoral curriculum, as proposed. This change is scheduled to come into effect starting in 2025, and currently, debates continue to extend throughout the country, revealing the tension generated in the education field. If this measure materialises, it could be even more challenging to achieve a democratic, reflective school education that encourages the breaking of social stereotypes for young people in their social and school formations.

Regarding the curriculum, focused on the BNCC, it is important to use the thematic opportunities to reflect on the construction of History as a science and put up for debate, when possible, the interlocutions with knowledge, with peoples and cultures, making it possible to look at the writing of the history of BNCC itself. Africa, with its political militancy in the 1960s in the need for affirmation as a field of knowledge, can be a first step towards entering this dynamic of criticising history, as a dynamic discipline for the students themselves. There are teaching resources, such as music, literature and films that can be useful to encourage this reflection.

What we encounter in teaching African history in Brazil is having to deal with prejudices and assuming that Brazil is still a racist country. Racism can be understood as one of humanity's most disastrous 'inventions', as highlighted by

Achille Mbembe (2019). The racism intertwines the material and symbolic fields, expressing itself in different relationships in which the conception of race is a basic idea, both in individual and collective contact. As a problem, it is not limited to a single time, but survives decades and reaches generations, and contemporary society affected by prejudices like this reproduce situations of violence and profound inequalities.

Brazil as a country where there are many racist attitudes within the population's actions, whether in everyday life or in more extreme situations, needs to consider a historical myth that had harmful impacts - the myth of racial democracy. For many decades, and to this day it is possible to find this discourse in Brazilian society, the general discourse was the denial of racism in Brazil. Supported by Gilberto Freyre's idea of lusotropicalism, the myth of racial democracy stated that Brazil constituted a harmonious society, without racism since miscegenation was a striking feature in Brazilian society. By constructing the great references of the historical past in a national project, the black population was marginalised, and an attempt at social whitening occurred. Abdias Nascimento (1978) demonstrates how the construction of racial hierarchies has made Brazil a country with a history of violence that is at the core of its formation To serve contemporary political interests was more interesting to say that Brazil was a mestizo country than a country made up of a large proportion of black people, who largely lived in situations of inequality when compared to those who dominated the great centres of power, mostly a white elite (Domingues, 2005).

Given this situation, it is more than legitimate to think about the teaching of African history linked to the needs and specificities that occur in the Brazilian context. Law 10.639/03 is assertive in this sense, as it combines the fight for the history of Africa in Brazil with the teaching of the history and culture of Brazilian peoples. On the other hand, the law concerns mainly the teaching of struggle, culture and the agencies of Afro-Brazilian peoples in the formation of Brazilian society, and the study of the culture and history of African society, mainly in the areas of artistic education, literature and history (Brasil,

2003. Lei 10.639). This, in a way, can generate an exception to other areas that could and should work with themes that are part of the entire social formation; after all, interdisciplinarity and other areas of knowledge also have contributions and expressiveness from African elements and formed by peoples and Afro-Brazilian groups.

Nilma Gomes (2013) highlights the positive movements that occurred after the approval of Law 10.639/03, as guidelines were approved by the National Education Council to assist the debate and implementation of the requirements in 2004. It is also important to point out that the law proposed revisionism that impacts several areas of education. Reflections on how to approach themes in classrooms, the search for complementary training by professionals, the promotion of extension courses and debates around the teaching of African history, as well as the production of teaching materials. Even though it encountered resistance to adhering to its criteria, it is possible to highlight positive balances for the growth of the large area of African studies in Brazil.

### **Law 10.639/03 and area of African studies in Brazil**

Even though Law 10.639/03 is directly aimed at the basic education system, it is undeniable how it affected the area of African studies in Brazil (Oliva, 2003; Pereira, 2012; Silva, 2022). The development of African studies in Brazil has great demarcation with policies from the 1960s, which saw an interest in approaching the recently independent countries of the African continent, in a foreign policy strategy because of the context of the Cold War. As Dávila (2010) demonstrates, diplomacy played an important role in this movement, with the formation of agreements, a greater presence in regions of the African continent, with the establishment of embassies. Linked to these actions, in Brazilian universities, there was a greater opportunity for the circulation of people and an important moment for the formation of centres focused on African studies in Brazil. As Zamparoni (1995) and Reis (2021) demonstrate, universities built these spaces that encouraged debates on the area of African studies, with students and professors from

African regions coming to Brazil. It was a moment for greater knowledge of debates, literature and research in which Africa became the protagonist of its own history.

It is also worth highlighting that these movements of rapprochement and formation of areas of African studies have several characteristics and situations that are not always linear. For example, in the 1950s, Brazilian intellectual Gilberto Freyre played an important role in the discussion about the way that the Portuguese carried out colonisation. Brazil, considered a mixed-race country, greatly affected by the myth of racial democracy, was an example given to corroborate this idea. In international politics, as independence movements were intensifying on the African continent, the Portuguese government was quick to use this argument as a justification for remaining in colonised territories in Africa. Gilberto Freyre, invited by the Portuguese government to visit these African territories, which were under Portuguese rule, published the book *Um Brasileiro em terras portuguesas* in 1953. Lusotropicalist discourses participated in an important moment in the attempt to delay the independence process of the Portuguese colonies and were reproduced in the most diverse social areas (Castelo, 1998).

Another important event to be considered in this rapprochement with the African continent in the second half of the twentieth century is the recognition of Angola's independence, with Brazil being one of the first countries to do so. The contradiction in such action is that since 1964, Brazil has been experiencing a period of military dictatorship, with a strong discourse against left-wing governments, in a context of the Cold War, in which communism presented itself as a danger to capitalist governments and the Brazilian dictatorial regime. Furthermore, the country received a prominent figure from the Salazarist dictatorship, Marcelo Caetano. Still, Brazil did not stop trying to ally itself with the newly formed Angolan government to guarantee a certain area of influence (Dávila, 2010). These relationships encouraged approaches that went beyond the institutional political sphere.

However, relations with Africa not occurred through diplomatic and institutionalised politics, but went further by being present in social interests, which mobilised and fought to create a more democratic and horizontal discussion on the African continent. Within Brazil, social movements, especially the Black Movement, played an important role in demanding an anti-racist struggle. Amílcar Pereira (2011) analyses how the teaching of African history and the struggle demands of the Black Movement, integrated into political sectors that were in the process of building a new Constitution for Brazil, replacing the years of repression that were in force with the military-civilian dictatorship, since 1964. The 1980s were an important period for reflection and the search for greater representation with the opening of the democratic period, but an opening that needed to be taken advantage of with a lot of struggle and militancy, for the inclusion of social groups that in the past remained on the margins of a more direct participation of public authorities.

As Amílcar Pereira (2011) discusses, the Brazilian Black Movement has a diversity in its components, in its areas of activity and also at a regional level, as is possible to notice in other social movements, but one of the objectives that united its intentions in the formation of the new Constitution was the search for affirmative policies, in the face of the profound social inequality that exists in Brazil. Santagada (1990) states that Brazil's social profile in the 1980s was hit by a drastic economic crisis, with basic needs for the quality of life of the Brazilian population. An attempt to repair many of these deficits that had persisted for years in Brazilian governments was a feature of the 1988 Constitution. This problem appears to be structural because of the history of slavery, accompanied by a post-abolition period in which there were no public policies for reparation or social integration (Rios & Mattos, 2004). The situation of the population considered black was formed in a scenario of vulnerability, with poor working conditions and dealing with a social mentality permeated by racism and material actions that aimed at the subordination of these groups. There were centuries of unfavourable material conditions, which also

affected identity perceptions and recognition as a social subject in its power, for many people, a process of understanding and initiatives to positively recognise what it was like to be black was necessary, a process that psychoanalyst Nelsa Souza Santos calls “becoming black” (Santos, 2021[1983]).

Neuza Santos’ (2021[1983]) argument resembles that of Frantz Fanon (1952) in *Black Skin and White Masks*, in terms of raising awareness, since racism and colonial discourses also affected mentalities. From this discussion, many theorists sought to think about the need to expand the political debate to the field of culture, representation, in search of what Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o (1986) proposed as ‘decolonizing the mind’. In this way we can see that the struggles fought on the African continent are connected with some struggles that exist in the Brazilian scenario, not because the protagonists of these struggles are all the same, but because they seek to fight a common enemy, which affects them in different ways: Racism, stereotypes and the mythification of people and cultures not only concern the field of representation, but have disastrous material effects. Obviously, these struggles at many points diverge, but it is interesting to think about their connections to problems that have become global.

For the Law 10.639/03 to exist in Brazil, it was fundamental to the demands led by black movements. Amílcar Pereira (2011) highlights how the Black Movement, with the launch of the Charter of Principles in 1978, placed the importance of reassessing the role of black people in the construction of Brazil’s history. The author builds a connection between these social demands with the promulgation of Law 10.639/03, since it also concerns the Afro-Brazilian population. Petronilha Gonçalves e Silva (2007), rapporteur of the law in 2003, highlights the difficulties that exist in teaching the history of Africa and the Afro-Brazilian population in Brazil. The author draws our attention to interactions between people, the need to reduce the barriers that support systems of discrimination, notions of inferiority and superiority in establishing relationships, since the teaching and learning process is a relational one. The teaching of anti-racist education

is, in this sense, very important in promoting a more egalitarian society that is less likely to reproduce hierarchies, which not only concern race, but also gender and social class. and one of the most significant points regarding education in the Brazilian basic system concerns the area of training for professionals to work in schools.

It is also important to remember that Law 10.639/03 was accompanied by other public policies that directly affected the restructuring of universities, with the *Reestruturação e Expansão das Universidades Federais (REUNI)* - Restructuring and Expansion of Federal Universities - plan in 2007, which meant an increase in the number of places for students in these institutions. Affirmative policies actions, such as quota laws that began to be adopted in universities since 2012, were another preponderant factor for the diversity of the student population, as an opening, albeit slow, for the growth of a more diverse faculty, which caters to plural representations. The basis of this law establishes that 50% of the vacancies are reserved for students who attended high school in public schools. Other favourable actions that we find include the creation of the *Universidade da Integração Internacional da Lusofonia Afro-Brasileira (UNILAB)* in 2010, which was an important action in this context, as it brings direct relations with the African continent to the fore, in search of a more democratic and less Eurocentric curriculum. UNILAB is a federal university that seeks integration between Portuguese-speaking countries. The institution receives many students from African regions that have this language institutionalised. Márcia Guerra Pereira highlights how the number of vacancies for teachers in the area of African history increased between the period, while Moisés Corrêa da Silva (2022) demonstrates the growth in the number of theses and dissertations, also increasing, after 2003.

In this way, we can verify that the impact of Law 10.639/03 occurred in many ways, as the university is linked to a set of coordinated elements for teaching in the basic education system, whether in teacher training or in the participation of materials para-didactic or didactic activities and in the growth of African centres, which become important

for the development of the most varied disciplinary activities. In postgraduate programmes, students can delve deeper into their topics of interest in their research, which generates a diversity of knowledge and exchanges about African studies. Some programmes and professors enjoy the possibility of studying abroad, nurturing networks and gaining rich academic experiences to support their research proposals with funding from the federal government, by the programme Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior (CAPES). Today, a significant portion of Federal Universities, which train professionals in the field of History, offer the discipline of African History. Additionally, the country has important movements focused on research and teaching of African studies, such as the establishment of a group within the Associação Nacional de História (ANPUH) since 2011 and the formation of the Associação Brasileira de Estudos Africanos (ABEÁfrica) since 2014.

But the large area of African studies that Brazilian researchers are currently engaged in does not manifest total consensus. The Associação Nacional de História (ANPUH) – National Association of Historians, in 2011, discussed the parameters to outline the debates that would enter into research called African studies. This debate took into account the fragile limitations seen in Africa in its Diaspora, and the formation of an Afro-Brazilian history. Considering the multiple narrative identities and events of the past, the general interest was to avoid generalisations and develop a debate that averted the stereotypes that supported in the imagination both an Africa seen by pessimism, and the romantic narratives without problematisations. The debate, which in certain aspects continues to this day, brings into question the slave trade, considered by most experts to be part of the history of African peoples, and the developments in the Diaspora, with the formation of Afro-Atlantic societies. Not by chance, Law 10.639/03 concerns both themes, but considering the differences and identity limits to be worked on.

These debates demonstrate to us the growth of this large area, which works in conjunction with a law that seeks

to encourage teaching, and consequently research, in the area of African history. Twenty years after the promulgation of Law 10.639/03, we observe that much still needs to be achieved in Brazil, to have fairer, less unequal and better teaching conditions, to combat racism and other forms of prejudice. But we also consider the gains in these twenty years, recognising the diversity that African studies have gained in Brazil and how Brazilian society has important links to the teaching of these and other stories.

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## Chapter 10

# Transforming Education through African-centred Publishing


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### Introduction

For a protracted timeframe, Africa has been battling with knowledge hegemony (Bgoya, W, 2021). Colonial legacy and imperialism are still persistent in the knowledge industry, resulting in non-African literature, including books, textbooks, journals, reports, and web content dominating African libraries (Bgoya, W, 2021). Even to this day, most literature on Africa is written by non-African scholars, applying a Western lens that may not necessarily reflect African realities (Thiong'o, 2021). There are many reasons for this sad reality, one being African scholars not writing and publishing enough (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018a) and another being overdominance of multinational publishing companies (Ngobeni, 2009; Lages et al., 2015; Snaije,



2020). In the end, non-African ideas dominate teaching content used in institutions of higher learning at the expense of African perspectives and knowledges (Mugumbate & Nammi, 2023). This affects many disciplines in the health, social, agricultural and natural sciences, commercials, Humanities and arts, despite several years of calls for decolonisation of education in Africa and globally (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018b). Realisation of this knowledge imbalance has led to the call to decolonise publishing in Africa (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018b).

One way of doing it may be African-centred publishing, which encompasses, but is not limited to having publishers, writers, reviewers, editors, designers, printers, distributors and librarians informed by African philosophy (Mugumbate, et al., 2023). The process of achieving African-centred publishing is not an easy one, largely because of competition from established Western and Western-oriented publishers who do not want to give away the privileges that accrue from the dominance of the market, itself a result of colonisation (Bgoya, M, 2021). It may be a tough process, but if publishing is not transformed, African-centred literature will remain scanty, publishing will remain largely in the hands of outsiders with different perspectives, and misinformation will remain (Mugumbate et al., 2023). If misconceptions and stereotypes about Africa are to be overcome globally, then most of the literature on Africa must be produced on the continent by African writers writing from the philosophy of Africa (Achebe, 2009; 1975; Mugumbate & Naami, 2023). Many books written by non-Africans about Africa, for example Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* novel published in 1889 (Conrad, 1889), have been popular outside Africa but such books portray Africa in a very negative and dehumanising way (Achebe, 1975). About a century later, Michael Crichton's 1980 book, *Congo* (Crichton, 1980), comes out filled with sentiments that Africa was savage, less human and mysterious while so called European 'discoverers' and Christian missionaries were portrayed as more human. These sentiments promote the superiority of Europeans, and continue in several works of art (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018b). In the 1958 novel, *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe wrote about Nigeria's tribes from a non-dehumanising

lens; ironically, negativity and dehumanisation continues today, not only in works of art but also academic publications (Achebe, 2009). In academia for example, Mayaka and Truell say that the dehumanising cultural-genocidal racist views of Western philosophers like Kant, Hume and Hegel continue today in textbooks (Mayaka & Truell, 2021). Mugumbate et al. (2023) support this view, arguing that the reliance on Western textbooks is a setback for decolonisation, and results in African universities training professionals who will migrate because their skills won't be relevant locally.

This chapter starts with a discussion on African scholarly work before delving into challenges of African-centred publishing, and potential solutions thereof. This is followed by publishing models and case studies of publishing models used in Africa to transform education through African-centred publishing in Africa. The chapter ends with short discussions on principles for an African-centred publishing model and the intersection of publishing and education.

### **African scholarly work**

Literature consists of oral (orature) and written (print and digital formats). Examples of orature are songs, poems, stories, riddles, proverbs, art, artefacts and folktales, while written literature exists in novels, textbooks, newspapers, journals, magazines or digitised texts, audios or visuals (Mugumbate et al., 2023). Oral literature is mainly written and communicated through Africa's indigenous languages while print and digital literature are mainly written and communicated in foreign languages, mostly in the colonial languages of English, French, Arabic and Portuguese. However, publications in indigenous languages, mainly Swahili, have increased (Bgoya, W, 2021). Other popular African languages are Gikuyu, Kinyarwanda, Acholi, Shona, Fula, Igbo, Amharic, Zulu, Oromo and Hausa but these have not been popularly used in published materials (Bgoya & Jay, 2013). The production and distribution of oral literature is the responsibility of every member of African society especially the elderly – while there are griots and expert story tellers, they do not monopolise literature production and dissemination

(Mugumbate & Naami, 2023). This is different from written literature, which is mostly produced by those able to read and write in colonial languages (Ngobeni, 2009). To that end, written literature is mostly available in the languages of former colonisers (Bgoya, M, 2021). European languages to this day remain official languages in most government communications and are often used as official languages of communication in most African higher learning institutions (Thiong'o, 2021). This might reflect lack of political will to Africanise. Surprisingly, the ability to speak a European language comes with pride amongst most African communities.

Africa has a long history of written literature, for example, the former University of Timbuktu in Mali, the oldest university globally, created more than 700,000 pieces of written literature in Arabic, Fula, Songhai, Tamasheq, Bambara and Soninke languages beginning in the thirteenth century - significant amounts of this literature survive today in homes and libraries (RSA, 2014; ASWD Net, 2023). In 2003, the Government of South Africa built the Ahmed Baba Centre at Timbuktu with a library to accommodate about 350,000 Timbuktu pieces of literature (RSA, 2014). The Timbuktu manuscripts cover a wide range of topics, including but not limited to, astronomy, poetry, law, history, faith, politics, and philosophy (RSA, 2014). As Nabudere (2002) said, the writing and publishing trend in Africa suffered from several years of colonisation.

Africa written literature has passed through four stages - colonial-missionary, colonial-government, independent-government and indigenous stage (Mugumbate & Naami, 2023). The colonial-missionary stage was when Arabic and Christian preachers came to Africa to proselytise, which basically meant demonising African religion and promoting their religion (Mugumbate et al., 2023). To achieve these two aims, they needed to produce both oral and written literature, in most cases they simply reproduced or translated the religious books from where they came, including the Bible and the Qur'an (Thiong'o, 2021). The work of colonial missionaries started around the thirteenth century but continued to dominate publishing until colonial governments were created around the

1890s (Mugumbate et al., 2023). The colonial governments had their own mission of achieving full political, social, religious, educational and economic control (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2020). One way to achieve this was to control literature, so they took over most publishing from the missionaries, although they worked together with them (Diop, 2007). Colonial governments were defeated beginning in the 1950s (Diop, 1974), and that gave room for the independent governments to take over publishing, but they later gave up to private indigenous and foreign publishers (Bgoya & Jay, 2013). The seminal works of Chinua Achebe of Nigeria, written in English and published the 1950s, were published to communicate colonial life in Nigeria and later life after the country gained independence in 1960 (Bgoya & Jay, 2013). Achebe's most popular book, *Things Fall Apart* (Achebe, 1958), was written with an aim of having an African author educate white people about Africa.

Throughout these four stages, literature was predominantly written and distributed by outsiders (Mugumbate & Naami, 2023). African publishers and writers have been few and the paucity of African literature by African scholars means that non-African literature, including books, textbooks, journals, reports and web content continue to dominate African libraries and teaching (Mugumbate et al., 2023). This scenario is the same in many disciplines including health, social, agricultural and natural sciences, commercials, Humanities and arts despite several years of calling for decolonisation of education in Africa and globally. As Bgoya and Jay (2013:13) state, "indigenous publishing is integral to national identity and development: cultural, social, and economic." Such publishing reflects a people's history and experience, belief systems, and their concomitant expressions through language, writing, and art. In turn, a people's interaction with other cultures is informed by their published work (Achebe, 1975; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018a; 2018b). Publishing preserves, enhances, and develops a society's culture and its interaction with others."

A solution to overcome this Euro-Western dominance is African-centred publishing (Bgoya, M, 2021). The term African-centred is often used to refer to a worldview which

places Africa at the centre (Mugumbate & Naami, 2023). In terms of publishing, it would place African people and their social, economic and political contexts on the forefront, thereby publishing with African cultures and values in mind (Nabudere, 2002). African-centred publishing would, amongst other things, have publishing houses established in Africa by Africans (Mugumbate et al., 2023). Publishing houses should consider publishing more content in African languages, make publishing affordable to low-income researchers from the African continent and the published materials should be cheaper such that less-privileged people can also afford it (Bgoya, W, 2021). African-centred would consider more publications on traditionally neglected African issues such as African religions and their impact on human life, with more examples used in texts should be applicable and familiar to African readers (Nabudere, 2002). African-centred publishing has its own challenges, but also opportunities as alluded to in the next section.

### **Challenges for African-centred publishing**

The introduction section already showed the historical barriers to the success of African publishing. The key barriers are colonisation, which devalued African languages and educational philosophies, and manipulation distribution of literature, and other barriers are limited research funding, inadequate publishing experts and equipment, inadequate distribution channels and a low book-reading culture, amongst others (Bgoya, W, 2021; Thiong'o, 2021).

Carré (2016) asserts that colonialism and neocolonialism have resulted in major setbacks for publishing in Africa, and the effects are still felt today. Carré (2016:1) states “not only is the volume of African book production dramatically underrepresented in the world, but the African publishing industry has had to contend with the ongoing legacies of former colonial monopolies”. The problem of monopolies comes from the big publishing companies that still market their products in Africa in capitalistic ways that do not consider the local industries (Bgoya, W, 2021). Ruthless competition from French, British and American multinationals started during colonisation

and continues through neocolonialism today (Lages et al., 2015). The multinational companies use corruption and dirty tricks; for example in 2010, the World Bank censored British publishers and they were eventually fined by the British Serious Fraud Office £11.2 million for Macmillan and £1.9 million for University of Oxford Press for corruption in Tanzania and South Sudan (Vasagar, 2012; World Bank, 2012). These publishers manipulated supply chains, bribed officials to buy textbooks from them using World Bank and government funding and more dangerously, they directly and indirectly managed to manipulate local institutions and officials to shape education, curricula and educational policy directions, the effects of which are long-term and whose consequences are evident today, 64 years after independence, with most countries still following British and French curricula patched here and there to make them appear local (Bgoya, W, 2021; Snaije, 2020).

The multinationals are part of lobbyists who promote and protect English at the expense of local languages in publishing (Lages et al., 2015). The big publishing companies for books and textbooks are Heinemann (notable for the *African Writer's Series* in the 1980s), Hachette Book Group, Harper Collins, Macmillan Publishers, Penguin Random House, Simon & Schuster, L'Harmattan, Pearson, Merriam Webster and Scholastic (Ngobeni, 2009). In academic and journals publishing, the top publishing companies are Elsevier of Netherlands (with 2,674 journals), Sage, Springer of Germany (3,763 journals), Taylor & Francis of United Kingdom (2,912 journals), and Wiley and Sage of United States of America (with 1,691 and 1,208 respectively), OMICS of India (705 journals), Oxford University Press of United Kingdom (500 journals) and Cambridge University Press of United Kingdom (422 journals) (Nishikawa-Pacher, 2022). The largest journal publisher in Africa is Academic Journals of Nigeria with 125 journals, ranking number 49 globally (Nishikawa-Pacher, 2022). The other publishers in Africa are African Online Scientific Information Systems (AOSIS) and National Inquiry Services of South Africa (54 and 29 journals respectively).

A key challenge is low or no research and development budgets in African countries (SGCI, 2022). Most knowledge-sharing publications are backed by and embedded into research grants, mainly public grants. Opportunities to publish journal papers or books increase with the availability of grant funding. However, opportunities for public grants are limited in Africa; therefore, researchers rely heavily on external funding. The situation is made worse by the decline in private and business funding for research, which was about 35% in 2022, compared to 40%–70% in other continents (SCGI, 2022). Related to this challenge is the low number of editors from Africa at global publishing houses, which increases the rejection rate for manuscripts submitted by African authors (Lages et al., 2015).

Funding is a key barrier for writers, especially those who desire to make their work open access (Lages et al., 2015). Publishers charge huge amounts for work to be made open access, for example a journal article could cost \$300 in Africa (Lages et al., 2015). Although this figure is smaller than figures up to \$5,000 charged in some Western journals, it is still a lot given the low levels of wages for African scholars. Without government funding for open access, many writers are unable to publish their work in high-quality open access journals on the continent (Ngobeni, 2009). Funders could help by waiving open-access fees or supporting publishers to publish freely. Funding could also be directed at developing digital repositories to make research accessible free of charge. Writers require more scholarship support to increase creativity and innovation, especially in universities. Funding will make research for doctoral, master's and honours students and academics stronger and more relevant to Africa (SGCI, 2022).

Another challenge is the neglect of African publishers in favour of global publishers (Lages et al., 2015). While the SGCI (2022) reported an increase in journal articles published by African authors from 13,470 in 2003 to 128,076 in 2022, most of these were still published outside Africa. This means African authors are contributing more to publications globally than domestically (SGCI, 2022). During the same period, international publications by African authors grew from 1.2%

to 4.5% but domestic publications fell, negatively impacting the local publishing industry (SGCI, 2022). African scholars would prefer European journals that enjoy a high impact factor. However, Sharma et al. (2024) argue that a journal's impact factor is not associated with quality of the peer review process or quality of its content. It simply measures the frequency with which the journal has been cited over a period of time, usually two years. There is a misconception in African academia that publishing in European journals by big publishers like Sage and Taylor & Francis means that the published work is of high quality (Sharma et al., 2024). African scholars who publish only in African journals would derive low social status from their peers and institutions (Snaije, 2020). In the authors' experience, mostly European journals have earned themselves the tag 'international journals' and are preferred as part of the promotion criteria to high academics ranks like associate professor or full professor; consequently, most African scholars desire to publish in the so-called 'international journals'. A challenge emanating from this is the cost of buying content back to Africa from companies such as Elsevier, whose costs are very high (Tomaselli, 2020). Further, there are copyright challenges when books are published outside of Africa; for example, the 1953 classic novel *The African Child* by Tamara Laye of Guinea was published in France by Plon, and the rights, pricing and distribution are controlled in France. The challenge is compounded by poor negotiation on the part of writers, some of whom do not even know that they can keep their rights from the publisher (Tomaselli, 2020).

The culture and frequency of reading and writing books is low in Africa (Kigotho, 2021). Orature has been highly favoured because it is contextual, decolonising and exists in local languages, unlike most books (Bgoya, W, 2021). Books are often written and published in foreign languages and tend to promote philosophies and ideals from outside of Africa. "The shortage of academic books written by African academics has forced African universities to rely heavily on imported works, even for studies with African-specific content such as history, literature, music, politics, sociology and economics", argues

Kigotho (2021). Speaking from experience, Bgoya, M (2021) states that textbooks for schools provide a better market in Africa; however, historically, this market has been grabbed by global publishers like College Press and Macmillan, mainly because the colonial curricula still used in most countries favours external publishers (Kigotho, 2021). In countries like Zimbabwe, the situation shifted from these global publishers to their local franchisee and now to indigenous independent publishers like Zimbabwe Publishing House and Secondary Book Press. This move was supported by domestication of curricula, although more still needs to be done. It was the same situation in Nigeria; companies like Kachifo Limited were created in 2004 for ‘telling our own stories.’ Through its literary imprints like Farafina which published the local edition of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus* (Chika, 2022). Kachifo went on to publish many young award-winning writers. Cassava Republic Press is another of the Nigerian independent publishers started in 2006 (Chika, 2022). Cassava prioritised affordability and quality and was able to expand to other countries outside Africa. Other publishers of this age in Nigeria are Paressia Publishers, Griots Lounge, Masobe Books, Ouida Books, and Narrative Landscape Press. In East Africa, publishers Kwani? and Huza Press and in South Africa, Kwela Books are examples (Chika, 2022). While the market for primary and secondary textbooks is there, the market is low for tertiary textbooks such that publishers in Africa do not publish tertiary textbooks in adequate quantities, leaving a gap often filled by global publishers (Bgoya, M, 2021).

Digital publishing presents opportunities (for example cheaper and quicker publishing) for publishing in Africa but there are challenges at the same time (Bgoya, M, 2021). The growth of the Internet and increase of digital gadgets such as phones and electronic readers is positive; however, compared to other regions of the world, Africa lags, resulting in a new challenge of keeping up with competition from new players such as Amazon and other print-on-demand (POD) publishers (Bgoya, M, 2021). Bgoya, M (2021) argues that without similar players in POD in Africa, writers will use POD services outside

Africa, but this impacts local services in Africa. Big technology companies produce platforms and algorithms that do not prioritise African literature. According to Bgoya, M, (2021): “If we are to see another 40 years we need to collaborate with like-minded technologists to develop new tools for getting our content discovered and widely accessed we need to imagine new mediums and adapt to the ones which are being invented so that we can stay relevant and in touch with our readers as well as reaching new ones I think we can endeavour to make African Books Collective play an even bigger part by transforming it into a part into a platform that is powerful as Amazon but for African published books in both print and digital formats but anyway while we are working on that.” However, without quality control, predatory publishing may creep in, especially in the publishing of journals (Tomaselli, 2020). More quality assurance measures are required to prevent predatory publishing, at the same time promoting entrepreneurship. Moreover, digital products such as audio books can be very cheap, resulting in a lack of motivation for writers (Bgoya, M, 2021).

A traditional challenge in African publishing is language. As Thiong’o (2021) states, language and colonisation are tied together. In the past, African languages were banned and therefore could not be published (Mugumbate & Naami, 2023). The effect then and today is that Africans were made to be ashamed of writing and publishing in their languages. While there are publications in local languages, mainly Swahili and a few other languages in a few disciplines, Bgoya, W (2021) notes that scientific, mathematics and philosophical books in local languages are rare.

Sustaining book publishing companies in Africa has also been a challenge. Bgoya, W (2021), who founded Mkuki naNyota Publishers, one of the few publishing companies that has been running for over 40 years, says there is “need to remember that we are talking about building and strengthening institutions so that they can continue to exist and serve us for generations to come. Too often our creations leave for one maybe two generation and then they disappear only for us to start over again to build the same.”

Poor publishing infrastructure in Africa is still a major concern (Kigotho, 2021). More attention is required to build African-centred publishers and infrastructure for the publishing of journals and books. Infrastructure includes paper, power, machines for communicating, designing, printing and binding and services like postal, courier, transport, promotion (e.g., book fairs or week and awards) and bookshops. Kigotho (2021) cites lack of distribution hubs, an intra-Africa book trade and remoteness of publishers as a major weakness of publishing in Africa. University presses and bookshops play an important part in publishing; however, in Africa, they are very few or those few are not doing well (Ngobeni, 2009). As a result of a weaker infrastructure, publishers choose to publish outside of Africa; for example, in France but then their books won't be found locally or if they do, they will be too expensive (Kigotho, 2021).

Human resources is a key aspect of the publishing industry, as Bgoya, W (2021) and Bgoya, M (2021) argue. The key personnel required include entrepreneurs, academics, writers, editors, literary agents, designers, printers, binders, copy writers, marketers and distributors. Writers especially, play an important part in publishing but, as Kigotho (2021) says, African schools and universities teach students to read for examinations and not to write for discovery, creativity and innovation. Teachers and lecturers themselves are products of such a system, so their own contribution to writing, editing or reviewing high quality books, articles and textbooks is limited. The challenge is made worse by the conditions of low pay and large classes that they must teach.

The challenge of piracy is a big one in Africa (Bgoya, W, 2021). This is when books are photocopied, reprinted, bound, digitised and distributed without copyright. Pirated books, including novels and textbooks, are sold on streets and door-to-door. This results in low revenue for the authors, making book publishing unattractive. The drivers for piracy are unemployment, lawlessness, lack of enforcement and unavailability of the original books on the market (Thiong'o, 2021).

Another challenge is low publishing of themes that are not of interest to publishers; for example, African culture and religion; decolonisation and freedom and African scientific innovations (Thiong'o, 2021). Anta Diop, whose work about African civilisation was rejected many times by publishers and university presses, is a good example of this challenge (Diop, 2007).

The political, economic and policy environments have not been favourable in many countries (Carré, 2016). For example, some countries such as Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) have been unstable because of wars and unrest, while others such as Zimbabwe have experienced economic instability for several years. Publishing policies have not favoured local publishing in many countries with major challenges being lack of support for local languages and poor support of entrepreneurs and lack of incentives for writers, publishers and research institutions. In South Africa, and perhaps a few other countries, there is public funding for universities and writers for book and journal publications (SGCI, 2022).

In the absence of adequate locally published books, donated books from outside Africa are filling the gap in many countries in Africa (Mugumbate & Naami, 2023). Donations come as free books or low-cost books; however, most donated books are old and not written for the African population. The situation can best be described as dumbing, which kills the local industry.

## **Solutions and opportunities for African-centred publishing**

This section is largely based on the work and speeches of Walter Bgoya, who founded Mkuki naNyota, an indigenous publisher based in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, about four decades ago (Bgoya, W, 2021; Bgoya, M, 2021). Mkuki naNyota published Walter Rodney's book *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, Agostinho Neto's *Sacred Hope*, Samora Machel's *Establishing People's Power to Serve the Masses*, Issa Shivji's *Class Struggles in Tanzania* and has published biographies of African liberation

with support from the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) (Bgoya & Jay, 2013). Bgoya (W) is a Pan-African publishing intellectual with more than 50 years' experience. He was former Chairman of Africa Books Collective (ABC) and is regarded as one of the successful Pan-African publishers (Bgoya & Jay, 2013). The speeches include 'Limitations to what an African publisher could do if money were not a problem' delivered at University of Cape Town, South Africa in 2021 and 'The role of African publishing in the knowledge production ecosystem: Celebrating Mkuki na Nyota', which was delivered in 2021 during Mkuki naNyota's 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations (Bgoya & Jay, 2013). The publications include a book chapter titled 'Publishing in Africa from Independence to the Present Day' co-authored with Mary Jay in 2013. Bgoya (W)'s model of African-centred publishing is summarised below, supported with ideas from other authors.

### **Bgoya (W)'s model for successful publishing in Africa**

1. Decolonisation of publishing is required to value local knowledge and ultimately increase the reading market. Bgoya (W) argues that publishing helps to redefine Africa, protects languages, culture, interests, consumption and identity. Books allow us to 'give to other cultures as much as we take from them, and to think for ourselves and protect African interests' (Bgoya, W, 2021).
2. Skilled human capital for Africa's publishing industry, including entrepreneurs, publishing intellectuals, technologists, technicians, marketers, amongst others. Skilled manpower results in quality writing, design, publishing and services.
3. Market knowledge, including statistics of the book trade to facilitate reliable investment decisions; for example, what titles sell better, how much to invest, how many copies to print and when to print (Bgoya & Jay, 2013).
4. Lobbying Western multinational publishers for fair, ethical, sustainable and just practices supported by supportive

- legislation to protect and promote local enterprises (Mugumbate & Naami, 2023).
5. Expanding the demand and market for books, and this encompasses increasing people's purchasing power, which is very low because of poverty, unemployment and low income. The global market should also be targeted. For work that has already been published by the multinational publishers, Bgoya (M) recommends partnerships and cooperation with them to acquire publishing rights back or share them. Another strategy is to reach children early in life (Bgoya, M, 2021).
  6. State investment in relevant education, cultural productions, publishing presses and production of publishing requirements; for example, timber, paper, ink and machinery (Bgoya, M, 2021).
  7. Local, regional and continental partnerships and publisher associations and networks to secure good conditions of conducting business with governments, funders and global publishers (Chika, 2022). This helps to reduce printing and distribution costs. An example is the ABC, a network of African publishers that was created in 1989 to ensure a central marketing place for African books to a global market. Networks help with coordination of buyers to buy in bulk. A useful intergovernmental partnership could be having a common syllabus, so that the same book can be used in many schools, expanding its market. Databases such as the African Journals Online (AJOL) aggregate content from over 700 African journals, and provide the publishers with an opportunity to market, sell or distribute open access articles (AJOL, 2024).
  8. Machinery and equipment to allow fewer books to be printed cost-effectively at a time, in line with market availability. Mkuki naNyota owns an Espresso Book Machine (EBM), which is a print on demand (POD) machine made by On Demand Books - the machine has addressed the problem of cost-effectiveness; it was not developed for the African market, hence, there is need for African-centred technologies (Bgoya, W, 2021).

9. Funding from governmental and intergovernmental institutions, private financiers and not from external donors because they set their own conditions, expectations and ideological orientations and would hardly publish in local languages or support decolonising publishing (Bgoya & Jay, 2013). There are several ways that funding could be directed, including paying publishers, research institutions or researchers; for example, through a reward-based publication system (e.g., economic reward and promotion) such as the one used by the Department of Higher Education and Training, South Africa (SGCI, 2022).
10. A “buy local” campaign is required because book buyers for schools, universities, book shops and libraries have a tendency to think that books should be imported and can’t come from inside Africa (Bgoya & Jay, 2013). Based on the example of corruption by Western publishers shared before (World Bank, 2012), book buyers in Africa should be ethical and refuse to be paid cuts to favour external suppliers.
11. More research into publishing; for example, research by the African Languages Research Institute (ALRI) has led to the publishing of dictionaries in African languages such as *Durawamazwi* in Zimbabwe (Chimhundu, 1996; 2001). This only happens when governments provide more research and development funding.
12. Building sustainable publishing companies that last long and survive beyond a single generation. Sustainable companies are built for the very long-term (Bgoya, M, 2021).

## **Models for publishing and distribution in Africa**

### **Entrepreneur models**

This model represents the approach taken by most entrepreneurs who venture into publishing. The approach involves forming a private company using personal, family or credit from banks (Bgoya & Jay, 2013). In the case of Walter Bgoya, he formed Mkuki naNyota in the 1980s using his

resources and his expertise as an intellectual (Bgoya & Jay, 2013). He thinks that small printing presses or technology will address easy, quick printing and cheaper distribution with a rural focus (Bgoya, W, 2021). Writers approach the publisher with their work, which is assessed and accepted if it meets the standards set by the publisher. The publisher then reviews the work, sends it back to the writer to improve before it is accepted or reviewed again. The publisher then performs a copy-edit before the writer proofreads. The work is published, and the writer receives royalties when the publishing costs have been offset. Distribution includes through traditional channels such as the publisher store and bookshops and directly to libraries and educational institutions but may also include print-on-demand (POD), which involves printing copies of the book when needed (Bgoya, W, 2021). Another form of distribution is online, where the book is sold as a soft copy that can be downloaded or read on screens. This model is most suitable for achieving African-centredness; however, publishers may not have all the resources required to publish and distribute quicker.

### **University press model**

This model has been used for publishing tertiary education textbook and journals. A university sets up a printing department, with human resources and printing equipment (Vilakazi, 1999). They then publish the university academics' work and also that of writers outside the university. South Africa has some of the continent's successful university presses (Tomaselli, 2020). Funding often comes from the university, government grants or profits from the business. The university press publishes not to make money commercially but to advance knowledge.

### **Global publisher franchise model**

With this model, a global publisher establishes a local imprint or offers a franchise. The franchisee will represent the global publisher in the local region benefiting from the skills, experience, equipment and distribution channels of the global publisher (Tomaselli, 2020). The role of the franchisee will

be to study the market to identify gaps, and to seek local publishing contracts. With this model, the interests of the franchisee are often overlooked, making it difficult to achieve African-centredness.

### **Government publishing model**

This model is mainly used to publish early, primary and secondary education textbooks (Bgoya, W, 2021). The government sets up a public publisher with a printing press. Funding comes from the government. Often, there is a lack of proper management, and resources can be abused (Bgoya, W, 2021). Workers are often not adequately paid, resulting in poor-quality work or corruption. Most government publishing companies in Africa have failed as a result of these reasons. However, their chances of achieving African-centred publishing are high because they have access to the education system, and their books match the syllabus. They are also better placed to publish in local languages.

### **Journal publishing models**

There are many models for publishing journals. One model involves a university publishing a journal or a few more at its press, as stated above. Another is when an independent publisher, government or community publisher publishes a journal, or a few more as stated above. The other option is when a publisher publishes multiple journals, journal publishing being their only or main business. This is the model used by Academic Journals (Nigeria) and AOSIS (South Africa). A model that has grown in recent years is when a publisher focuses on one mega multidisciplinary or a few multidisciplinary journals. This model is used by Open Research Africa (2024), which says that its aim is rapid publication of writers affiliated with its member associations (Tomaselli, 2020). Another model involves a local journal being hosted by a foreign journal to benefit from journal software, marketing and distribution. This strategy is used by University of South Africa, working in partnership with Taylor & Francis (SGCI, 2022). Funding strategies for all these models include free publishing, writers paying a fee to be

published or a hybrid of these strategies; for example, delayed open access. Marketing and distribution strategies vary too; for example, the journal can be hosted by a larger publisher as stated above, it can be listed or indexed in a database, for example SciELO, which is state-supported in South Africa, Sabinet, which is commercial, or AJOL, which is non-profit or institutional repositories (Tomaselli, 2020). Successful journals publish frequently and on schedule; they attract quality research, and their articles are widely read, giving writers the joy of having their work read and used in policy, education and practice (AJOL, 2024). Successful publishers have their journals subscribed to, indexed in quality lists and databases and use technology to show metrics or usage (for example downloads, shares, views or cites) (AJOL, 2024). They provide their content on websites that are easy to navigate, and continuously (AJOL, 2024). The publisher has enough personnel for review, editing, design, marketing and distribution (Tomaselli, 2020).

### **Non-government organisations (NGO) model and community publishing model**

These models are usually used for non-profit purposes. In the NGO model, a local or international organisation provides writers or institutions with resources that are required for publishing, often for a short period of time or for a single project (Bgoya, W, 2021). In the community publishing model, the support to publish is provided to a community or community organisation, often for a short period or a single project. The projects are often focused on the priority of the donor; for example human or environmental rights. There is often limited review of content to allow more people to publish. The shortcomings of the model in achieving African-centredness are that the donor comes with their own ideas (Mugumbate & Naami, 2023).

### **The self-publishing and POD models**

In this model, the writer takes charge of writing, printing, marketing and distribution, which they can even perform themselves or hire services (Bgoya, W, 2021). They sell their publications on their own. Self-publishing is often tied to POD,

which is when a book is prepared and stored digitally, and then printed when an order has been made. Selling of soft copies is common. Self-publishing can be exploitative and there is often no proper editing, rights are lost, and knowledge is accumulated by the West (Bgoya, W, 2021). This model can achieve African-centredness with ease; however, there is often a challenge with quality and limited production and distribution.

### **Digital and print hybrid model**

With this model, publishers combine systems for print and digital publishing and maximise on technical developments to publish and distribute (Bgoya, W, 2021). Pambazuka Press, with a presence in Nairobi, Cape Town, Dakar and Oxford is an example of this model (Fahamu, 2019). Pambazuka Press, together with Pambazuka News are imprints of Fahamu Books, a non-profit Pan-African digital diversified publisher started in 2000 (Fahamu, 2019). The press's mission is to disseminate analysis and debate on the struggle for freedom and justice. They publish books and articles on human rights, social justice, politics and advocacy in Africa, including an online and open access weekly newsletter, podcasting, broadcasting and blogging and have a large community of content creators or writers who are academics, public intellectuals and activists (Fahamu, 2019).

### *Towards a transformative African-centred publishing model*

A unified publishing model is desirable but it may not be easy to develop because publishers at different levels - individual, community, national and government, continental and global - have different aims and aspirations. However, in the authors' view, it may be possible for the aims and aspirations of all other stakeholders, except global publishers (driven by a profit motive) to be coalesced around a single aim because most of them already share an aspiration of African-centredness. The single aim, in our view, should be providing, at all levels of society, resources for education that are of high-quality, accessible locally and globally, affordable, suited to the socio-ecological situations of Africa and decolonising. The goals of such an African-centred publishing model would be:

1. Protecting local publishing industries from multinational companies.
2. Supporting educational needs of educators and learners.
3. A policy environment that supports entrepreneurship, decolonisation and indigenisation.
4. Building sustainable publishing companies and practices.
5. Research and development of publishing technologies.
6. Quality and consistent publishing.
7. Publishing for Africa and the world.

## **Conclusion - the intersection of publishing and education**

Using African perspectives and indigenous knowledges in teaching is possible, but the starting point is having African-centred literature that is accessible to teachers and students. Publishing and education are intricately related; where they intersect, we find teachers and academics, literature, curricula, libraries, policy, languages and decolonisation. If the misconceptions and stereotypes about Africa are to be overcome globally, then most of the literature must be produced on the continent by African writers writing from the philosophy of Africa. Teachers and lecturers should play an important role in the process of transforming education in Africa. Their roles include writing high quality book and journal manuscripts but also editing and reviewing the work of others. They should also start publishing houses, based on a model that works best for them but guided by the aims of African-centred publishing. The other role of teachers and lecturers is to promote ordering and using local literature in syllabi and libraries - books, textbooks, journals, reports, and web content dominate African libraries.

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## How We Teach Africa Matters



## Chapter 11

# Dismantling the Discourses of the Master's House: Counterpositions to Lusotropicalism from the Perspective of Lusophone Africans

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### Introduction

The last decades in Brazil have been marked by a severe rupture in the way of thinking about the formation of the country and the racial violence resulting from this process. Through political struggle and contestation, the Brazilian Unified Black Movement managed to build reparatory public policies to the black population, such as affirmative action to enter universities and the federal public service; the mandatory teaching of Afro-Brazilian and African histories and cultures in basic education, through Federal Law 10.639/2003 (which aims to include the subject of “Afro-Brazilian History and Culture” in the official school curriculum); as well as the expansion of disciplines and postgraduate courses in the afore-mentioned contexts in higher education.

Thus, since then, we have been breaking with the myth of Lusotropicalism, an idea solidified by the Brazilian sociologist Gilberto Freyre (1933:197) based on the conception that the Portuguese were the colonisers amongst the European ones who was the least cruel with indigenous and black folks. This conception was used to sustain colonial domination in the African and Asian worlds invaded by the Portuguese empire



during the twentieth century. It comes from Freyre's view of Portuguese colonialism in Brazil, whose main fruit would be the production of a *racial democracy*.

According to the Afro-Brazilian intellectual Abdias do Nascimento (2016:47-48), racial democracy would supposedly reflect a certain concrete relationship in the dynamics of Brazilian society: that black and white people coexist harmoniously, enjoying equal opportunities of existence, without any interference, in this game of social parity, of their respective racial or ethnic origins.

This, for some authors, would be the reason for greatest national pride. However, Nascimento shows us that, in fact, there was a naturalised segregation in Brazil based on anti-black and anti-indigenous racism that promoted the genocide of both populations. Thus, Nascimento (2020:196) argues that racial democracy is non-existent; in fact it is a "racial demagoguery". The Afro-Brazilian sociologist pointed out that the Lusotropicalist discourse of "affable" Portuguese colonialism "in the tropics" would be a way of silencing and perpetuating the racial violence produced by this system of exploitation.

It is important to emphasise that Lusotropicalism is not only a historical perspective marked by gross errors in its narrative, but it is actively harmful. By silencing the violence promoted by Portuguese colonialism around the world, Lusotropicalism continually acts as a way of continuing colonial alienation (Fanon, 1967; 2022), as it prevents the construction of reparation measures in the face of the crimes committed by the colonial system - as can be seen with the violent reaction to the current Portuguese president's statements about reparation measures for colonial crimes.

Despite the fact that, as mentioned above, there is a series of federal laws that make it compulsory to introduce discussions on race, African studies and related issues, the hegemonic discourse that Brazil was one of the first countries to recognise the independence of Portuguese-speaking Africa continues to operate in International Relations (IR) classrooms, while the continuous support that the Brazilian diplomatic mission has

given to the Portuguese government in the field of international politics is erased (Nascimento, 2020)

Contrary to this perverse hegemonic narrative, different academic initiatives have emerged to contest it and, thus, to understand the violence caused by the persistence of race and racism on Brazilian soil. One of them was the discipline of Race, African Diaspora and Race Relations (known by its acronym, RADARI), created within the scope of the Laboratory of Afrocentric Studies in International Relations (LACRI) of the University of Brasília. LACRI, in their turn, was created in 2016 by black undergraduate students in IR at that educational institution. The purpose of LACRI was to recover, produce, and discuss knowledge about racial inequalities and their relation to the IR field, using race as a central analytical category.

From this perspective, the main objective of the course was to analyse the contributions of historical and contemporary black - and non-white - thought in IR studies; to understand the racial relations within the IR - which were historically erased in the discipline, even though race was the guiding element of the emergence of IR as a field of study (Acharya, 2022; Henderson, 2013; Sabaratnam, 2020); as well as to centralise the African Diaspora within global flows and discourses. The course aimed to present to the students theoretical-methodological references to (re)think the field of IR from the structuring element of modernity that is the category of 'race', going against the silencing fostered about the racial issue in IR (Rutazibwa, 2016).

The students gathered at LACRI began the political mobilisation so that the course of Race, African Diaspora and IR would be offered as an elective subject. The course was first taught by Marcos Vinícius Lustosa Queiroz in 2019. At that time, part of the students' work consisted of the production of material in the form of texts for the LACRI blog (LACRI, n.d.), whose purpose was to serve as input for subsequent versions of the course. The course was offered again in the Semesters 2/2020 and 1/2021 by Professor Bruna Jaquetto Pereira. Between the Semesters 2/2021 and 2/2022, I convened the course. Throughout the three semesters in which I was in charge, the

course had as its target audience the IR student body, although it was not restricted to them. An important fact to mention is the racial diversity of the students during the three editions of the course that I offered. Classes were fairly balanced between black and white students, and I also received indigenous and Asian-descent students. This made it possible to look at race in a more complex way than just black and white.

Throughout the course, it was imperative to take a path that would address the three central topics of the discipline: race, the African Diaspora, and IR. Thus, the discussion began with a reflection on the conceptualisation of race and racism, with the purpose of understanding the concept of race as a social and sociological category (Munanga, 2003); as well as the result of the advent of modernity and the consolidation of European whiteness as a civilising model to be followed (Acharya, 2022). From this initial contextualisation, it was possible to perceive how race and racism – or *the r-word* (Rutazibwa, 2016) – are systematically erased, neglected, and euphemised to the detriment of other systemic forms of oppression, such as geolocation, within the scope of race relations (Zvobgo & Loken, 2020).

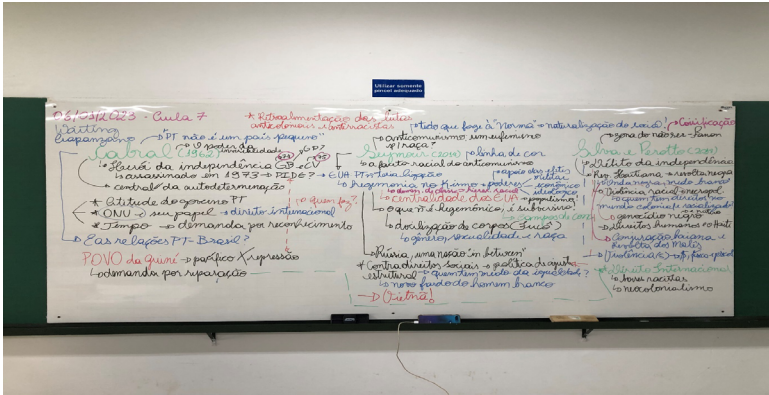
By focusing on canonical authors from the African Diaspora, we brought to the centre of the debate marginalised discussions in Brazilian academia, such as the one on racism and sexism in Brazil and America, based on the writings of the *American* author Lélia Gonzalez (2021), who pointed out that Latin America is, in reality, an *América Ladina*, that is, African and Amerindian America, produced and founded by black and indigenous hands, like hers. On the other hand, if the discussion of racial issues in Brazil is moving towards a process of consolidation in the university space, the presence of Africa and Africans was still relatively minimal. Although the African continent serves as a contrast for “Europe” and the “West”, especially in terms of human development (Mills, 1997:13), the social sciences of the Black Atlantic continue to fail to give the necessary attention to the impacts of the conjunction between colonialism and racialisation that have historically occurred

across even the most different African contexts (Pierre 2019:1), as well as for the production of African intellectuals.

In this sense, when I took the responsibility for teaching RADARI, I understood that it was essential to bring Africa and African intellectuals into the debate. In this way, I introduced readings from works by different authors from the Luso-African world. They were Amílcar Cabral (2011; 2013), the agronomist and militant for the colonial liberation of Cape Verde and Guinea Bissau; Alcinda Honwana (2012; 2023), Mozambican anthropologist; Eufémia Rocha and José Carlos Gomes dos Anjos (2022), Cape Verdean anthropologists. We also read African authors outside the Lusophone space, as Achille Mbembe (2018). But here, I am going to focus on the Luso-African ones.

Regarding the teaching practices and methodologies applied to the learning process, the classes were structured as follows: the semester included double classes, i.e., two consecutive classes of one hour and fifty minutes each. In each session, a theme ran through the discussions and the bibliographical references to be discussed (between two or three articles). Students were expected to conduct the readings individually before class. Thus, the first hour of class was devoted to the presentation of the strengths, weaknesses and doubts of the articles by three or four students. This didactic proposal consisted of a combination of brainstorming and seminars, teaching strategies presented by Anastasiou and Alves (2004:80, 90) to make the students' presentations more dynamic and less protocol-based. During the classes, I used to write some of the comments made by the students on the whiteboard, as illustrated by Figure 11.1.

At the end of the students' presentation, the debate was opened up to the rest of the class and, once the interventions had been completed, I started to comment on each of the points indicated by them on the whiteboard. In the second part of the lesson, I returned to each of the compulsory readings using the logic of the dialogued lecture (Anastasiou & Alves, 2004:79).



**Figure 11.1:** In the picture, we can see the whiteboard all written after the students’ presentation about anticolonial struggles and thinking (January 6, 2023).

Based on this pedagogical construction, the students were invited to express their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the readings. This model allowed them to feel more comfortable in expressing their views. Interestingly, most of the students, in a fairly homogeneous way, were surprised by the strong parallels between the African contexts presented in the texts and the Brazilian scenario. On the one hand, the persistence of Lusotropicalism as a silencer of inequalities was a new element for the students. On the other hand, the readings helped to pluralise the African scenarios previously established in their minds, based on the stereotype of ‘poverty’ on the one hand, and the mythical Africa on the other, an idea promoted by Pan-Africanist discourses of the diaspora.

Based on the discussions that I had with the students, I bring in this chapter the dialogues that emerged from the readings of the aforementioned authors. I will present how those readings were received by students, dividing the text into three parts: Reading Amílcar Cabral, Reading Alcinda Honwana and Reading José Carlos dos Anjos and Eufémia Rocha. Next, I tie the analysis to the conclusions, noting the importance of looking to the ‘side’; that is, directing analysis to other Global South contexts, in this case, African contexts. At the end of the paper – inspired by the proposal of Audre Lorde (2003) –

I will show how introducing other theoretical-analytical tools helps us to dismantle the “big house” erected by the “lord” (or colonialists), without using the tools produced for and by colonial whiteness. Thus, from the reading of Luso-African intellectuals, there were more solid and effective tools to deal with and to understand some Brazilian problems and issues, despite the differences between those contexts. This happened because, in general, the readings were critical to the discourse of Portuguese “exceptionality” - or as pointed out by Freyre, the softness of its colonialism system.

### **Reading Amílcar Cabral: a look at Portuguese colonial violence**

“National liberation is, necessarily, an act of culture” (Cabral, 2011:361) is one of the most classic phrases spoken by Amílcar Cabral (1924 - 1973), agronomist, intellectual and leader of the revolutionary process that led to the independence of Cape Verde and Guinea Bissau. The speech in which that quote was present, originally delivered at a ceremony in honour of Eduardo Mondlane, Cabral’s counterpart in the struggle for Mozambican independence, was read in two of the three editions of RADARI.

Even though Cabral left a large number of texts, articles, speeches and reflections, the possibility of reading his texts in Brazilian university classrooms is still very rare. For this reason, and because of the praxis that the text addresses, the discussion about the work was marked by a visible enthusiasm on the part of the students. In addition to the fact that Cabral was the first African author we read in the course - and for many of the students, the first of their lives - having that text in our hands was also a way of unveiling many of the academically consolidated statements about African contexts and Portuguese colonialism.

This canonical phrase of the Bissau-Guinean intellectual that presents the national liberation as an act of culture brooded the horizons - geographically and historically - for the students. It gave other sense to the demands for self-determination that are increasingly flourishing on Brazilian soil by the voices of

the black and indigenous populations. Thus, by overturning the racist myth of “African culture” in the singular, the result of the process of epistemicide – as “the denial it undertakes of the legitimacy of forms of knowledge, of the knowledge produced by dominated groups and, consequently, of their members as subjects of knowledge” (Carneiro, 2005:96) – carried out during colonialism and which persists even with its end, the reading of Amílcar Cabral led us to understand how colonial liberation was more than a political-administrative element.

His proposal for the *re-Africanization of spirits*, a political perspective carried out by the Generation of 50 – the group of young students from Portuguese colonies who went to the Metropolis to study and become the leaders for colonial liberation –, which germinated the anti-colonial struggles in the Luso-African world, was, after all, a process of awareness that “the tools of the master will not help to dismantle the big house” (Lorde, 2003). This is because the *Indigenato*, a legislative system that hierarchised the non-white populations of the colonial world between *assimilated* and *indigenous* with deeply racist foundations, did not fail to act with its formal purpose, continuing to erase black-African populations from Portuguese citizenship (Venancio, 2025).

Likewise, such legislation acted in to annihilate African histories and cultures, in order to produce physical, cultural and psychological domination. Cabral’s perspective was constructed as a function of his interpretation of colonial assimilation as a negation of culture, arising from the “negation of the historical process of the dominated people” (Cabral, 2011:359). In this way, in the midst of the assimilationist project of Portuguese colonialism, seen by Cabral as the most retrograde of colonialisms (Cabral, 2011:355), the struggle for national liberation would also be a way of denying the negative stereotypes promoted by the colonisers, that is, promoting self-determination.

The impact of Cabral’s proposal was immediate and produced parallels with the Brazilian reality, a country where white people continue to produce racial segregation in different

areas of social life – including university life. In this sense, Mah Freitas (2023), one of the students of the course, resumed the Cabralist proposal to understand the aesthetics and politics of Afrofuturism in the songs of young Afro-Brazilian singers. For the political scientist:

In a context of colonial domination and the existence of a regime of epistemological hegemony, it is in the cultural sphere that the counter-forms of resistance of a dominated people develop, transform and diffuse. And as we have already discussed, with the imposition of the dominant power of the elite on public discourse and, in addition, the removal of black peoples from the mechanisms and institutions necessary for political agency, it is found in culture and cultural production, forms of political agency and recreation of realities and communication of black subjectivities. Therefore, as Cabral (2011) proposes, understanding culture as a powerful counter-hegemonic and anti-colonial movement is essential for transforming the reality of black African peoples (Freitas, 2023:38 – my translation).

On the other side of the Atlantic and in a socio-political context very different from the one for which Cabral wrote his proposal, the revolutionary's words did not fail to echo and make sense as a way to transform realities. This connection emerged as a result of Cabral's proposal that progress should occur, in colonised contexts, on its own terms. By freeing themselves from the shackles of colonialism – and the anti-black racism that would structure the Black Atlantic – it would be possible for black and non-white populations in general to resume the history that was denied to them and, through it, produce and manage their culture for their own purposes.

However, in addition to the emancipatory character that Cabral's readings brought to the students, there was also the unveiling of the Brazilian contribution to the consolidation of such a regime of violence. When we read, in the third edition of the course, his speech about the relationship between the peoples of the then African colonies, the Portuguese and the

United Nations (UN), the violence perpetrated on African territories became more than explicit. By denouncing the absence of a peaceful agreement for colonial liberations, which should have occurred in the early 1960s through the UN, Cabral (2013) shed light not only on the existence and persistence of colonial violence based on racism, but also on the uses – and abuses – of the legislation that allowed them to occur.

This is because, until 1960, the legal basis of international law had not only allowed colonialism, but also the different types of forced labour (Cabral, 2013). The white and metropolitan citizens of the Portuguese empire were protected from the forced labour, while black and mixed populations had to perform it compulsorily. Despite attempts at peaceful agreements to achieve colonial liberation, the Portuguese counterpart was one of violence, carrying out different massacres, such as Batepá (1953) in São Tomé and Príncipe, Pindjiguiti (1959) in Bissau and Wiriamu (1972) in Mozambique.

With the denunciations of physical violence and forced labour perpetrated by the Portuguese government, the question emerged: How did other countries, and Brazil in particular, cope with this situation? How to sustain Lusotropicalism after denunciations like Cabral's? The answers came from reading Abdias do Nascimento (2020) and Seymour (2014). The second, by proposing that the Cold War was, after all, a racial war, helped us to understand the reasons for the persistence of colonialism and the reason for the American alignment with the Portuguese government.

On the other hand, Nascimento shed light on the role of sustaining the myth of benevolence of Portuguese colonialism. At the same time that Brazilian representants denounced South African apartheid – even though Brazilian authorities and economic elite were directly involved with it – the Brazilian votes were like those of a “loyal dog” to Salazarism always that any anti-colonial measures were proposed by the United Nations (Nascimento, 2020:193). The birthplace of Lusotropicalist ideology, through its white, racist and earthly elite, was a crucial key to ensuring the persistence of Portuguese

colonialism – a history of cooperation with colonial and racial violence that is not debated with the necessary vigour in courses such as Africa’s International Relations.

In line with what Fanon (2022:96) proposes that the capitalists have behaved in the Global South as “war criminals”, Cabral proposes an update of the notion of civilisation. For him, colonial violence, whether physical, cultural, psychological or symbolic, would not match the proposal of civilisation. For this reason, Cabral proposed that the liberation struggle is more than a cultural fact, it is also a cultural factor (Cabral, 2011:373). In other words, the colonial liberation would enable the construction of a new model of society for African populations that would break with the structure of violence proposed by European colonialism.

By placing the production of precariousness in the Global South as a “problem of the UN”, or even the “UN as a problem” – since it would be the imperialists who judge the claims discussed there – Cabral shed light on the fact that the structures of global societies are founded on white capitalism, indicating a racialisation of economic-political power prior to what was argued by later scholars (Robinson, 2000). Thus, since alterity is organised by the concept of race as the element that organises the capitalist productive system, postcolonial societies would still live the limits between what was said and what was done in the resolution on decolonisation of 1960, imposing neocolonialism, the last stage of imperialism, on them through the capillary claws of capitalism (Nkrumah, 1973).

The problem is that, inserted in the world-system built on the ballast of the racial contract (Mills, 1997), Portuguese colonialism has left deep marks on the territories on Lusophone Africa – and its tentacles are still operative. This is because, during late colonialism, Portuguese power and agency operated from a double ideological apparatus of repression: the material, through the concentration and slow death camps where political prisoners were sent, and the PIDE (International and State Defence Police), on the one hand; and on the other, the cultural apparatus, founded on Lusotropicalism.

All the events narrated by Cabral occurred during Salazarism, a dictatorial regime that lasted between 1933 and 1974 and whose collapse was accompanied by national dissatisfaction in the face of the colonial liberation wars fought in Angola, Guinea Bissau and Mozambique, was structured, based on Lusotropicalism, in the logic of the “3 Fs”: Fascism, Fatima (Our Lady of Fatima) and football, having engaged in mass popular culture (Cardão, 2020).

For these reasons, for Cabral it was undeniable to read colonialism as a crime. Although he was assassinated even before seeing the independence of Guinea Bissau and Cape Verde, the impacts of colonialism on post-independence life without a severe rupture were already glimpsed by the intellectual. Reading the following authors helped us to better understand this issue.

### **Reading Alcinda Honwana: understanding the persistence of colonialism**

Our (reading) meetings with Alcinda Honwana were marked by the understanding that, as stated by António Costa e Silva (2003), the Atlantic Ocean is like a river, a river that circulates common experiences through its course. This is because, when we came into collective contact with the book *The Time of Youth* (Honwana, 2012), the similarities between the Mozambican, Senegalese, South African and Tunisian contexts, and ours in Brazil, jumped out at us immediately. Her work gives its name to a phenomenon very similar to that found in Brazil, marked by a high number of young people who are unable to fully become adults because of the deepening of social precariousness caused by the current neoliberal austerity policies. This phenomenon, present not only in the Global South, but also in the peripheries of the North of the world (Honwana, 2023), the author referred to as “waithood”. As a result of the combination of profoundly unequal strong economic growth, political exclusion, corruption and rising unemployment associated with inefficient public education, the:

Waithood, a portmanteau term of “wait” and “-hood,” is the best way to describe this period of suspension between childhood and adulthood. It represents a prolonged adolescence or an involuntary delay in reaching adulthood, in which young people are unable to find employment, get married, and establish their own families. [...] Waithood suggests the multifaceted nature of the transition, which goes beyond securing a job and extends to other aspects of life, such as access to learning opportunities, household formation, and civic participation. Young people in waithood are increasingly unable to become social adults and full-fledged citizens (Honwana, 2012:4).

In Brazil, this phenomenon became known as *generation neither in* (employment nor in education or training) and, as in the different African contexts in which the Mozambican anthropologist carried out her research, it is marked by being a local reflection of a global phenomenon that associates citizenship with consumption. By introducing the topic into the classroom with a non-moralising perspective of the lives of these young people – contrary to what we saw happening in Brazil, reproducing racial stereotypes related to “laziness” – we were able to begin to understand the structural facet of the phenomenon from the prism of countries with histories of colonisation and exploitation based on racism that are close to ours.

However, if Alcinda Honwana, by bringing four African scenarios that are racially more homogeneous than Brazil, shows us the racialised character of waithood, we could, in class, ask ourselves: who are the disadvantaged young people who are suffering in waithood? In our country, the answer followed precisely the intersectional path that we followed in the discipline: black women were about half of the young people aged 15 to 29 who would like to study or work, but they could not because they were focused on performing the housework. At the same time that the Brazilian scenario was close to the South African one, in which young black people are proportionally

more unemployed than white people (Honwana, 2012:13); it also helped us to stress in a gendered way the data from Honwana, which dialogued mostly with male youth.

The male youth interviewed by Honwana, as the author herself demonstrated, went through a greater lack of responsibility in the world of domestic and family compared to women (2012:89), something very similar to what happens in Brazil. Still, in realities close to ours, the emergence of this generation on the “gap” between youth and adulthood was, in South Africa, Mozambique, Senegal and Tunisia, also the result of the “failures” (more purposeful than intended) of neoliberalism and the impossibility of a welfare state in the Global South imposed because of the austerity policies carried out in the field since the 1980s, generating underemployment and precarious works.

In this way, even though she analytically explored realities beyond those existing in the Lusophone world located in the Global South, Alcinda Honwana (2012) showed us how the different types of racially motivated colonialism and domination, even if produced in distinct historical-geographical contexts, had a common core: the production of the continuous dehumanisation of non-white populations living around the world. By giving a name to the phenomenon that we see, but did not know how to call beyond the hegemonic meritocratic discourse, the author indicated, from the African worlds, creative ways to deal with this situation of precariousness.

By looking at the contexts described by Alcinda Honwana (2012), the result of the precariousness produced by neoliberal fiscal adjustment policies that did not generate the promised jobs, Honwana perceived the existence of what was called “System D” (“*Débrouille*”, “*débrouillardise*” or “*démerde*”). It denotes a set of practices, actions and quick responses to the challenges imposed by everyday life (Dimé, 2005). In this sense, the young Africans interviewed by Honwana pointed out ways of subsistence that are very common to young people from other parts of the Global South: street commerce, intra and

intercontinental migration, call centre service, smuggling, and even life on the streets rummaging through garbage.

Still, the author indicated to us more than individual solutions to this problem, which is collective and structural. When I introduced another text of hers (Honwana, 2023), which marks a leap of almost a decade to the first, we were able to discuss together the collective responses sought by young people in African countries. In contexts of the Global South in which political leaders build close ties with the rich and powerful in the Global North; in addition to the fact that it is common for anti-democratic, incompetent, and corrupt leaders in the South to be tolerated as long as they do not challenge the hegemonic neoliberal agenda of powerful nations in the North (Honwana, 2023:36); young people take to the streets to demand change.

However, this happens not without confronting something very common to the Global North and the Americas dominated by white elites: a truculent police force that kills and represses protesters. To make their voices echo, these young people appropriate rap music and social networks (Charry, 2012), as in the other peripheries of the world. Thus, even in non-Atlantic African contexts, music emerges as a politics of realisation, as Gilroy (1993:95-7) postulates for the Black Atlantic. In other words, music fulfils the function of uniting and producing proposals for the possible future and for less violent and precarious lives, as we see in the Brazilian case, uniting young people in the construction of other possibilities of political confrontation.

Thus, by naming the problem – beyond the attempt at social pathologising seen in Brazil – and identifying ways to circumvent it, Alcinda Honwana (2012; 2023) provided us, in a similar way to what Cabral did, the union between theorisation and practice, resulting in a proposal for praxis.

### **Reading José Carlos dos Anjos and Eufémia Rocha: demystifying Lusotropicalism**

The last authors from Lusophone Africa read by us during the course were José Carlos dos Anjos and Eufémia Rocha

(2022), both anthropologists born in Cape Verde islands. They were introduced to the students through the text *Traces of Antiracism in Cape Verde*, in which, by addressing the relations of Cape Verdeans with Africans born on Continental Africa, the authors shed light on a silent - and thorny - theme in African studies: the persistence of race and racial tensions, even in contexts of a black majority (Pierre, 2019).

By adhering to the notion of anti-blackness in place of “racism” to address these relationships, the authors point out that this feeling presupposes an incomplete humanity in bodies overloaded with traces of Africanity and blackness, even in spaces and situations where white people are not present (Anjos & Rocha, 2022:111). And, for the authors, anti-blackness in Cape Verde would emerge in different relationships, encompassing the internal tensions between *badius* (people from the island of Santiago) and *sampadjodus* (from the island of São Vicente), in which the latter consider themselves whiter - and more civilised - than the former; to the construction of the homogenising category of the *mandjakus*.

It is important to explain the Cape Verdean racial vernacular. *Badiu* is a word from the Cape Verdean Creole, which has as its root the Portuguese word “*vadio*”. This term was used in Cape Verde to describe individuals who were recently released from slavery or who “became free” by escaping the plantations. Deprived of the possibility to develop reintegration adjustments, they had to live under a state of material, social and moral heteronomy (Fernandes, 2002:91).

According to Lima and Robalo, the purpose [of the use of the term *badio*] was to stigmatise a group of freed men loaded with a strongly marked African identity, characterising them as useless, party-goers, aggressive, and vagrants (2019:89). Although *vadio* existed on all the islands of Cape Verde, the word *badio* is used to designate the inhabitants of the island of Santiago, no matter their status or economic insertion (Fernandes, 2002:92). Still, the expression maintained its pejorative connotation from the colonial period, associating the *badius* with the idea that they were blacker, less civilised,

and, therefore, closer phenotypically and culturally to what an African stereotype should be (Furtado, 2013:9). *Mandjaku*, in its turn, is a word used to stigmatise African immigrants from other West African countries, such as Nigeria, Guinea-Bissau, and Senegal. It is a homogenising and pejorative word that comes from Manjaco, the name of one of the biggest Guinea-Bissau ethnic groups, being used in Cape Verde as a way to call all the “black people”, all the Africans who came from the mainland Africa (Anjos & Rocha, 2022).

From the analysis of the uses (and abuses) of these terms, we saw how the grammar of difference (Cooper & Stoler, 1997) based on race persists on Cape Verdean soil, despite the continuous denial by the national elite. Although Cape Verde is a country with a majority of black people in its population (Anjos & Rocha, 2022:, 110), the emergence of anti-blackness amongst black populations was not new to Brazilian students. From the text, students were able to reflect both on personal experiences of racism coming from other black people, and on broader issues, such as Europe’s refusal to receive Arab and African refugees, while quickly welcoming Ukrainian refugees with the discourse that “they are white, blond and have blue eyes like us”.

Still, by thinking about the experience of the persistence of race as a category of domination in a Luso-African context, we were able, together, to outline the understanding that Lusotropicalism only existed in discourse. In Cape Verde, Lusotropicalism was consolidated with the myth of Cape-Verdean “Creole exceptionalism”. Within the narratives of the construction of the Cape Verdean nation, creolisation was elected as the defining mark of Cape Verdeanity. Nevertheless, the creolity, originated by Cape Verdean slave formation, would produce a tension between Africanity and (Lusitanian) Europeaness. In other words,

the organizing matrix of this racial formation [i.e., of Cape-Verdean society] is a racialized Creole continuum, a scale of value with multiple gradations and notations between the figures of “Africa” and “Europe” through

which the social status of subjects was ascertained and different formations of Cape Verdean Creole identity or “creolity” were historically produced that reach postcoloniality (Cidra, 2021:23).

By this way, because of the persistence of anti-blackness, we saw that the violence produced in the “Brown Atlantic” – an ironic designation created by Almeida (2004:109) to characterise the narrative of the Portuguese miscegenation project that would create the Portuguese exceptionalism – was not so different from that produced by other colonial empires, such as France and England. By overthrowing the so-called “racial democracy” in the “Creole paradise”, idea that was built deeply inspired on Brazilian social thought – especially Gilberto Freyre’s works – Anjos and Rocha also help to destroy the proposition of an alleged absence of racial discrimination in Brazil. This is because both contexts are marked by the non-being zone, as pointed out by Fanon (1967), this zone marked by racism and anti-blackness where life and death mean nothing (Anjos & Rocha, 2022:115).

In this way, Anjos and Rocha’s proposal brings Cape Verde closer to the Brazilian realities observed by the students, not because of the absence of racial violence, as proposed so far for both contexts. The approximation happens, in reality, through the sharing between people from both countries of what Lélia Gonzalez (2021) called *cultural neurosis*. In other words, this would be the result of the repression of the black contribution, in the form of anti-blackness, that would emerge through this desire to consume this other black-African. In Cape Verde, for example, although popular, sorcery is seen in a negative light and attributed as something exclusive to immigrants from the African continent, Cape Verdeans from the most different social classes seek out this type of service.

The same works with sexual desire, which portrays immigrants as people with whom you must not have a long relationship, while at the same time creating racial stereotypes that they are sexually “hotter”. This duality, that desires and forbid black(er) bodies at the same time, is a long-term

characteristic of Portuguese colonialism – but also can be found in other colonial systems, as Fanon (1967) pointed out. At the end of the day, by overturning the Lusotropicalist myth of the former colony, which, despite being founded by the transatlantic slave trade in Africans, became a “post-racial” paradise, Anjos and Rocha (2022) offer us the opportunity to review and question the historiography on Portuguese colonialism on both sides of the Atlantic – and elsewhere.

### **Final remarks**

To consolidate the proposal of this chapter, I return to the idea presented by José Carlos dos Anjos (2008), also read in all the three editions of the course. By returning to the collectivist perspective and without hierarchy proposed by Afro-Brazilian religions, as well as the preservation – with modifications, of course – of the ritual practices carried out by Africans who were enslaved, the author draws a common parallel to the studies of Afro-Diasporic communities, which is to think about the contribution that they can provide to the (re)construction of the black-African world – in general.

What I propose, based on my experience in the discipline of race, African Diaspora and International Relations, is to take the opposite path. Instead of starting from the Diaspora to understand the African continent, I invited students to use the analytical-theoretical tools produced by African social scientists, on African contexts, to understand the realities of the black Diaspora in Brazil – and in the world. This proposal was made for three reasons. The first of these had, as its central purpose, to look at the contributions of African thinkers and at some African realities in the present, as opposed to the historical freeze that we usually make when we read the continent only through the understanding of the transatlantic slave trade towards the Americas. As Saidiya Hartman (2012) proposes, it is necessary to look at Africa and how Africans exist beyond the legacies of slavery.

Although, I aimed to produce (and introduce) gazes towards the Global South. I believe that by doing so, we will

find more answers to understanding our problems than if we continue seeking our answers and using analytical tools solely in Global North academia and experiences. Ultimately, the dialogue with African social scientists (contemporary or not) helped us to better understand different African contexts, as well as the place of our country and our present. Africa is not only part of our nation's past, but it is also the place where we need to take a contemporary comparative look to find the best analyses for our present. If the imperialist division of Africa by the European colonial powers at the end of the nineteenth century is the mark of the true birth story of International Relations (Henderson, 2013) and the first modern genocide took place in Namibia (Gewald, 2003); how could we leave the continent out when talking about the centrality of race and African diasporas to the construction of the disciplinary field? Starting from the behaviour change that this question proposes, we were able, through the readings of Amílcar Cabral, Alcinda Honwana, Eufémia Rocha and José Carlos dos Anjos – as well as Achille Mbembe – to understand how the introjection of colonialism is multiple, cultural, symbolic and physical, persisting to this day.

Also with them, through different forms, we have seen how self-determination, a term that dominates racial studies nowadays (Collins, 2000), appeared in different forms and with different proposals. Cultural self-determination, through Cabral's revolutionary thought, was the interpretive key for Mah Freitas (2023) to understand the political role of the production of Brazilian music that follows the aesthetic-political of Afrofuturism. It is the same self-determination, which does not appear with these terms in Honwana's work, led the anthropologist to indicate how youth is a geographical-racial product, since the current model of *being an adult* is the result of the same modernity that produced racial and gender hierarchies. In this way, if cultural practices can be used as a producer of violence, as Anjos and Rocha (2022) point out for the contemporary Cape Verdean case, it is also envisioned as the way to transform the legacy left by Portuguese, English and French colonialism in the Global South. From the use – in a critical way – of the bibliography in the final papers of

the course; as well as in the final monographs, as in the case of Freitas; and even in the options for translation, one of the possible forms of final work, I could see the assimilation of the debate and the effervescence of the gaze against the perspectives that misinformed future internationalists about Lusophone Africa.

The third – and last, but not least – reason why I chose to read these authors concerns my own formative trauma. During my training as an anthropologist at the University of Brasilia, I rarely had the opportunity to read black and/or African authors as a required bibliography. The usual justification is that either there was no production available, or it was not relevant. Even though Amílcar Cabral himself was one of the main influencers of Paulo Freire's liberating pedagogical proposal (Malott, 2022), his importance to the world continued to be silenced in classrooms.

As I progressed in my education, I discovered that this whole narrative was nothing more than a fabrication. Breaking with this profoundly harmful academic practice was necessary, once we need to break with the narcissistic pact of whiteness, “which implies the denial, the avoidance of the problem with a view to maintaining racial privileges” (Bento, 2002:7) which is still in force in universities. Thus, from the literature discussed in this article, we were able to consolidate how the anti-blackness and dehumanisation of African populations continues to be “the oil in the colonial power system that makes discrimination and violence against certain people not only possible, but also invisible and acceptable” (Rutazibwa, 2016:6). Thus, when the hands that excavate the ruins left by colonialism are those that descend from the people who were violated by it, other tools for dealing with its continuities emerge.

To identify with contexts that seem so distant, but whose realities are so close to us, is to enable us to share the tools that will break with the hierarchical structure that currently prevails amongst people who share the nefarious legacy of colonialism. Thus, by bringing these questions and these authors to the classroom in a Brazilian university, we were able to produce a

new look at the emergence and function of IRs in Brazil and in the world, exposing the open wounds left by the ancestors of the discipline and that continue to be poked by its current members. Thus, from the (re)reading of African authors and contexts, it was possible to think together with the students: what can we do differently from now on within our university?

By now, the most important thing that I take away from this experience is the confidence that by bringing debates like this into the classroom, we are building a path with professionals who are aware of the racist and colonial biases that are still directed at the African continent today. Only by dismantling the colonial discourses of the big house will we be able to understand the present and plan less hierarchical diplomatic futures between Brazil and African countries. And the classroom is the best place to start this endeavour.

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## Chapter 11

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## Chapter 12

# Helping American Students Find a Productive Positionality in the Study of Africa

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### Introduction

Coming of age during the crest of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, and as members of educational institutions in which DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion) were standard watchwords, it stands to reason that many of the current students at American universities would be eager to participate in an anticolonial study of Africa. To be sure, the contours of the US's – and American academe's – treatment of African Americans and Africans differs, but they arguably both stem from a white imperialist logic (Goyal, 2014) that has become a key target of opposition on American campuses. Moreover, the mainstreaming of antiracist pedagogy in higher education is often framed by both researchers and the institutions themselves, as a response to student demands (Ebbinghaus & Huang, 2023). It appears that American undergraduates don't want to be deemed 'colonisers' any more than they want to be labelled 'racists.' But it would be a mistake to assume that just because students seem to have anticolonial, antiracist intentions that they have found, or know how to find, the most productive place for themselves in efforts to reframe the study of Africa and Africans. Students who are aware of their privileged position vis-à-vis those that they study and who are committed to 'checking' that privilege might focus more on liberating



themselves from guilt than contributing to the empowerment of their subjects. Many American students hold misconceptions not only about Africa, but also about how to be an effective ally in promoting Africans' interests.

This chapter is the result of my experiences in teaching Political Science classes at two prestigious, highly selective American colleges. I found that most students who claimed to want to learn about Africa in a way that affirms the dignity of the continent's peoples had trouble, on their own, putting this goal into practice. More concerningly, they were often unaware that their efforts at resisting colonial, Western, and racist biases did more to improve their status amongst their likeminded peers than to raise the status of Africans within their estimations and broader discourses. Simply put, many students were (unwittingly) using the study of Africa to appear to be individually anticolonial rather than to further the global cause of anticolonialism. What many students seemed to want to obtain from their lessons wasn't knowledge or understanding of Africa, but reassurance that they would be seen as treating Africa the 'right' way.

As their professor, I am not blameless in the matter. Instead, I will analyse how my choice of educational texts served to either encourage or discourage the superficiality of student engagement with anticolonial learning. In particular, I will compare students' reactions to two texts about contemporary Africa: Jeffrey Herbst's 1990 *International Security* article, *War and the State in Africa*, and Tsitsi Dangarembga's 2018 fictional novel, *This Mournable Body*. Herbst and Dangarembga occupy quite different positions when it comes to their relationship to Africa (the former is an American and the latter is a Zimbabwean), the social scientific study of Africa (Herbst was an assistant professor at Princeton University when his piece was published, while Dangarembga was a filmmaker, playwright, and novelist), and international scales of social status and power (he is a white man; she is a black woman). Moreover, the voice that the two authors adopt in their work stands in stark contrast. He writes in the first-person style of an academic, endeavouring to convince readers of the soundness of his reasoning, while she

uses the second-person style of an omniscient narrator to *tell* the audience or her protagonist how they feel as they live the protagonist's story.

Indeed, I will argue that it is primarily the differences in the positionality of the authors and their texts that served to lead students away from, or towards, a more productive position within anticolonial education. Herbst's positionality encouraged my students to stop at self-satisfied, superficial 'allyship' with Africa; Dangarembga's pushed my students towards an anticolonial understanding of the lives of some Africans. Herbst's piece seemed to activate students' awareness of their privileged positionality vis-à-vis Africa and their concomitant desire to atone for this privilege. As a result, many emphasised misperceptions of African victimhood and retreated into the role of the self-appointed 'protector' of Africa from outside judgement. Dangarembga's positionality and the positionality that she imposes on the readers unsettled their expectations. My students could no longer shield 'Africa' from colonialist bias when Dangarembga's second-person narration made them into a black Zimbabwean woman living under a neocolonialist mindset. Consequently, many students began to appreciate that their place in the anticolonial study of Africa is to learn from Africans about Africa. They also began to grasp how they are also disempowered by global forces of neoliberal capitalism, sexism, and racism. Africa isn't just a prop that they can use to project an ideal image of themselves; it can be a tool in their educational journey towards understanding themselves and the world.

Before I proceed with a detailed discussion of my experience teaching Herbst's and Dangarembga's work, I will first review the concepts of anticolonial pedagogy and positionality and my understanding of them. While it lacks a settled definition, I define anticolonial as the opposition to the colonial impulse and imperative to centre economic, political, and social relations on the needs of certain places and populations: those in the so-called 'mother' countries or 'core' areas. This suggests that an anticolonial study of Africa cannot serve the needs of those in the core areas only, nor can

it serve to reaffirm the power of non-Africans over Africans. I also use an expansive conception of positionality in relating it to the learning experience, looking not only at where students stand in relation to the subjects of their study, but also where they stand in relation to the authors of the work that they use to study their subjects. Educators, I argue, must think critically about how students' reaction to the positionality of the authors of their educational texts shapes their learning experience.

### **Aspiring for Anticolonialism**

It may seem counterintuitive to speak of an anticolonial study of 'Africa,' as such a study seems to fail the most basic plea of anticolonial activists: to stop regarding the continent as if it were one undifferentiated, backwards 'country.' Indeed, ignorance of the African continent and Africans, especially in the Global North, is pervasive. Those who do take an interest in the continent nevertheless often share the same sentiment as those who don't – that it is a place of nearly universal failure (Williams, 2009). The image of African 'suffering' feeds much of the (limited) Western interest in the continent, but it also calls for a blindness to nuance, complexity – and success. In the common Western (mis)conception of Africa, it makes little sense to talk of countries or individuals but rather of general, freighted types: guerrillas, dictators, starving people, etc.

To counter this inaccurate conception of 'Africa,' we should ideally aspire to an anticolonial study of Namibia, or better, to an anticolonial study of Nama women in Namibia. But I will retain the use of 'Africa' in this chapter not to suggest that the continent and its peoples are monolithic, but as a reminder of what an anticolonial pedagogy is seeking to resist. An anticolonial approach to Africa isn't simply opposed to colonialism, but also opposed to the mythic, essentialised 'Africa.' I also contend that it is very difficult to proceed to an anticolonial study of a specific African country or group without first engaging in an anticolonial study of 'Africa,' as the need for specificity and nuance only becomes clear once the image of Africa as one poor, uncivilised 'country' is pierced.

As suggested, opposition lies at the heart of my conception of anticolonial pedagogy, regardless of whether Africa is the specific subject of study. There is considerable debate amongst scholars as to meanings and relative merits of the interconnected concepts of decolonisation, anticolonialism, and postcolonialism (Bhambra, 2014; Childs & Williams, 1997; Elam, 2017), so I will focus on their common core, the colonial. But I use the prefix 'anti' to signal a clear and active rejection of the colonial. I also prefer to describe my ideal pedagogy as anticolonial rather than decolonised, as the latter suggests a sort of intellectual cleansing of a contaminated source, whereas the former points to building something new from fresh ideas and sources.

Colonial education isn't confined to merely what was practiced by colonial authorities in the colony or mother country; it can be pursued in a postcolonial setting as well (Oyedemi, 2021). In one sense, a colonial education is born of Eurocentrism and Western chauvinism. It is the study of Africa that looks at the continent through "the lens defined by the institutions of colonial power," rather than focusing on "the indigenous origins of African societies and the patterns of thought that these embodied, and how these have in turn been influenced by the impact of colonial rule and incorporation into a global system ... of Northern dominance" (Clapham, 2020:138-139). It is part and parcel of modernisation theory, which regards Africa, especially now that it has been shorn of colonial rule, as simply 'behind' in a universal process of development. Such an approach ignores indigenous contributions to knowledge about Africa - and the world - because it expects that Western scholars, in their more 'advanced' universities and disciplines, are closer to capturing and understanding the 'truth.'

But most scholars conceptualise a colonial education as having a much more explicit political purpose, such that it doesn't simply reflect colonial domination as much as actively reinforce it. Quijano's (2007) theory of coloniality would categorise an educational approach as colonial if it is a manifestation of the constructions of race, Eurocentrism, and capitalism - in other words, if it entrenches and legitimises

the processes and ideologies that supported the political, economic, and social relations of colonialism. In particular, a colonial education privileges ways of seeing the world and forms of knowledge that *justify* unequal and exploitative relationships between the colonised and the coloniser. Subaltern epistemologies, and indeed any contributions from subaltern individuals, are unwelcome in colonial education, as they call into question the basis of the subaltern's position; the subaltern is supposed to be subaltern in part because he has little to contribute to the knowledge of the world. Instead, misconceptions of Africa's backwardness and helplessness reign supreme in the colonial imagination of the continent.

Whether or not one believes that the colonial study of Africa deliberately intends to further Western domination, what is clear is that this approach decentres the experiences and needs of indigenous Africans despite its purported intention to understand them. As with the economic, political, and social relationships between the colonisers and the colonised, the former are always at the core of colonial study and the latter are always at the periphery. A colonial study of Africa is about satisfying the "white appetite for stories of victimage" (Syed & Ali, 2011:352) more than it is about countering African victimhood; it is about giving Westerners a sense that they can make a difference in the world (Cornwall, 2020) more than understanding and implementing differences that would help Africans. An anticolonial study of Africa, then, refuses to foreground the needs of non-Africans. It is one in which "the continent holds a central place, and which defines the questions to be asked and the answers to be sought in terms that are clearly rooted in Africa itself" (Clapham, 2020:139). But it also isn't a study of a "place apart" that can play no role in "the generation of ideas and theoretical insights that have widespread and general relevance for the world" (Abrahamsen, 2017:129), as that simply reproduces the constructed peripherality of the continent.

## Productive Positionality

An educational approach that focuses on relocating Africa within the academe and the world will need to interrogate positionality in all aspects. As a concept, scholars tend to apply positionality at the level of the individual. In its most spare definition, individuals' positionality refers to their social location, or their place within a web of relationships in a social setting (Acevedo et al., 2015; Nelson, 2023). It chiefly derives from socially constructed identities like race, gender, and social class, which are themselves dependent on context and not wholly immutable (Cooks, 2003; Rodriguez & Navarro-Camacho, 2023).

The salience of positionality in an anticolonial pedagogic approach to Africa is multi-fold. Such an approach is fundamentally about resisting the inferior social positioning imposed by colonialism and its legacies on indigenous Africans by recentring them in the study of the continent. It is also about recognising how the positionings of Africa's interlocutors affect their epistemologies and viewpoints, the chief application of positionality theory (Takacs, 2003). To use accounts of Africa produced by non-indigenous Africans not only risks reinforcing the inferior standing of indigenous Africans in the world order, but it may also introduce 'facts' about Africa that give justification for their diminished social standing. At the very least, those who study Africa without reflecting on their positionality might end up asking the wrong questions and looking for answers in the wrong places, as one's social positioning trains one's eye primarily on what matters personally.

In addition, an anticolonial pedagogy will ask students and their teachers to reflect on their own positionality. This is the key application of positionality theory within the literature on pedagogy (Acevedo et al., 2018; Takacs, 2003). Much of the focus is on how incorporating awareness of the positionality of students and teachers can create a more inclusive classroom, where students are more engaged in their studies as they can become co-creators of their education (Acevedo et al., 2018; Nelson, 2023; Rodriguez & Navarro-Camancho, 2023).

The classroom experiences I detail in this chapter suggest that American students' awareness of their positionalities has the potential to be both productive and counterproductive to anticolonial pedagogic goals regarding the study of Africa. On the one hand, it can make students more receptive to indigenous knowledge about the continent as they recognise how their social positioning has functioned to make Africa a literal heart of darkness – a place that they aren't allowed to see. On the other, American students who are aware of their privileged positioning vis-à-vis Africans may use it to indulge in misconceptions about Africa's victimhood and Americans' role as their appointed 'saviours.' Indeed, I found that most students, when given the chance, were inclined to reframe the study of Africa so that it served to vault them into a special class of 'enlightened' Westerners who appreciated African suffering and refused to blame Africans for problems imposed upon them. Learning about Africa became an opportunity to criticise *other* Americans for their colonial viewpoints. This is in line with Acevedo et al.'s (2018) warning that excessive emphasis on the function of students' positionalities can foster a narcissistic approach to education (Montuori, 2006) that devolves into anti-intellectualism and uncritical naval gazing. The key to ensuring that focusing on positionality doesn't reinforce misconceptions of African victimhood, I argue, is not to constantly remind Western students that they are privileged, but instead to ask students to position African voices at the centre of their study of the continent.

This points to the important role of the professor in ushering students towards a productive positionality in the anticolonial study of Africa. Here I use positionality to refer to the place that American college students occupy in the processes of understanding Africa and disseminating information about it. The most productive place for such students is one that is deferential and receptive to the knowledge, needs, and experiences of indigenous Africans. Students who occupy this social location encourage other Americans to be similarly respectful and receptive; they do not use it to prove their superiority to other Westerners. I argue that the choice of

educational texts, especially as they relate to the positionality of their authors, can play an important part in guiding students to this location. Not all authorial positionalities will provoke productive student positionalities.

In what follows, I reflect on my experiences teaching Jeffrey Herbst's (1990) *War and the State in Africa* and Tsitsi Dangarembga's (2018) *This Mournable Body*. I used them both at two highly selective American colleges but in different Political Science courses within each college: Herbst's text in introductory comparative politics courses and Dangarembga's in intermediate-level courses on the Global South and women's empowerment. Each course enrolled approximately thirty students per semester, the overwhelming majority of whom were white and/or had been educated in American high schools. In total, I taught Herbst's text ten times to approximately 300 students and Dangarembga's eight times to approximately 250 students. For each text, I asked students to write a short, pre-class online discussion board post reflecting on their initial reactions. We then spent seventy-five minutes in class discussing the text together. I later assigned the students a formal essay on Dangarembga's novel, but for the purposes of comparison, I will only focus on students' reactions in the pre-class online discussion boards and in-class discussions.

### **Provoking a Performative Allyship: Herbst's "War and the State in Africa"**

Jeffrey Herbst's 1990 article in the top-ranked journal *International Security*, 'War and the State in Africa,' was the first expression of arguments that he further developed and refined in his award-winning book, *States and Power in Africa: Comparative Lessons in Authority and Control*, published a decade later. In the article, Herbst argues that the development and consolidation of African states "has been stunted by the very problems that war helped European countries to solve" (Herbst, 1990:119), chiefly centralised and efficient institutions of taxation and a unifying nationalism that could legitimise the state. He dismisses intrastate conflict as insufficient to foster

these developments, as they don't put national survival on the line in the way that international wars over borders do. African leaders, and the world at large, have honoured the artificially drawn system of states that resulted from the European scramble for the continent, and he argues that as a result, African states are weak but remarkably stable.

This chapter need not review the scholarly assessment of Herbst's article; what matters instead is how it fits into an anticolonial study of Africa. Herbst is no Joseph Conrad, so loathed by Chinua Achebe (2009) for bringing the European to Africa to explore the question of the basic humanity of Africans. Rather, he has brought European models of state development to Africa to assess their universality, using the assumption of African humanity to question whether European ideas explain the entire world. Therefore, the article questions the centrality of the European state in the scholarly study of state development. On the other hand, the article shades into what Hountondji (2002) calls the "extraversion" of Africa – the use of Africa to test theories generated elsewhere, to satisfy the need of outsiders to confirm their theories – and it ultimately concludes that Western political scientists were right in what they discerned from their study of Europe – that "war made the state" (Tilly, 1975:42). Indeed, while Herbst cites several other prominent Western scholars of Africa, he incorporates almost no voices from the continent itself. Instead, the article follows the colonial tendency of Westerners talking to other Westerners about what to make of, and what to do about 'Africa.'

Students have been quick to pick up on this colonial gloss of Herbst's work. But I found that most of them, by themselves, stopped short of moving towards a productive position within the anticolonial study of Africa. Instead, many of them took cues from Herbst's positionality to adopt a sort of performative allyship with Africans. Their goal became to prove that while they are positioned like Herbst vis-à-vis Africa, they were *not* like him in their approach to the continent. Yet their approach was revealed to be fundamentally incurious about learning about and from Africa and instead steeped in uncritical acceptance of the continent's misperceived 'troubles.'

Like most of my students, Herbst is a white American. When he published his article as a professor at Princeton University (Herbst, 1990:117), his social milieu was also defined by the rarefied walls of elite American educational institutions. Learning this seemed to activate many students' worry that they would fall victim to the same blindness and biases that Herbst might carry. Common reactions to Herbst's article included such comments as:

"We White people need to stop thinking we understand Africa."

"I've been on a safari in Kenya, but you don't see me trying to tell Africa what to do."

"Of course he thinks war will help Africa. Our [Americans'] history shows that we don't care about the suffering of people in the Third World, especially when it serves our interests."

"Just like how we like to forget about slavery in America, we like to forget about colonisation in the rest of the world."

Although students were using the words "we" and "I" to acknowledge that their positionality in the world was similar to the place occupied by Herbst, they were using the *awareness* of their positionality to suggest that they had transcended its pernicious effects. This is in line with what Cooks (2003) witnessed when she taught white students about whiteness; some of them claimed that while they were white, it was *other* white people who carried the white subjectivity. Herbst reminded my students of themselves, and the goal became to remind themselves, and others, that they were 'better,' and more 'enlightened' than Herbst. Suddenly, the misperceptions that needed to be remedied were not about Africa, but that *all* Americans had colonial mindsets.

This became very clear in students' posts in our online discussion board. They were overwhelmingly focussed on Herbst's "typical" (their words) American / white / Western / privileged disregard for Africans. But amid agreeing with

one another on Herbst's failings, students also seemed to be engaged in a game to prove their knowledge of the atrocities that have befallen Africa. The following were mentioned in students' responses: colonisation, ethnic cleansing, genocide, extreme poverty, famine, civil war, ethnic conflict, warlords, despotism, child soldiers, HIV/AIDS, blood diamonds, climate change, missionaries, the slave trade, the looting of indigenous art, and cultural appropriation. There was virtually no mention of positive outcomes on the continent.

These reactions play into colonial stereotypes. While I expected that students would want to question Herbst's starting assumption about the weakness of the 'African' state, I found that they not only accepted this blanket assessment, but that they quickly surpassed it with their characterisations of the 'troubled' continent. Herbst was right about Africa in general, they decided, but like many fellow Americans, he was insufficiently educated or wilfully blind about how *much* Africans were suffering. Knowing that Herbst was a white American, they fell back on what they knew about other white Americans, and what they wanted to avoid themselves - callous disregard for what is/was happening on the continent.

It makes sense that the students would think that what is transpiring in Africa transcends state weakness. The laundry list of atrocities gripping the continent points to how Westerners have been 'educated' about Africa. Campaigns like #Kony 2012, #BringBackOurGirls (Dewey, 2014), and Live Aid (Ray, 2025) have all rested on the premise that the best thing for a Westerner to do regarding Africa is to know and care about its problems (Davis, 2010; Faloyin, 2022; Goyal, 2014; Williams, 2009). The song *Do They Know It's Christmas?* (Geldof & Ure, 1984) written in response to the 1984 famine in Ethiopia and still in regular rotation in the US today, carries a more pointed implicit question for its listeners than solely what is in its title: Do *you* (Westerners) know Africa is, as the lyrics state, a "place of dread and fear"? (Faloyin, 2022:92). Students' reactions to Herbst's article seemed to suggest that they wanted it to be known that unlike other Americans, their answer to such a question would be 'yes.'

Students would invariably start with colonisation in their narrations of Africa's victimhood. This is a further sign that students were using Herbst's article to position themselves as the 'good' Westerners. Goyal (2014) has noted a distinct American fascination with 'war in Africa.' He suggests that there is comfort in studying Africans killing Africans because it is unambiguously a story of *African* atrocity; it opens possibilities for Americans to serve as sympathetic, third-party humanitarians. The colonisation of Africa, I contend, has similar dynamics, as it was a project of the *non-American* Western world. For American students to point to colonisation as the wellspring of African problems is to indict *other* Westerners. It serves as a way of reminding themselves, and the world, that Americans are different from others of a similar global positionality. Americans should feel guilty if they don't help Africans now, but they don't have to shoulder the burden of atoning for what their compatriots did to Africans in the past. (My students tended to view slavery as American mistreatment of black people in the US and not conceptualise it as American mistreatment of Africans in Africa.)

Indeed, it was difficult to tell if some students' incredulity that Herbst, an American, did not focus on the colonisation of Africa was rooted in their disbelief that he wasn't using European colonisation to acquit himself of charges of Western privilege. I suspect that was the case for far too many of my students, as their recourse to cry 'colonisation' seemed reflexive and perfunctory, showing little more than that they knew that it had happened and they knew it was bad. In their minds, recognising the evil of colonisation – meaning its form but not necessarily its content – seemed to be the unimpeachable, normatively 'right' position for someone like them to take. Yet that is the minimal requirement for anyone; a student of Africa, especially an anti-colonialist student of Africa, will insist on knowing more.

For example, they will want to know how colonisation not only impeded African state-building, but also furthered Western state-building. This is part of the anticolonial approach to Africa, which sees the continent as generative of knowledge

about the world outside its borders. Without my prompting, few students made the intellectual effort to connect African colonisation with European state-building. I expected them to counter Herbst's suggestion that border wars could be as productive of state-building in Africa as it had been in Europe by pointing out how fundamental European colonisation of distant lands had been to the development of European states and economies. Instead, students brought up colonisation because, like war, it brings death and destruction. This thin understanding of colonisation isn't something that seems to require further input, especially from those, like indigenous Africans, who are living with colonisation's legacies.

Thus, what I found particularly troubling about my students' reaction to the Herbst reading is that it forecloses learning more about Africa or learning from Africans. To prove that they were better than Herbst, despite sharing a similar positionality, students had to adopt a posture of *already* being sufficiently informed about Africa. To learn information about Africa, or about state development in general from Herbst, would make them no better than the average ignorant American. While Herbst was a scholar, he was first and foremost a white American man, and it was that positionality that students didn't want to match - or worse, to fall below. One student commented that white men have been "saying whatever they want about Africa forever and getting away with it," the implication being that if they were to engage with Herbst's academic articles, they would be enabling Herbst to "get away with it" as well. The student was certainly not wrong about the impunity that white men have enjoyed regarding their 'knowledge' about Africa, but an anticolonial study of the continent would not stop short at saying that white men are wrong about Africa. To do so still centres the enterprise on the biases, needs, and (lack of) knowledge of white men.

In fact, I found that I needed to bring up the prospect of seeing what *Africans* had to say about state weakness, its causes, and the potential relationship between war and state-building; it was not the natural inclination of students to want to counter Herbst's knowledge with indigenous African

knowledge. While initially puzzling, it fits with the idealised positionality that has been constructed for Americans vis-à-vis Africans. Americans shouldn't be 'colonisers' coming in and telling Africans what to do; they should be 'allies' who save Africans from *other* Westerners who are trying to come in and tell Africans what to do. Many students seemed to worry that seeking African responses to Herbst would be an insult to Africans' intelligence and dignity. The vast majority of Africans, my students concurred, would agree that war would be detrimental to the continent. After everything that Africans have suffered at the hands of the outside world, they should not have to also entertain a wrong and dangerous argument. This suggests that students had decided that the best positionality available to them was to be a sort of "white saviour" (Faloyin, 2022), shielding Africans from harmful ideas and stereotypes. But while it seems to meet the needs of Africans to protect them from having to answer misguided and harmful stereotypes, in the words of Chinua Achebe (2009:89), Africans "are not really served" by the outsider's "compassion"; instead, "they ask for one thing alone - to be seen for what they are: human beings." In the academe, to be seen as a human being means being both a 'worthy' subject of study *and* a worthy producer of knowledge. Students seemed to assume that the only knowledge that they could obtain from African sources was what they already knew: that Herbst was wrong about Africa. Again, the focus shifted back to the positionality of students in relation to Herbst, but in the process, students were also pushing Africans to an inferior position when it comes to the global production of knowledge.

When I first put Herbst's piece in my syllabus, I expected it to generate discussion about what Africa could teach the world about state-building and curiosity about how colonialism shaped state-society relations. Perhaps naively, I didn't expect that most students would use it to rehearse their social-justice bona fides and to turn away from engagement with indigenous African scholarship. However, students were clearly using the positionality of the author as a cue to focus on their positionality, which they then attempted to renegotiate. Having an author who was so close to their positionality, addressing

them in ways that they were familiar with, gave them that opportunity. But it also encouraged them to indulge in lazy misconceptions of 'Africa' and its need for outside 'help.' Encountering an author with such a different positionality – and expectations of the positionality of her audience – provided them with no such space.

### **Forcing Students out of their (Comfort) Zone: Dangarembga's *This Mournable Body***

I considered Tsitsi Dangarembga's 2018 novel *This Mournable Body* a core supplemental text in my classes on politics in the Global South and women's empowerment. This oxymoronic designation of 'core supplemental' reflects the fact that it was both central to my pedagogic goals and yet also meant to complement the traditional scholarly work I had students read – the scholarly work that the discipline would consider requisite for such courses. But I found the liminal status of the novel within the courses and the standard political science canon only enhances its ability to unsettle the type of reflexive, unreflective positionality that Herbst's piece inspired in my students.

*This Mournable Body* is Dangarembga's final novel in a decades-long trilogy concerning the fictional character Tambudzai (Tambu) Sigauke, the black female Zimbabwean protagonist of 1988's *Nervous Conditions* and 2006's *The Book of Not*. Critically acclaimed, the winner of the 2021 Pen Pinter Prize, and shortlisted for the 2020 Booker Prize (Graywolf, n.d.) the novel finds Tambu in Harare, struggling to fully achieve 'success,' which she understands as leaving her 'Africanness' – her 'village' – behind and becoming wealthy and Westernised. Dangarembga is unflinching in her representation of the "neoliberal hold on subjectivity" (Niemi, 2021:870), allowing Tambu to become an unlikable character, willing to betray anyone, but especially other Zimbabwean women, to advance her interests. After a series of devastating choices that Niemi (2021:871) describes as "cross[ing] all the possible moral lines and humiliat[ing] herself and others," Tambu finally awakens to the error of her ways, although Dangarembga leaves it

unclear whether such a realisation and subsequent redemption would have come had Tambu's schemes for wealth and prestige been successful. The novel is a complex tale of the colonisation of African minds but also what those colonised minds can do to other Africans. Neoliberalism is the ultimate antagonist, but it isn't a wholly imported or imposed ideology; it is also something that Africans have made their own.

At first, it seemed that my students did not have an instinctive, immediate reaction to *This Mournable Body* like their peers had to Herbst's article. There was no rush to criticism or praise when I solicited their initial reactions to the novel. However, with some probing, it became clear that most students first disliked the novel. The problem was that they feared that voicing their dislike would signal to their classmates, and me, that they had an incorrect (meaning negative) view of Africans and Africa. The thoughts and actions of the protagonist, Tambu, are frequently despicable - in the first pages of the novel alone, she finds enjoyment in participating in mob violence against an innocent hostel mate - but my students were reticent to admit that they were repulsed by her. One student ventured that disliking Tambu was simply a "gut reaction," the implication being that she had decided that her judgement of the character and the book needed conscious, careful deliberation. Here, other students agreed: disliking African characters was an "unthinking" stance, something that had been ingrained in the Western psyche. It was something that they were committed to transcending, and were transcending, by ignoring their moral and ethical judgements of the character.

But why couldn't a careful consideration of Tambu's actions also conclude that she was acting reprehensibly at points? Why was applying moral and ethical scrutiny to an African character an "unthinking" reaction? Could it also be a "gut reaction" to avoid a negative judgement of an African character? Were students transcending a colonialist bias towards Africans when they treated Africans as a 'test' of their transcendence? Were they learning anything from Africans about Africa, or about the world, in thinking so much about how

they didn't want to appear to be *unthinking* in their reception of the book?

When I pressed students with these questions, it became clear to all of us how much the students were letting their awareness of the positionality of Tambu and Dangarembga dictate their engagement with the novel. As they had done with Herbst, they were taking cues from the social location of the author and her protagonist to decide what they were to obtain from the text. And once again, what they wanted to gain from the text wasn't knowledge or understanding of Africa, but a reassurance that they would be seen as treating Africa the 'right' way. Dangarembga and Tambu are both black African women. That meant, several students (correctly) explained, that their social location, on multiple dimensions, was one of intersecting and compounded marginalisation. My students clearly knew that in terms of global prestige and power, these two women were below them. They also knew that the inferiority of black African women was unjust and needed to be remedied, and expressed that their job, as those unfairly positioned above them, was to remedy that injustice. As one student wrote in her discussion board post, she was sure that I had assigned the book so that students could recognise that black African women were producing "award-winning" literature. This student hoped that we would further discuss the novel's sophisticated literary techniques so that we would be better equipped to defend African writers against those who deem their work inferior.

Yet students knew that they were in political science courses, and so it felt "strange," as another student put it, that most were concentrating on the literary qualities of the novel in their initial discussion board posts. To focus on Dangarembga as purely a skilled *writer* seemed incongruous when thus far, our class had been about interrogating the *ideas* of our authors. In other words, students could feel themselves twisting to try to fulfil what they thought were their prescribed roles based on their privileged positionality. For the students who had read Herbst, it had been easy; their job as 'enlightened' or 'good' Americans was to call out the benighted and biased amongst their compatriots. The inverse of that role should have been to

champion indigenous African voices. But how could students praise Dangarembga when she painted such a damning portrait of contemporary Africa - and suggested that Africans were playing an active role in its woes? Should they applaud someone who was playing into stereotypes of immoral Africans by giving the world such a troubling figure of African womanhood in her protagonist? If they joined in Dangarembga's implied criticism of her protagonist, how could they convince others that their reprobation wasn't part of a racist, sexist, and colonial mindset?

As Goyal (2014) reminds us, the African protagonists that Americans are used to encountering are victims, like the former child soldiers in popular novels like Beah's *Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier* (Beah, 2008) and Eggers' *What Is the What* (Eggers, 2007). I agree with scholars like MacDonald (2008) who argue that African women are even more likely to figure into the imagination of "humanitarian" Americans solely as victims. While much of the insistence on only seeing African women as victims can be traced to racism and sexism, I contend that it can also result from a performative hyperawareness of African women's positionality. Most of the students in my political science classes at academically rigorous liberal arts colleges had at least a cursory understanding of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991). They knew that black African women, because of the intersection of their race, nationality, and gender, were triply marginalised. As a result, they were convinced that they should only see black African women, like the character of Tambu, as a victim. They needed a figure who occupied a position of unambiguous, unearned marginalisation: someone who was a 'Black African Woman' but no more than a 'Black African Woman.' The 'Black African Woman' was who they could point to in order to prove that the world was unjust. Reading her story and empathising with her was how they knew how to contribute to the fight against injustice. Dangarembga, however, did not give them that option.

This opened the door for us to discuss how their version of 'justice' only reified black African women's marginalisation, as it amounted to little more than convincing themselves and others that black African women were oppressed. The same

conceptualisation of 'justice' for Africans was at play with the students who read Herbst, but Dangarembga's positionality as a black African gave the lie to its emancipatory effects. The self-centeredness of the argument that the author didn't make Africans 'pitiable' enough became clear once it was an African author - one who presumably knew what Africans' interests were - who was resisting the construction of the continent and its peoples as helpless victims.

This was how I was able to get my students to truly engage with the issue of what Africans want for themselves and Africa, beyond the facile conclusion that they didn't want war or poverty. One very perceptive student remarked that she was only able to appreciate the novel once she realised that it wasn't written for her approval. We then discussed how that might mean more than simply that Dangarembga didn't write the novel to please Westerners; instead, she didn't write it *for* Western audiences at all. In fact, Dangarembga has been clear quite in her comments on the novel that it is meant to help Zimbabweans diagnose and imagine solutions to their nation's crises (Shringarpure, 2019). Tambu is both part of the problem of what Dangarembga has called the "crisis of personhood" (Shringarpure, 2019) and part of its solution. When students said that they didn't like the character that Dangarembga has given them, I asked them to consider if what they actually objected to was the positionality that Dangarembga has imposed on them - the outside observer who is helpless to do anything but bear witness to the stories of others.

Indeed, while popular culture has made some important strides in a different direction (Faloyin, 2022), Americans are used to stories of Africa that reinforce Americans' privileged positionality, treating them as potential rescuers of a troubled continent. Even those stories that attempt to illuminate the shared humanity of the 'African' and the 'Westerner' assume that this humanity inheres in the Westerner; the message is that the African is no different from the Westerner, not that the Westerner is no different from the African. But Dangarembga's choice of narrative style places the African at the centre and forces *Westerner* readers to adopt a subaltern positionality. She

writes the novel in the second person, addressing the reader and Tambu as 'you.' Thus, readers have effectively no say in what they think or do but are rather given a subjectivity by the author. This is the colonial encounter turned on its head. The African Other is no longer everything that the Westerner does not wish to be; instead, the African Other is the Self: the total of everything that the Westerner is. As the neoliberal ethos stresses self-actualisation, most Western readers would balk at being told who they are. It is especially jarring, however, for them to be told that they occupy the social positionality – the black African woman – that, my 'enlightened' students would tell you, is afforded very little chance at self-actualisation. Again, my students were forced to recognise that simply being aware of a marginalised positionality and lamenting its injustice does little to combat that marginalisation. My students spoke of wanting to put down the novel, of wanting to escape from its/their story. None of them would be content with simply being acknowledged and pitied for weathering the hardship that was Tambu's story in *This Mournable Body*. That, in turn, made them question whether they were truly serving Africans' interests by merely bearing witness to their suffering.

Nor does Dangarembga provide much respite for readers who try to disassociate from the novel's imposed subjectivity. She rather shows that it is precisely when Tambu disassociates from herself that she commits the most cruelty towards others. That is not to suggest that students who try to disassociate themselves from their colonialist compatriots are somehow on par with those who colonised Africa, but to argue that the position that they are prone to adopting isn't productive of an anticolonial relationship between Africa and the West. What is particularly valuable about Dangarembga's use of second-person narration is that it forces students to consider how their minds might have *also* been colonised by such global forces as neoliberal capitalism, sexism, racism, classism, and the ideology of 'development.' My students have recounted that over time, it became expeditious and less exhausting for them to stop mentally resisting identification with Tambu and just accept her 'you' as their 'I.' From that observation, we could then discuss

the specifics of how colonisation affects the colonised. Students could then see that the African mind and psyche illuminated the *human* mind and psyche. The reason that we teach American students about Africa shouldn't be so they can claim an 'enlightened' social position; it should be so that they can move towards enlightenment about the human condition.

### **Conclusion: Meeting Well-Meaning Students Where They Are**

There is an inherent risk in teaching American undergraduates about Africa as a white American woman. Even if I'm not the repellent 'white coloniser,' students could easily regard me as their competition for the most 'aware' amongst the 'good ones,' turning their time in my classroom into an effort to prove themselves rather than an opportunity to learn about Africa. While I will not claim to have the perfect solution to this possibility, I do contend that educators must be better prepared for the complex ways in which students' awareness and negotiations over their positionality vis-à-vis the subjects of their studies and authors of their educational texts affect our anticolonial pedagogic goals. In the BLM and #MeToo era, we shouldn't assume that students are blind to issues of identity, but we also shouldn't assume that students who are steeped in awareness of identity know how to find a productive position for themselves in the study of Africa. As my classroom experiences demonstrate, American students can get caught in the web of performing the 'proper' positionality, transforming what should be learning from and with Africans into an exercise in signalling virtue to other Americans.

The standard recommendation for any anticolonial or decolonial education project is to focus on the voices of the subaltern. That should only be the beginning; we can't expect that students, especially those who have been socialised in the Western classroom, know how to hear these voices. Some students, because of unexamined bias, will dismiss them as less authoritative or reliable. Of those who are aware of their privileged positionality vis-à-vis the texts and authors that

they read, more attention has been paid to those who view the contributions of subaltern voices as meritless ‘diversity,’ and how that can invite student backlash (Nelson, 2023). I argue that we should also consider students who know that subaltern voices have value and want to honour that value, but who nonetheless end up centring themselves and their Western peers in the process.

That means challenging students to move beyond simply being aware of their positionality and that of the people and authors whom they study, to recognising how that awareness can become an end in and of itself. It means asking students to reflect on whether focusing on their privilege allows them to accept lazy misconceptions of African ‘suffering.’ Texts like Dangarembga’s *This Mournable Body* are useful because they unsettle students’ expectations of their positionality in the anticolonial study of Africa. They do not provide easy ways for students to be white saviours or humanitarian allies. They do this by providing unapologetically nuanced images of Africans. They don’t seek to convince the readers – who can then feel good about themselves for ‘accepting’ Africans’ arguments – but rather expect the reader to be already convinced. Or even better, they don’t address the Western reader at all, but are self-consciously targeted to other Africans.

Scholarly texts by Western academics like Herbst can be used, but as educators, we can’t allow students to treat them as mere props in their effort to prove their ‘anticolonial’ bona fides. If students are going to use their reception of an article to prove that they are anticolonial, then we must ask them to prove it by pointing out what new information they learned about the needs and interests of Africans from their criticism. If we can’t help them to move in that direction, then we owe it to them, and to Africa, to rethink our approach.

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## Chapter 13

# *Ubuntu: A Humanising Approach to Community Development Pedagogy in South Africa*

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### **Introduction**

Community development is an academic discipline and a profession experiencing rapid demand globally and in Africa. Community development is the work of various community stakeholders including community development workers, researchers, government entities, civic organisations, and community members to create positive and beneficial social change (Littrell & Littrell, 2006). Typically, community development is accepted as a means of developing infrastructure, local economic projects, and democracy. Community development can be understood as an attempt to build assets that will increase the capacity of citizens to improve their quality of life (Green & Haines, 2008). Furthermore, community development includes a set of practices and methods that focus on enhancing people's abilities and community assets as agents of the community members' own development (Gilchrist & Taylor, 2016). Since community development includes a set of

practices and methods that focus on enhancing people's abilities and community assets as agents of one's own community development, it is important to teach this discipline in a manner that is relevant to the people of the community. Therefore, this chapter proposes the inclusion of *Ubuntu* philosophy in teaching community development in Africa.

Various universities in South Africa offer community development modules as part of other degree programmes such as Communication Science, Public Administration, Leadership, Social Development and Development Studies. The University of the Free State is the first South African university to offer a fully-fledged four-year-professional community development degree with its first enrolment in 2018. It was later followed by the University of the Western Cape, with its first intake starting in 2021. Other universities offering a three-year programme in community development include the University of Johannesburg, the University of KwaZulu-Natal and the University of South Africa. Issues of focus across all community development modules and programmes include poverty, inequality, unemployment, homelessness, skills development, gender-based violence, inequality, food insecurity, and social cohesion, changes in social capital, civic investment, community safety, and overall well-being of all members of communities (Maistry, 2012).

The community development curriculum is predominantly centred on Western epistemologies, such as: The sustainable livelihoods approach (SLA), asset-based community development (ABCD), the dialogic approach, community-driven or -led development approach, the Social Transformation System (STS), the needs-based approach, the problem-solving approach, the participatory approach, the power conflict approach, the Welfare approach, and Rights-based approach.

The aforementioned approaches seek to come up with community development solutions such as addressing conflicts that impede progress and hinder development; directing facilitators in planning interventions that improve livelihoods in communities; and facilitating sustainable community-

driven development. This chapter proposes the need for the inclusion of an African philosophy such as *Ubuntu*, which is a unique humanistic tradition of African systems originating from South Africa, that delves into embracing African knowledge, ideas, cultures, indigenous knowledge and livelihood strategies. This proposed framework focuses on how the principles of participatory and active learning in congruence with collectivism, participation, and collaboration can be instrumental mechanisms to foster student engagement in teaching community development, with an intent to maximise community development curriculum through the knowledge, ideas, cultures, and indigenous knowledge that students gained from their African communities.

*Ubuntu* is an African philosophy, which is an indigenous philosophy, a cultural practice, and a way of life that has been adopted and utilised across different spheres of being by Africans, and that is a relevant alternative to teaching community development in South Africa, and Africa as a whole (Naudé, 2019). *Ubuntu* as a pedagogic and practice approach to community development has the potential to preserve African indigenous knowledge systems, practices, and identities while enriching for meaningful community development and engagement (Ngubane & Makua, 2021). This chapter thus illuminates the anti-misconception pedagogical relevance of the indigenous (South) African philosophy, '*Ubuntu*', for community development.

*Ubuntu* addresses a collective approach by locating identity and meaning making. It deals with the nature of being and it is culturally grounded (Oviawe, 2016). In that regard, *Ubuntu* is a learned behaviour and can thus be taught to community development students (Xulu, 2010). We argue that *Ubuntu* has the potential to be used as a teaching approach to community development to cater not only to indigenous students but also to students coming from diverse cultural backgrounds. We further argue that *Ubuntu* has the potential to preserve indigenous knowledge systems, practices, and identities while preparing them for meaningful careers in community development (Ngubane & Makua, 2021). Thus, the integration of the *Ubuntu*

philosophy in teaching community development in Africa has prospects for improving the quality of teaching in the discipline of community development.

## **Methodology**

The methodology used in the study is twofold. The first part was a document analysis of community development course outlines in three purposefully selected South African universities offering community development modules. The chosen universities are the University of the Free State, the University of the Western Cape and the University of Johannesburg. The documents were analysed for the purposes of establishing the community development approaches taught at each university. The document analysis also included community development policy documents from South Africa's National Department of Social Development. The policy documents reviewed include the Comprehensive Norms and Standards for Community Development Practice with CDPs Tools (SACSSP, 2019), the Policy for Social Service practitioners (DSD, 2017) and the Draft Framework for Community Development (DSD, 2014). Upon establishing the community development approaches used in South Africa, we then employed a literature review on the different community development approaches and the *Ubuntu* philosophy as a pedagogical and practice approach for community development in Africa. The choice of a semi-systematic literature review was made because this study aims to detect themes as well as identify gaps within the literature on *Ubuntu* values and principles as well as those of community development. A semi-systematic literature review is "a type of review that is useful in identifying themes, theoretical perspectives or common issues within a specific research discipline or methodology or for identifying components of theoretical concept" (Snyder, 2019). Search engines such as Science Direct, EBSCOHost, Google Scholar, JSTOR, Sage Journals, Taylor & Francis, Scopus, and Web of Science were used to source the data sources. Each identified article or book was carefully read through by the researcher to determine its inclusion for analysis. The decision to include an article or a

book was primarily based on the judgement of the relevance to the theme of the study. This study analysed full articles published in journals such as journals in African Philosophy, *Ubuntu*, indigenous knowledge, and community development. On each database, the first ten most-read items were screened for relevance by reading the abstracts and both the older and the most recent articles reviewed. In total, 60 articles were reviewed based on their impact and relevance to the study. The semi-systematic review recognises that it is impossible to review every single article that could be relevant to the topic, hence inclusion and exclusion criteria must be developed. Thematic analysis was used in this study, which enabled us to identify, analyse, and report the emerging patterns in research deduced from the literature studied. Snyder (2019) stipulates that several methods can be used to analyse and synthesise findings from a systematic review; there are similar approaches used in qualitative research and those are thematic and content analysis.

## **Western Approaches to Community Development in South African Universities**

The selected community development approaches are summarised in the table below:

### **Sustainable livelihoods approach (SLA)**

The sustainable livelihoods approach (SLA) emerged in the late 1980s as a method to improve progress in reducing poverty. It focuses on people's livelihoods as a key aspect of development (Morse & McNamara, 2013). The SLA directs facilitators in planning interventions that improve livelihoods in communities. It refers to the way that a household or community sustains its existence, including the methods used to ensure the well-being of its members (Brocklesby & Fisher, 2003). The Brundtland Commission on Environment and Development initially presented the sustainable livelihoods framework (SLF) (UN, 1987). SLD was further developed during the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development

(UN, 1992), which promoted the goal of attaining sustainable livelihoods as a comprehensive approach to eliminating poverty (Natarajan et al., 2022). SLF is closely associated with Robert Chambers. The foundational publication behind SLF was a 1992 working paper that he co-authored with Gordan Conway titled *Sustainable Rural Livelihoods: Practical Concepts for the 21st Century*, published by the Institute of Development Studies (Chambers, 1995). Sustainable livelihoods encompass the value and importance of a life that affords individuals opportunities that grant people access to fundamental necessities, the potential for growth, a feeling of belonging and identity, and the ability to generate and share resources and services. The goal is to guarantee economic sustainability and social standing, while also tackling issues like unemployment, underemployment, discrimination, and exploitation (Westoby, 2008).

### **Asset-based community development (ABCD)**

Asset-based community development (ABCD) has its roots in the United States of America where it was conceived as an approach to achieve a better standard of living for underdeveloped communities in the early 1990s (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1996) posit that ABCD aims to facilitate sustainable community-driven development. ABCD focuses not only on mobilising a specific community but also on connecting small-scale assets to the broader environment (Blickem et al., 2018). ABCD opines that communities can lead the development process by identifying and utilising existing, yet often overlooked, resources, thus creating local economic opportunities. Instead of focusing on needs, ABCD emphasises building on the assets already present in the community and uniting individuals, associations, and institutions to work together (Nel, 2018). Significant effort is dedicated to identifying the assets of individuals, associations, and institutions before mobilising them to collaborate and build on their recognised assets. Assets identified in individuals are then matched with others who can benefit from or have an interest in those specific assets. The key is to utilise the community's existing resources. ABCD highlights the strengths and successes found in a community's collective history as the

starting point for change. Amongst the community's various assets, ABCD specifically acknowledges the importance of social relationships, formal and informal associations, and networks (Mathie & Cunningham, 2010). ABCD's community-driven approach aligns with the principles and practices of participatory development, emphasising active participation, empowerment, and the prevention of disempowerment. Ultimately, ABCD aims to foster sustainable, community-driven economic development (Forrester et al., 2020).

### **The dialogical approach**

The dialogic approach is a conversational method for community development that considers dialogue as a profound, mutually beneficial, and enriching exchange (Ross, 2020). Westoby (2014) posits that the dialogic approach plays a central role in the practice of community development as a process of constructing shared understanding, meaning, communication, and creative action. The dialogic approach operates from the premise that dialogues create opportunities for building relationships, learning, and space for transformation where individuals can pose strategic questions and address challenging social, economic, environmental, and political issues (Owen & Westoby, 2012). Matarrita-Cascante and Brennan (2012) posit that dialogues go beyond just listening and finding common ground; they involve practitioners seeking approval from the participating community members to analyse community issues while questioning and mutually interpreting them. Supporters argue that community dialogue differs from community debate in that it draws participants from diverse parts of the community to have face-to-face information exchange, share personal stories and experiences, candidly express perspectives, clarify viewpoints, and devise solutions to community concerns (Cornish, 2020).

### **Community-driven or -led development**

The approach of community-led development originates from the community programmes of the World Bank and is commonly utilised by international government agencies, including those

of the United Kingdom and New Zealand (Holmlund & Rao, 2021). In numerous countries, CLD operations serve as the sole available mechanism to effectively and promptly reach remote and vulnerable groups. Key aspects of CDD include (i) establishing a local committee to oversee the process or project; (ii) receiving external facilitation to aid decision-making within the CDD framework; and (iii) a community contribution in cash or labour (de Beer, 2023). Concentrating decision-making and management power at the local level within the community is suggested as a way to better align development interventions with community needs and preferences, and to address weaknesses in state service delivery by utilising social capital (Binswanger-Mkhize et al., 2010). CLD is commonly employed for providing basic services, constructing and maintaining local public goods and infrastructure, managing common property resources, and planning and overseeing community budgets.

### **Social transformation systems approach**

The Social Transformation System (STS) provides a method for reflecting together as a group in a safe environment that embraces complexity. It advocates for systemic transformation through collaborative efforts, agreement on the importance of specific interventions, and alignment of strengths and resources to achieve common goals (Rabie, 2013). STS allows for a collaborative, quick evaluation of the current situation, as well as the development and implementation of action plans. This approach has been utilised to create customised models for achieving different transformational goals in diverse contexts, including rural communities (Feola, 2015). The model and method involve an optimistic process of envisioning the desired outcome. It focuses not only on the intervention itself but also on the anticipated results of the investment. It requires interventions to be evaluated based on their outcomes and acknowledges the possibility that they may not always be the most suitable. This entails organising a workshop with a diverse group of stakeholders who have a shared interest in transforming the system. The participants collectively envision the desired outcome, reflect individually on how they

can contribute to achieving it. Following this, they establish clear and relevant collaborative partnerships, conduct a rapid assessment based on the knowledge available, and create action plans to move the entire system towards sustainable resilience (Zautra et al., 2008).

### **The needs-based approach**

The needs-based approach centres on addressing the needs, shortcomings, and challenges within a community. It involves recognising the requirements within a struggling community and implementing external resources to address those requirements. Widely considered a deficit model, the needs-based approach is a traditional method that focuses on the needs, shortcomings, and challenges within a community (Nel, 2018). This approach entails conducting a thorough assessment of the overall needs of individual students and their families, identifying issues and priorities, and efficiently coordinating appropriate support using available resources.

### **The problem-solving approach**

The problem-solving approach focuses on various methods used to generate diverse solutions for the issues encountered by communities. Service agencies and practitioners typically engage with communities in response to existing problems, residents' needs, or demands for services. Hence, it is recognised that the social problem-solving model has received more attention and recognition than any other concept or theory in community development. The problem-solving model applies scientific methodology and thinking to community development, placing emphasis on the cause-and-effect relationships of social problems, rational inquiry, and task-oriented processes (Ramos & Stetson, 2022). Additionally, the problem-solving model offers clear and direct guidelines for examining and taking action in the community.

### **The participatory approach**

The participatory approach aims to educate and motivate people to take part in the development process. It is important for individuals to be involved at all stages, from the beginning to the assessment, in all development projects and programmes. This approach involves a method in which groups and communities, through inclusive discussions and agreement, decide on 1) their main development objectives and 2) the creation of solutions to address these pressing needs. The responsibility for implementing a solution rests with the participants.

### **The power conflict approach**

The power conflict approach focuses on fostering a harmonious community. It involves finding solutions to address conflicts that impede progress and hinder development. The power conflict theory aids in comprehending the origins and reasons for community conflicts, as well as in devising tactics to confront and resolve them. A power conflict approach involves decision-makers determining how community issues will be tackled.

### **The welfare approach**

The welfare approach focuses on empowering working communities to enhance their well-being, happiness, and ultimately their prosperity. This approach prioritises addressing the basic needs of individuals such as food, clothing, shelter, and medical care. The underlying principle of this approach is to provide support and services for economically disadvantaged individuals. The central concept revolves around assisting individuals who are vulnerable, marginalised, lacking in knowledge, or experiencing illness (Herselman et al., 2023).

### **Rights based approach**

The rights-based approach (RBA) places emphasis on ensuring that individuals' human rights are upheld by both themselves and their leaders. This approach addresses human rights violations that have confined people to suffering and poverty

(Broberg & Sano, 2018). RBA is closely associated with human rights advocacy and constitutionalism. Implementing a human rights-based approach entails the prohibition, prevention, and elimination of all forms of discrimination in the fulfilment of rights. It also involves prioritising individuals in the most marginalised or vulnerable situations who encounter the greatest obstacles in realising their rights. Participatory inclusion, non-discriminatory pursuits of equality, and answerability (Broberg & Sano, 2018).

### **Ubuntu: An African indigenous philosophy**

*Ubuntu* is a South African indigenous philosophy that works and is situated within African epistemology. *Ubuntu* contributes to African epistemology “as a philosophy of becoming human” (Swanson, 2007). *Ubuntu* derives from a short Xhosa proverb in South Africa: “*umntu ngumntu ngabantu*”, which translates into “a person is a person through their relationship with others”. Thus, this philosophy links individuals to a collective society, brotherhood, and sisterhood that promotes humanism and the humanisation of all sectors of society (Swanson, 2007).

*Ubuntu*’s philosophy is two-dimensional: “it portrays the art of being human as well as the indigenous patterns of thought and the achievement of humanness” (Ngubane & Makua, 2021). From the perspective of *Ubuntu*, as an art being human, means one cannot be human until they have *Ubuntu*, which means one needs to understand another human being. African philosophers believe that communal and traditional lifestyles are the most significant elements of *Ubuntu* because these lifestyles are where every person becomes their neighbours’ keeper. Therefore, humanity is found where humans belong together (Gichure, 2015). On the other hand, *Ubuntu* as an indigenous pattern of thought and the achievement of humanness comes from seeing *Ubuntu* as a basic value, which is something that is found significant in the world and human relationships, and that guides people’s reasons for acting in a certain way. So *Ubuntu* as a basic value is seen as “an excellence of character, such as kindness, courage, honesty, wisdom, patience, generosity, sensitivity” (Allais, 2022). *Ubuntu* is an African view

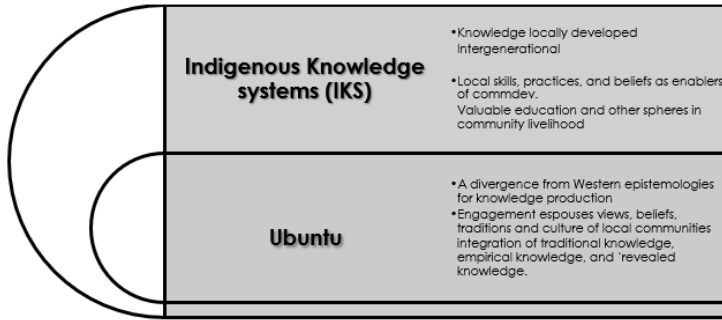
of life which encourages sharing and treating people selflessly (Mabovula, 2011).

### ***Ubuntu*'s philosophy in preserving African indigenous knowledge systems**

Africa is a continent that has a rich culture and repository of knowledge that can make a significant contribution to the sustainable development of our communities and society (Masenya, 2024). The indigenous African ethnicity that is expressed through *Ubuntu* is an example of decolonising Western knowledge, which has become a norm of all pieces of knowledge because the university curriculum is still dominated by forms of Western knowledge (Naudé, 2019).

*Ubuntu* philosophy has been an important and great education tool that has been utilised by African indigenous communities to “educate, guide, and maintain” human interactions. This philosophy is an indigenous African way to generate knowledge and information and should hold value just like Western knowledge because it approves views, beliefs, traditions, and the African way of life (Bhuda & Marumo, 2022). Thus, *Ubuntu* philosophy recreates relevant knowledge to Africa and African universities that African students can relate to.

African indigenous knowledge systems can make local voices heard and infusing effective approaches, such as *Ubuntu* philosophy as a guide to indigenous knowledge studies, will reinstate the honour of African indigenous knowledge and indigenous people which have been overlooked, misrepresented by Western research and worldviews for a long time (Divala, 2016). The misrepresentation has resulted in the misunderstanding of the Africans' struggles, especially their experiences, which should be values that African parents pass on to their children who lived in different contexts from which their parents were raised. Thus, indigenous knowledge is important in preserving, revitalising, and transmitting *Ubuntu* values to the younger generation (Tusasiirwe et al., 2021).



**Figure 13.1:** *Ubuntu* and the preservation of Indigenous knowledge systems

Figure 13.1 illustrates the interconnectedness between the *Ubuntu* philosophy and indigenous knowledge systems, highlighting their shared values and principles. Indigenous knowledge systems are depicted as interconnected nodes that emphasise diverse indigenous cultures and knowledge that are foundational to community reciprocity, interdependence and respect. *Ubuntu* is depicted as a breakaway from Western epistemological standpoints to integrate local beliefs, traditions and knowledge.

*Ubuntu* builds a sense of unity amongst indigenous people of different tribes; and is a result of the unity that comes from their shared social, cultural, and physical togetherness, in a society that is racially and socio-economically divided. Indigenous knowledge not only reveals how indigenous people live, but also what they know about their physical environment and how these two (social and physical) interact for the benefit of both. Thus, indigenous knowledge is a result of long-term residence in a particular place, and it is gained from a certain group of people, who resided in a particular community for centuries and developed an in-depth understanding of their particular place (Gade, 2012).

## ***Ubuntu* as an indigenous knowledge system to facilitate community development**

Africa has indigenous knowledge systems such as communalism and traditional initiation school care that can contribute to the healing and reconstruction of African communities (Bhuda & Marumo, 2022). *Ubuntu* is an indigenous knowledge that produces a moral community, which enables any member of the human species the right to express their concerns about how their fellows must live and act. The moral community includes people sharing their concerns about the present and future of a particular community, looking at its resources, and redressing ills, inspirations, blueprints, models, and encouragements (Sigauke, 2016). To that effect, Nkosi and Daniels (2007) posit that *Ubuntu* is a fundamental strength of families and communities and thus continues to play a vital role in African communities. *Ubuntu* and its collective undertone are largely influential to the resilience of the communities and the members therein (Theron & Phasha, 2015).

Van Breda (2019) posits that *Ubuntu* can be understood on two distinct levels. The first is at the personal or individual level. These are the qualities that make up the moral being of an individual. Actions connected with the personal or individual level of *Ubuntu* generosity, sympathy, empathy, selflessness, forgiveness, and the overall state of being considerate of the needs and interests of others. For some, *Ubuntu*, or lack of it is the foundation of what is good or bad not only for the individual but for all those around the individual (Gade, 2012). The second level is the level of connectedness with one's surroundings including people, the community, and the interests of others. It is thus a worldview of one's positive interaction with not just oneself but with fellow human beings and the wider environment (van Breda (2019). Nyaumwe and Mkabela (2007) describes the concept of '*Ubuntuism*' as the moral traditional philosophy of African societies.

*Ubuntu* is closely connected to social service professions including social work and community development. In social work, for example, Osei-Hwedie (2007) identifies *Ubuntu* as

a crucial aspect of decolonial thought, Africanisation, and indigenisation. For some scholars, *Ubuntu* is closely associated with the concept of the interactions of persons with their environments. This addresses people's connections with their ecologies. Person-environment (P-E) fit theory is a theory focused on the interface between the physiognomies of the individual and the environment. In P-E, The individual has an impact on their environment, but the environment has an impact on the individual (Gander et al., 2020).

Van Breda (2018) emphasises the centrality of the collective in community development as he argues that the resilience of communities is not centered on individuals, but on 'social connections as the crucible of personhood' (White, 2013). The profession of community development encompasses broad principles that include participation, representation, the use of trusted methods, community decision-making and enforcement, dialogue as well as holistic, systematic approaches to working with people accompanied by the creation and recreation of the communities that community members aspire to live in (Littrell & Littrell, 2006). The latter principles have the potential to be of greater impact in their execution within the *Ubuntu* philosophy as an approach to community development pedagogy.

### **Utilising *Ubuntu*'s philosophy to enhance community action, participation, and capability for community development purposes**

*Ubuntu* has been recognised in community development as one of the key themes in the drive towards the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development 2020–2030 (Nworu, 2023). *Ubuntu* is thus recognised as a fundamental philosophy for community development by the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW), the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW), and the International Council on Social Welfare (ICSW) as a cornerstone for community development. *Ubuntu* is thus foundational to the fulfilment of community development outcomes between the periods of 2020 and 2030. Venter (2004) posits that in Africa's educational

and development debate, “*Ubuntu*” and “communalism” are of particular importance. The community is always the first in African culture. An individual is a product of and belongs to the community, where it will always belong (Mbigi & Maree, 2019). All aspects of “*Ubuntu*” as a philosophy of life include interdependence, coherence, sensitivity to others, and caring for one another.



**Figure 13.2:** *Ubuntu*’s philosophy to enhance community action, participation, and capability for community development purposes

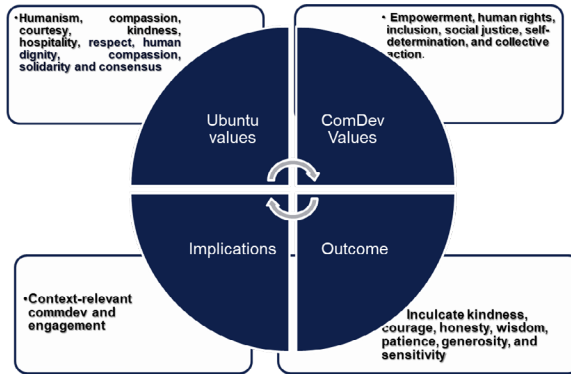
Over and above *Ubuntu* being a philosophical approach, it can also be seen as a foundation from which to collectively act, participate, and increase the capabilities and overall well-being of community members. This is because of *Ubuntu*’s allegiance to human relationships, social justice, and ethics-guiding relations between the community’s different stakeholders in community development processes (Carelse et al., 2019). Mbaya (2010) points out that in the South African context, *Ubuntu* is about a network of human relationships in which African people are engaged. As people rely on each other in everyday life, these relations are characterised by a spirit of interdependence and mutual trust (Vogt & Laher, 2009). Ogude (2019) argues for *Ubuntu* as a key instrument in the reconstruction of communities. The foundations of this thinking stem from the work of South Africa’s Archbishop Desmond Tutu in his work in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) – a process in South Africa’s democratic transition to initiate

nation-building through a process of healing from the history of apartheid (Mojola, 2019). Mbigi and Maree (2019) hold the view that though there is a multiplicity of studies on *Ubuntu* as a philosophy, there is a scarcity of studies on *Ubuntu* as a fitting philosophy for community development instruction. While community development and *Ubuntu* share the same values and principles of participation, collective action, consultative decision-making processes, and shared ownership of development imperatives, there persists a need to explore ways in which community development principles and values can be applied in community development initiatives, pedagogy, and practice.

### **Towards the inclusion of *Ubuntu* as a Humanising pedagogy to Community Development**

The findings from the literature highlight the need to integrate *Ubuntu* values in community development; *Ubuntu* as a tool for the preservation of African indigenous knowledge systems in Community Development; and the facilitation of community development through *Ubuntu*. Community development can be used to promote *Ubuntu* amongst community development students as they prepare for careers in community development. *Ubuntu*'s values of humanism and humanisation are closely tied to the principles and values of community development including empowerment, human rights, inclusion, social justice, self-determination, and collective action, as indicated in Kenny and Connors (2017). *Ubuntu* philosophy can foster active learning, collectivism, participation, and collaboration in student engagement. An *Ubuntu*-based pedagogical framework for humanising community development teaching would also foster kindness, courage, honesty, wisdom, patience, generosity, and sensitivity when dealing with community development issues as is enshrined in the values of *Ubuntu*. Mabovula (2011:39) mentions the "communal cultural values of tolerance, humanity, and respect as some of the common elements of cultural treasures of *Ubuntu* in African communities". The personal traits of caring, humbleness, thoughtfulness, being considerate, understanding, wisdom, generosity, hospitality,

social maturity, social sensitivity, and virtuousness are attributes that demonstrate *Ubuntu* in community development.



**Figure 13.3:** *Ubuntu* values and complementarity community development values

Figure 13.3 depicts the interconnectedness between *Ubuntu* and community development values. The emphasis is on their complementary nature. The figure highlights the value of *Ubuntu* and community development values to devise context-relevant community engagement and development in the South African context.

### **Ubuntu and preservation of African indigenous knowledge systems in Community Development**

Indigenous knowledge systems describe the inceptual knowledge and practices that indigenous communities develop over generations and pass on from generation to generation. These include knowledge, skills, practices, and beliefs that enable a community to achieve stable income in its environment (Kaya & Seleti, 2013). The promotion of indigenous knowledge in education and other spheres of community livelihood and development is a recent undertaking by institutions of higher learning in South Africa. Since its introduction in Africa and other non-Western societies, the Western worldview of

knowledge has failed to understand the holistic nature and approach of the non-Western way of knowledge and knowledge production (Lander, 2000). Indigenous knowledge is the unique knowledge confined to a particular culture or society. It is also known as local knowledge, folk knowledge, people's knowledge, traditional wisdom, or traditional science (Senanayake, 2006). Sodi and Mkabela (2009) argue that indigenous knowledge systems, when applied to community development, must espouse making local voices heard by paying attention to the views, beliefs, traditions, and way of life of local communities. Through the introduction of *Ubuntu* as an indigenous knowledge system, there is fertile ground for the integration of traditional knowledge, empirical knowledge, and 'revealed' knowledge.

### **Facilitation of community development through *Ubuntu***

Community development studies to use *Ubuntu* philosophy facilitate community development by allowing community members to express their concerns about how they must live and act. To achieve this, the instruction of community development should allow students and communities to share their concerns about the present and future of the communities that they study and work in, respectively. Allowing students and communities to look at their community resources, and redress ills, inspirations, blueprints, models, and encouragements as key components of the integration of *Ubuntu* in community development instruction. Allowing the centrality of the collective in community development encompasses principles like participation, representation, community decision-making, and enforcement and dialogue.

### **Conclusion**

The study contributes to community development literature by situating and contextualising the African *Ubuntu* philosophy as a pedagogical approach to teaching community development in Africa. The literature study examined *Ubuntu* philosophy as an approach to teaching community development in Africa. This

chapter proposes an *Ubuntu*-based pedagogical framework for humanising community development teaching. This proposed framework focuses on how the principles of participatory and active learning in congruence with collectivism, participation, and collaboration can be instrumental mechanisms to foster student engagement in teaching community development, with an intent to maximise community development curriculum through the knowledge, ideas, cultures, and indigenous knowledge that students gained from their communities.

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## Chapter 14

# Diverse Voices, Empowered Minds: The Transformative Power of African Teachers in Global Classrooms

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### Introduction

English language education fosters cross-cultural communication and understanding in an increasingly interconnected world (Fang, 2016). As the global demand for English language teachers rises, educational institutions in China are diversifying their faculty, recruiting individuals from various cultural backgrounds to enrich students' learning experiences (Johnson & Wang, 2020b). This trend has led to the inclusion of African teachers in English-medium instruction (EMI) contexts, where they bring unique perspectives and expertise to the classroom.

The concept of an African teacher in Chinese EMI contexts refers to an educator from an African country who is employed to teach subjects or courses conducted in English within Chinese educational institutions (Mkabela & Wadesango, 2018a). Depending on their expertise and qualifications, these teachers are typically hired to teach a range of subjects, including English language and literature, as well as other academic disciplines such as Science, Engineering, Business, and Humanities.

These educators play a crucial role in supporting the internationalisation of Chinese higher education and fostering global competencies amongst students. They contribute to



Chinese students' academic success and cultural enrichment by providing high-quality instruction, mentorship, and guidance. Moreover, African teachers in Chinese EMI contexts serve as cultural ambassadors, facilitating intercultural exchange and promoting mutual understanding between Africa and China (Smith & Silva, 2011).

African teachers in EMI contexts typically possess a strong command of English, often acquiring their language proficiency through education in English-speaking countries or rigorous language training (Nkomo & Chachage, 2017). Additionally, they bring diverse cultural perspectives to the classroom, enriching the educational experience for Chinese students and challenging preconceived notions (Dube, 2019). Their expertise spans various academic disciplines (Moyo, 2016).

Despite their qualifications and expertise, African teachers encounter numerous challenges when transitioning to teaching in China. Culture shock is a common experience as they adapt to a new language, customs, and social norms (Chinwe & Nwachukwu, 2018). Teaching in an EMI context presents further challenges, including language barriers, differing educational philosophies, and classroom management issues (Li & Gao, 2019). African teachers may often feel isolated within the academic community and face heavy workloads and high expectations (Amoako, 2020). For instance, finding yourself in environments where cultural norms and practices differ significantly from what you are accustomed to can lead to feelings of isolation as you navigate unfamiliar social dynamics and expectations. Moreover, the hierarchical structures within academic institutions in China may differ from those in African countries, making it challenging for African teachers to integrate seamlessly into the academic community, leading to feelings of isolation and frustration.

The prevalence of one-sided narratives about Africa and Africans also exacerbates these challenges (Adichie, 2009). Often perpetuated by media and popular culture, these narratives shape perceptions and attitudes towards African teachers, leading to biases and misconceptions (Mkabela &

Wadesango, 2018b). Students may question their qualifications and competence, and cultural misunderstandings can arise in the classroom (Huang, 2017). Hence, African teachers may face biases and discrimination based on racial or cultural stereotypes.

In many cases, they may be subjected to microaggressions or be treated differently by colleagues and students, contributing to isolation and marginalisation within the academic community; being excluded from social gatherings and networks or overlooked when seeking leadership positions because of cultural differences or other misconceptions (Amoako, 2020). These teachers often have to prove their competency by working extra hard to show that they can teach effectively. Sadly, there have been cases where some African teachers are considered a threat rather than an asset, leading to sabotage and back-stabbing (Moyo, 2016), others being assigned heavier workloads, evening or night classes, or higher expectations than their colleagues, possibly attributable to assumptions about their capabilities based on race or nationality (Smith & Silva, 2011). Some African teachers may even be exoticised or burdened with representing an entire continent, contributing to feelings of isolation and marginalisation (Mutongi, 2017a), as others struggle to navigate the academic bureaucracy and administrative processes because of language barriers, which exacerbated feelings of isolation and frustration (Dube, 2019).

Addressing these issues requires challenging ingrained stereotypes, promoting cultural awareness, and fostering inclusivity in educational settings (Johnson & Okpala, 2016a). Education should empower students to critically engage with societal norms and systems of domination, promoting dialogue and reflection (Freire, 1965). The chapter addresses the urgent need to reevaluate pedagogical approaches in teaching content related to Africa without perpetuating misconceptions about the continent, its cultures, and its people. It examines the impact of racial homogeneity in China on biases against African teachers and suggests measures to address these challenges. By utilising their unique perspectives, African teachers contribute to cross-cultural understanding and social transformation in Chinese educational institutions, ultimately enriching the

academic experience for all stakeholders. The chapter begins by establishing the historical and cultural context of bias against African teachers, providing a foundation for understanding the root causes of these biases. The chapter then examines why the persisting societal prejudice and misconceptions of African teachers, focusing on the influence of China's racial homogeneity and how it shapes perceptions.

The discussion moves on to the common bias and attitudes towards racial diversity in educational settings, highlighting the specific microaggressions that African teachers face. This leads to examining the effects of bias on African teachers in classrooms and the impacts of bias on teacher-student relationships, showcasing how these prejudices devalue African teachers' competencies.

Finally, the chapter proposes measures to curb discrimination and bias against African teachers, offering practical solutions to address these issues. It concludes by discussing the transformative impact on students, emphasising how recognising and valuing the contributions of African teachers can enrich the educational experience and promote cross-cultural understanding.

### **Historical and Cultural Context of Bias against African Teachers in China**

To understand the prevalence of stereotypes, it is crucial to acknowledge the historical and cultural context that shapes perceptions in Chinese society. Li (2019) points out that China has historically been influenced by limited exposure to diverse cultural representations, leading to a reliance on external media sources for information about different racial and ethnic groups. With the rise of globalisation and the proliferation of international media, including television, film, and the Internet, Chinese audiences have gained access to a wide range of cultural content worldwide. Therefore, the reliance on unfounded sources may perpetuate stereotypes, as media representations often oversimplify complex identities.

Western media, in particular, plays a significant role in shaping perceptions of African individuals globally. Scholars like Chen (2017) highlight that media representations focus on sensationalised narratives, reinforcing stereotypes about language proficiency, cultural competence, and the teaching abilities of African individuals. Such portrayals may contribute to misconceptions amongst Chinese students regarding their African teachers (Hao, 2018).

Another prevalent misconception relates to language proficiency. Some Chinese students may assume that African teachers are not native English speakers, impacting their confidence in the teacher's ability to communicate in English effectively. This assumption is challenged by Wang and Zheng's (2020) examination of language proficiency amongst African teachers, which found that many possess native-like fluency. Similarly, misconceptions about cultural competence arise from media representations that often need to be more concise about the cultural backgrounds of African individuals. Therefore, students may erroneously believe that African teachers need a deeper understanding of Western culture. However, research by Liu et al. (2018a) showcases African educators' diverse cultural experiences and backgrounds, debunking the notion that they are culturally isolated. One key research finding is the rich cultural diversity amongst African educators. Contrary to stereotypes that portray them as culturally isolated, the study highlights African educators' varied backgrounds and experiences, encompassing different countries, languages, and traditions. This diversity enriches the educational environment and challenges monolithic perceptions of African identity (Liu et al., 2018a).

Furthermore, Liu et al.'s (2018b) research highlights the importance of recognising and celebrating the cultural diversity of African educators. By acknowledging their unique backgrounds and experiences, educational institutions can foster a more inclusive and supportive environment for these educators. This benefits the educators and enhances the overall learning experience for students, who benefit from exposure to diverse perspectives and cultural traditions. Hence, there is a

need to move beyond simplistic narratives and stereotypes when discussing African educators (Liu et al., 2018b).

### **Why the Persisting Societal Bias and Misconceptions of African Teachers?**

Despite the evolving global landscape, misconceptions about African individuals persist in various societies, including China. Sadly, the existing colonial structures and systems continue to influence contemporary society and remind us that despite the end of formal colonial rule, the underlying power dynamics and hierarchies established during the colonial era persist, shaping political, economic, and social relationships on a global scale (Andrews, 2021). Hence, the impact of colonial legacies perpetuating unequal power dynamics between former colonisers and colonised nations is a reality in many countries, including China. In addition, Andrews (2021) reminds us not to forget how colonialism contributed to creating social inequalities that endure today, contributing to ongoing racism, discrimination, and cultural marginalisation. Hence, there is a need for decolonisation efforts that challenge existing power structures, dismantle systems of oppression, and promote equity, justice, and self-determination for marginalised communities. Meanwhile, historical narratives, shaped by centuries of colonialism and the transatlantic slave trade, have had a lasting impact on the perceptions of African individuals. Historical injustices have also contributed to negative stereotypes, portraying African people as inferior or subservient (Jules, 2024; Adams & Bell, 2016). Unfortunately, these deeply ingrained historical biases lay the foundation for the misconceptions that persist in societies, including China, affecting the way that African individuals, including teachers, are perceived.

In discussing why bias persists in global communities, it is essential to see how people's emotions have been used to manipulate or silence them. Regarding politicking, the psychological aspects of using negative emotions (anger, fear, loudness) to marginalise certain societal groups are still

efficient. Ahmed (2004) examines how emotions are often used as tools of social control, with marginalised individuals and communities being pathologised or stigmatised for expressing emotions that deviate from societal norms. Exploring “affect alienation” refers to how individuals may be estranged from their emotions or experiences caused by social pressures or cultural expectations. We should remember that the cultural politics of emotion play a significant role in shaping identity, subjectivity, and belonging, with certain emotions being valorised or vilified depending on one’s social position (Ahmed, 2004). Thus, many African teachers may be marginalised for expressing emotions that deviate from societal norms.

Likewise, the role of media in shaping public perceptions and the influence of media extends across borders. Adorno’s fundamental critique of the culture industry argued that mass-produced cultural products, such as films, music, and advertisements, perpetuated capitalist ideology and reinforced existing power structures. Thus, mass culture’s standardised and formulaic nature stifled creativity and critical thinking, leading to a homogenisation of taste and a commodification of human experience (Adorno, 2001).

In the context of African individuals, media portrayals have been historically characterised by limited and exaggerated stereotypical roles. This includes exaggerated stereotypes or marginalisation, creating a distorted image that may influence Chinese students’ expectations and assumptions about African teachers (Emodi & Samason, 2018). Emodi and Samason (2018) further note that if media representations predominantly depict African individuals in limited roles or emphasise negative stereotypes, it can reinforce the belief that African teachers may lack the qualifications, language proficiency, or cultural competence expected of educators.

This influence can lead to biased expectations and assumptions about the capabilities of African teachers, contributing to the challenges that they face in educational settings. Moreover, Gilliam et al. (2016) found that overrepresenting negative images in media can create and

perpetuate implicit biases. Thus, this influence extends to educational settings, potentially leading to the manifestation of biases and misconceptions that African teachers must navigate. Understanding the characteristics of students in the EMI context in China is essential to shed light on the challenges that African teachers often face.

It is essential to note that Chinese students in EMI contexts often come from diverse backgrounds, environments, and age groups. Understanding their characteristics is crucial for educators to effectively engage with them in the classroom and tailor their teaching approaches to meet their needs. Chinese EMI students primarily come from mainland China, although international students from other countries may also study in EMI programmes. Mainland China's students may come from various provinces and regions with cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic characteristics (Li & Gao, 2019). The environment in which these students grow up can vary widely depending on factors such as urban or rural upbringing, socio-economic status, and access to educational resources. Urban students may have greater exposure to international influences and English-language media, while rural students may face more limited resources and opportunities (Wang & Zheng, 2020). Chinese EMI students encompass a wide range of age groups. Some students may pursue undergraduate or postgraduate degrees, often driven by high expectations from their families, teachers, and society. They may feel significant pressure to excel academically and succeed in their studies (Qiu & Fang, 2022). They are also known for their diligence and perseverance in their studies and are willing to put in the time and effort required to master complex academic concepts and achieve their goals (Li & Gao, 2019). Still, while Chinese EMI students are studying in English-medium programmes, their proficiency levels in English may vary. Some students may be highly proficient English speakers, while others may struggle with language barriers and require additional support to improve their language skills.

Understanding the nature of Chinese students in EMI settings and recognising and challenging the typical stereotypes

experienced by African teachers is crucial for fostering a more inclusive learning environment where students can appreciate the diversity and expertise that African teachers bring to the classroom.

### **The Influence of Racial Homogeneity on Perceptions of African Teachers**

The influence of racial homogeneity on perceptions of African teachers in Chinese society is a significant aspect that warrants exploration. This homogeneity, primarily characterised by the dominance of the Han ethnic group, contributes to limited exposure to racial diversity, potentially leading to misunderstandings and misconceptions. Understanding this influence is crucial for addressing African teachers' challenges in Chinese educational settings.

Notably, China's societal structure is marked by racial homogeneity, with the Han ethnic group comprising most of the population. This demographic homogeneity can result in limited exposure to people of diverse racial backgrounds, including African individuals. Li (2019) highlights how limited exposure to cultural diversity can lead to reliance on external sources for information about racial and ethnic groups, perpetuating stereotypes and misconceptions. Likewise, the lack of meaningful interactions with African individuals in a racially homogeneous society can contribute to misunderstandings. Without first-hand experience, some Chinese students may rely on limited and potentially biased sources of information about African teachers. Hence, Liu et al. (2018a) emphasise the impact of limited interactions on the development of stereotypes and note the importance of personal encounters in challenging and dispelling misconceptions. Furthermore, the lack of exposure to diverse racial and ethnic groups can lead to generalisations and reinforce existing stereotypes. Sue et al. (2007) emphasise that generalisations often arise from limited interactions and reliance on stereotypical portrayals. In the context of African teachers in China, these generalisations can contribute to

misconceptions about language proficiency, teaching abilities, and cultural competence.

### **Common Bias and Attitudes towards Racial Diversity in Educational Settings**

Meanwhile, EMI universities in China are becoming popular destinations for foreign English teachers, including African educators. The impact of societal attitudes towards racial diversity on educational environments remains a complex and influential aspect that significantly shapes the experiences of African teachers in China. These dynamics are crucial for addressing African educators' challenges in societies where racial diversity may not be adequately recognised or celebrated.

In societies where diversity is celebrated and promoted, students are more likely to embrace and value the contributions of educators from different racial backgrounds. Hong and Lan (2014) highlight the positive impact of multicultural education in fostering a sense of belonging amongst students and enhancing their appreciation for diversity. In such environments, African teachers may find a more inclusive atmosphere that recognises and celebrates their unique contributions (Yin & Li, 2019). However, African teachers in a homogeneous Chinese society often face stereotypes, misconceptions, discrimination, and bias. Understanding the impact of these challenges is crucial for addressing misconceptions and fostering cultural understanding.

Language barriers contribute to misunderstandings, particularly in societies like China, where there may be a need for more specific and nuanced terminology for discussing race and ethnicity. Chinese may need more vocabulary for sensitive discussions about racial identity. Li (2019) emphasises the challenges in cross-cultural communication when specific terms for discussing race are absent, making it difficult to engage in nuanced conversations. African teachers may encounter challenges in gaining recognition and respect in countries where racial diversity is not adequately recognised or celebrated. Societal attitudes that do not prioritise diversity can contribute

to biases and misconceptions. Burgess et al. (2017) suggest that negative societal attitudes may lead to the undervaluing of contributions made by African educators, creating barriers to their professional advancement and recognition

Negative societal attitudes towards racial diversity can manifest in discriminatory practices within educational environments. Pager and Shepherd (2008) demonstrate how implicit biases can result in unequal treatment. Consequently, African teachers may need help in accessing resources, opportunities for professional development, and fair evaluations, contributing to an environment that hinders their ability to establish themselves as valued academic community members. In addition, in some instances, African teachers may face explicit challenges to their qualifications or ability to teach effectively because of their racial background (Mkabela & Wadesango, 2018b). Likewise, students may harbour misconceptions about the proficiency of African teachers in English or doubt their competence in conveying Western cultural nuances (Johnson & Okpala, 2016a).

Unfortunately, this scepticism is unfounded, as Johnson's (2019) examination of African teachers' qualifications demonstrates the contrary. Johnson's research highlights that African teachers frequently possess the credentials and expertise required for effective teaching in these contexts. The findings shed light on the misconception that race correlates with qualifications or teaching competence. Through a rigorous analysis of the qualifications of African teachers, Johnson reveals that many educators in this demographic hold relevant degrees, certifications, and experience in English language teaching. Furthermore, they often demonstrate proficiency in English and possess pedagogical skills that align with international teaching standards. By debunking this scepticism, Johnson's research highlights the importance of recognising and valuing the qualifications and expertise of African teachers. It challenges implicit biases and stereotypes that may undermine the credibility and effectiveness of these educators in the eyes of students, colleagues, and administrators.

It is worth noting that discrimination and bias in the classroom can have a profound impact on the well-being and self-esteem of African teachers. These cumulative negative interactions may lead to frustration, isolation, and self-doubt, leading to emotional tolls and a challenging work environment, potentially compromising the teachers' passion and dedication to their profession (Smith & Silva, 2011). The emotional toll resulting from discriminatory experiences poses a vital challenge for African teachers in maintaining their passion for teaching. Feelings of frustration and isolation may lead to burnout and hinder their ability to provide effective and supportive learning environments for their students.

Meanwhile, in the absence of nuanced discussions about race, students may need more than oversimplified or stereotypical perceptions of African teachers. Language barriers limit the depth of communication, potentially leading to misunderstandings and reinforcing existing biases. Chen (2017) highlights the role of language in shaping perceptions, emphasising that the lack of vocabulary can contribute to reliance on stereotypes. When there is a need for open discussions about race and diversity, challenging preconceived notions that students hold becomes difficult. Hence, effective communication is critical in dispelling stereotypes and fostering understanding to emphasise the limitations of language barriers (Smith & Silva, 2011; Zhao & Zhang 2021; Hong & Lan, 2014). Examining these biases is essential to shed light on the experiences of African teachers and the challenges that they face in educational settings. Moreover, it highlights the need for cultural awareness and inclusivity in academic institutions to create supportive environments for all teachers. Finally, addressing these biases is crucial for promoting equity and diversity in the teaching profession and fostering positive teacher-student relationships.

### **Microaggressions in Education Settings**

Most importantly, microaggressions are a prevalent issue faced by African teachers in China. Microaggressions, a concept introduced by Pierce (1978), refer to subtle, often unintentional,

verbal or nonverbal slights, insults, or derogatory messages directed at marginalised groups. These seemingly innocuous actions can significantly impact the recipients, contributing to feelings of exclusion, invalidation, and psychological distress. In China's English-medium instruction settings, microaggressions against African educators can manifest in various ways. One typical example is the assumption of linguistic incompetence based on race. African educators, particularly non-native English speakers, may face scepticism or disbelief regarding their language proficiency solely because of their race (Amoako, 2020). Colleagues or students may express surprise or make comments implying that their English skills are inadequate despite their qualifications and experience.

Another manifestation of microaggressions is the exoticisation or fetishisation of African educators based on racial stereotypes. Colleagues or students may overly focus on aspects of their physical appearance, culture, or background, treating them as novelties rather than respected professionals. Smith and Silva (2011). This can create feelings of objectification and discomfort, as African educators are reduced to simplistic caricatures of their identities. Furthermore, microaggressions can occur through subtle exclusion or marginalisation within the academic network or social community. Despite their qualifications and contributions, African educators may sometimes be overlooked for opportunities such as committee memberships, research collaborations, or leadership roles (Moyo, 2016). These subtle forms of discrimination can undermine their sense of belonging and professional fulfilment, creating barriers to their advancement and success in the academic field.

Research by Sue et al. (2007) emphasises that these microaggressions can take various forms, including insensitive comments or questions based on racial stereotypes. For instance, African teachers may be subjected to remarks questioning their language proficiency, teaching abilities, or cultural competence, creating an uncomfortable and unwelcome classroom atmosphere (Li & Gao, 2019).

## **Effects of Bias on African Teachers in Classrooms**

The experiences of discrimination and bias faced by African teachers in Chinese classroom settings constitute a multifaceted challenge that demands thorough scrutiny (Rao, 2010). These subtle or overt encounters contribute to a complex web of factors that profoundly influence African educators' well-being and professional fulfilment. The psychological toll of experiencing discrimination and bias can significantly impact the mental and emotional health of African educators (Mkabela & Wadesango, 2018a). Constantly facing microaggressions, stereotypes, and prejudices can lead to feelings of stress, anxiety, and even depression. Moreover, the emotional labour required to navigate these challenges while maintaining professionalism can be exhausting and draining. Furthermore, the impact on job satisfaction and sense of belonging cannot be overstated (Mutongi, 2017b). Feeling marginalised or undervalued within the academic community can erode morale and diminish the motivation to excel in one's career. African educators may struggle to establish meaningful connections with colleagues and students, exacerbating feelings of isolation and alienation. In addition, discrimination and bias may hinder African educators' professional advancement and career prospects (Amoako, 2020; Bodomo, 2012). Opportunities for promotion, research collaboration, and professional development may be limited or overlooked because of systemic biases within academic institutions. This stagnation can impede personal growth and hinder the ability to reach one's full potential in education.

The intersectionality of race, nationality, and language proficiency adds layers of complexity to the experiences of African educators (Johnson & Okpala, 2016a). Non-native English speakers may face additional challenges in proving their language proficiency and overcoming linguistic biases. Moreover, African educators may also grapple with cultural differences and expectations, further complicating their integration into the academic community. The lack of institutional support and resources to address issues of discrimination and bias can exacerbate the challenges faced by

African educators (Li, 2019; Johnson & Wang, 2020a). Without proper mechanisms to address these issues, educators may feel powerless to advocate for themselves or effect meaningful change within their institutions.

## **Impacts of Bias on Teacher-Student Relationships**

The impacts of discrimination and bias on teacher-student interactions and relationships, particularly for African teachers in Chinese classroom settings, are profound and multifaceted. Moreover, these challenges pose significant barriers to establishing rapport, trust, and effective communication, essential to a conducive learning environment. Most importantly, teacher-student relationships are crucial in fostering positive learning outcomes. Discrimination and bias can impede the ability of African teachers to establish rapport and trust with their students (Bessong, 2019). Moreover, scepticism or resistance stemming from students' misconceptions may create a barrier that hinders the development of a positive and supportive teacher-student dynamic.

Also, some students may approach African teachers sceptically because of preconceived notions about language proficiency, cultural competence, or teaching abilities. For instance, students may be reluctant to accept guidance, question the teacher's qualifications, or refrain from forming a meaningful connection (Li & Gao, 2019), impacting the potential for open communication and collaboration within the classroom. Furthermore, the lack of trust and rapport resulting from discrimination and bias can directly impact student engagement. Students may be less willing to participate actively in classroom activities, contribute to discussions, or seek help when needed. Hence, Fredricks et al. (2004) highlight the importance of student engagement in the learning process, emphasising that a positive teacher-student relationship is a crucial determinant of students' motivation and willingness to invest in their education.

Understanding that compromised teacher-student interactions result in the potential inhibition of inclusivity and

collaboration within the learning environment. When students feel disconnected, or harbour scepticism towards their teachers, the classroom atmosphere may become less welcoming and supportive, thus inhibiting the creation of a collaborative space where diverse perspectives are valued, limiting students' language development and overall educational experience (Howard, 2018). For instance, offering cultural competence training for teachers and students, awareness campaigns to challenge stereotypes, and implementing inclusive pedagogical practices are essential. Doing so establishes better student-teacher relations, as stated by Howard (2006), highlighting the effectiveness of culturally responsive teaching in breaking down barriers and fostering positive teacher-student relationships.

### **Devaluing African Teachers' Competency**

The challenges in gaining trust, respect, and recognition as competent educators for African teachers in Chinese universities are multifaceted and deeply rooted in prevailing stereotypes and biases. Overcoming these hurdles necessitates continually demonstrating expertise, dedication, and effectiveness in the classroom and building solid relationships with students, colleagues, and administrators. The prevailing stereotypes and biases contribute to an environment where African educators may encounter doubts about their language proficiency, teaching abilities, and cultural competence. Wang and Zheng (2020) highlight the additional scrutiny and scepticism that African teachers may face compared to their white counterparts in Chinese universities. This increased scrutiny poses a unique challenge that requires intentional efforts to address misconceptions and prove competence.

Moreover, African teachers must consistently demonstrate their expertise and dedication to overcome preconceived notions. Studies indicate that African teachers may need to go above and beyond to showcase their qualifications and commitment to effective teaching (Johnson, 2019). This ongoing demonstration is essential for dispelling stereotypes and earning the trust and respect of students, colleagues, and administrators. Hence, building solid relationships with

students, colleagues, and administrators is crucial for African teachers to dispel misconceptions and gain recognition. Howard (2006) emphasises the significance of positive teacher–student relationships in challenging stereotypes.

In addition, seeking support from colleagues and engaging in professional development opportunities are vital components of overcoming challenges and gaining trust and recognition. Also, collaborative efforts within the academic community can help to challenge biases and stereotypes collectively. Sleeter and Milner (2011) further emphasise the importance of professional development addressing cultural competence and diversity to enable educators to navigate challenges effectively.

To supplement these individual efforts, implementing inclusive pedagogical practices within the classroom can also contribute to dispelling misconceptions. These may include implementing group projects where students work collaboratively with their peers, including African teachers, can foster mutual respect and understanding amongst students (Johnson & Wang, 2020b). Incorporating interactive learning activities, such as debates, role-plays, and case studies, can encourage active participation and engagement from students, regardless of their cultural background (Li & Gao, 2019). Organising cultural exchange activities, such as guest lectures, cultural festivals, or language exchange programmes, can allow students to learn from African teachers and gain a deeper appreciation for diverse cultural perspectives (Mkabela & Wadesango, 2018a). Encouraging open communication and feedback between students and teachers can create a supportive learning environment where students feel comfortable expressing their thoughts and concerns (Amoako, 2020).

Undoubtedly, incorporating diverse perspectives into the curriculum and creating a culturally responsive learning environment can positively impact students' perceptions of their teachers (Gay, 2010). Inclusivity in teaching practices can further support the efforts of African educators in gaining trust and recognition. We must recognise the importance of administrative support in addressing African teachers'

challenges. Capper et al. (2018) highlight the need to acknowledge African educators' unique contributions at the institutional level. Thus, encouraging diversity initiatives, recognising the value of diverse perspectives, and providing avenues for professional growth contribute to a more inclusive and supportive educational environment. In sum, gaining trust, respect, and recognition as competent educators for African teachers in Chinese universities requires a multifaceted approach. By addressing stereotypes, African teachers can navigate these challenges and contribute to a more inclusive and equitable educational environment.

### **Measures to Curb Discrimination and Bias on African Teachers**

Improving the conditions of African teachers in EMI contexts in China requires a multifaceted approach that encompasses not only educational initiatives but also political and public actions. These measures must include implementing and enforcing anti-discrimination policies within educational institutions and broader society, which is essential (Bodomo, 2012). These policies should explicitly prohibit discrimination based on race, nationality, or ethnicity and provide mechanisms for reporting and addressing incidents of prejudice or bias against African teachers. Equally important, providing cultural sensitivity training to students, faculty, and staff can help to raise awareness of diverse cultural perspectives and reduce implicit biases (Mkabela & Wadesango, 2018a). This training should include modules on intercultural communication, cultural competence, and strategies for promoting inclusivity in the classroom and workplace (Davis & Stevenson, 2006).

Promoting diversity and inclusivity has become a must for many workplaces in today's society. Hence, promoting diversity and inclusion initiatives within educational institutions and government agencies can create a more welcoming and supportive environment for African teachers (Johnson & Okpala, 2016b). This can include initiatives such as diversity hiring programmes, multicultural events and celebrations, and

establishing support networks for minority faculty and staff. Also, advocacy groups and organisations can play a crucial role in raising awareness of the challenges faced by African teachers in EMI contexts and advocating for policy changes to address these issues (Mutongi, 2017a). These groups can also provide a platform for African teachers to voice their concerns and share their experiences with policymakers and the public.

Government support is essential in addressing systemic issues affecting African teachers in EMI contexts (Li & Gao, 2019). This can include funding professional development programmes, research grants, and initiatives to promote international collaboration and exchange in education. Moreover, launching public awareness campaigns to challenge stereotypes and misconceptions about African teachers can help to shift public perceptions and attitudes (Johnson & Wang, 2020b). These campaigns can utilise various media platforms, including television, radio, social media, and community events, to reach a broad audience and promote positive representations of African educators.

Engaging with local communities and stakeholders is critical in fostering understanding and support for African teachers in EMI contexts (Amoako, 2020). This can involve organising community forums, town hall meetings, and other events to facilitate dialogue and collaboration between African teachers, students, parents, and community leaders. By implementing these political and public actions, China can create a more inclusive and equitable educational environment supporting African teachers' success and well-being in EMI contexts.

### **The Transformative Impact on Students: Realising the Value of African Teachers**

Despite the challenges that African teachers may encounter in some global classrooms, the transformative impact of African teachers on students in Chinese EMI universities goes beyond academic learning. Understanding how cultural practices and social class intersect and shape individuals' life chances and

opportunities within society is essential. Through the lens of cultural capital, Bourdieu (1984) contends that cultural capital plays a central role in the reproduction of social inequality, as dominant cultural norms and practices are often privileged and valorised within society. Those with cultural capital that aligns with dominant cultural norms are more likely to be accorded social status and prestige. In contrast, those whose cultural capital deviates from the norm may face marginalisation or exclusion (Bourdieu, 1984). It is therefore necessary to explore how cultural connection, authentic language use, diverse teaching approaches, positive role modelling, and transformative learning experiences contribute to awakening students' consciousness to realise the value and expertise of their African educators.

Firstly, cultural connection plays a significant role in transforming students' perceptions of their African teachers. It is evident that when students perceive that their teachers share a linguistic background or have similar language learning experiences, they are more likely to feel a sense of belonging and trust. Consequently, African teachers who can effectively bridge sociocultural and linguistic gaps and engage with students personally foster more robust connections, positively influencing students' attitudes towards their educators (Gürsoy, 2018). Therefore, through sociocultural connections, students can gain a more nuanced understanding of the diverse backgrounds and experiences that African teachers bring to the classroom. Besides, when students acknowledge their African efficacy, it challenges common stereotypes and fosters a more inclusive and empathetic learning environment.

Secondly, African teachers who use authentic language and local dialects offer students exposure to the linguistic diversity of the English language. It is important to note that embracing diverse linguistic styles and accents helps students to develop a deeper appreciation for the global variations of English beyond the traditional Western-centric perspectives. Additionally, African teachers use unique and diverse teaching approaches through their teaching methodologies, informed by their cultural experiences and backgrounds, to provide students

with alternative ways of learning and understanding course material (Hill & Pinderhughes, 2016). Hence, this diversity of approaches enhances students' critical thinking skills and encourages them to embrace various perspectives.

Thirdly, African teachers are positive role models for students, especially those without significant exposure to educators from diverse racial backgrounds. More importantly, seeing someone from a marginalised racial group succeed as an educator can inspire students to pursue their academic goals and overcome challenges. Still, African teachers' successes and contributions challenge societal biases and reinforce the idea that racial or ethnic backgrounds do not limit excellence in education (Howard, 2018). Most of all, students who view their African teachers as role models are likelier to have higher self-esteem, are gritters with a positive mindset, have increased motivation to learn, and have a broader outlook on their potential.

Fourthly, transformative learning experiences facilitated by African teachers can challenge students' stereotypes and biases. This could be achieved by encouraging open discussions about race, identity, and diversity; African teachers can create spaces for students to critically examine their beliefs and assumptions (Ladson-Billings, 2019; Palmer, 2020). For instance, through meaningful and respectful dialogue, students gain a deeper appreciation for the complexities of race and ethnicity, leading to a more profound understanding of cultural diversity.

Fifthly, students' perspectives on meaningful dialogue about race and ethnicity are crucial in fostering a deeper understanding of cultural diversity and challenging stereotypes and biases. Research by Adams and Bell (2016) highlights the transformative potential of such dialogues in expanding students' perspectives and promoting inclusivity in educational settings. Engaging in meaningful and respectful dialogue allows students to confront their preconceptions and biases about race and ethnicity. By actively listening to diverse perspectives and sharing their own experiences, students gain a deeper

appreciation for the complexities of these issues (Adams & Bell, 2016). This process of self-reflection and critical engagement encourages students to question stereotypes and assumptions, paving the way for more inclusive and empathetic interactions.

Sixthly, transformative learning experiences through dialogue broaden students' understanding of cultural diversity. Through exposure to diverse viewpoints and lived experiences, students develop a more nuanced understanding of the social, historical, and political contexts that shape race and ethnicity (Adams & Bell, 2016). This expanded awareness fosters empathy and solidarity across cultural boundaries, contributing to a more inclusive and interconnected learning community.

Lastly, meaningful dialogue about race and ethnicity empowers students to challenge stereotypes and biases in the classroom and their everyday interactions. Students become agents of change in their communities by critically examining societal norms and structures perpetuating inequality and discrimination (Adams & Bell, 2016). This activism and advocacy for social justice create a more equitable and inclusive society for all. By engaging in respectful and transformative conversations, students deepen their appreciation for cultural diversity and empower themselves and others to challenge stereotypes and biases, ultimately fostering a more just and equitable learning environment.

### **Implications: embracing African teachers' unique perspectives**

The experiences of African teachers in Chinese EMI contexts highlight the pervasive impact of misconceptions, discrimination, and bias on educational spaces. By critically analysing the historical and societal influences contributing to these challenges, institutions can create a more supportive and empowering environment for African teachers. This transformation is essential to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion in global classrooms. Recognising African teachers' expertise and contributions has profound implications for students and society. We must begin by changing our mindset

and mentalities to embrace inclusive practices. Thiong'o's (1986) concept of decolonising the mind offers profound insights into challenging colonial mentalities and reclaiming indigenous ways of knowing and being. He advocates for a radical re-evaluation of education, language, and culture. By recognising the role of colonisation in shaping mentalities and worldviews, we can work towards creating more inclusive, equitable, and decolonised educational systems that honour diverse ways of knowing and being.

Likewise, students who realise their African teachers' significant support and guidance develop increased respect, appreciation, and cultural sensitivity (Chen, 2019). Transforming students' mindsets challenges preconceived notions about race, ethnicity, and teaching abilities, potentially leading to a more inclusive and empathetic learning environment (Barcus & Grace, 2019; Li, 2019). Furthermore, embracing African teachers' unique perspectives and teaching approaches enriches language education as students gain exposure to authentic language use and diverse pedagogical strategies, fostering critical thinking, open-mindedness, and creativity (Chen & Hsueh, 2020; Emodi & Samason, 2018). For these reasons, appreciating diverse voices in classrooms advances teaching and learning and prepares students for the complexities of a globalised world. Students become active agents in fostering a more equitable and compassionate world by challenging stereotypes and advocating for equal opportunities.

### **A Pedagogic Reflection: Experiencing Bias and Promoting Diversity and Inclusivity in Learning Spaces**

This reflection begins by sharing a personal experience as an African teacher in China. Then, it proceeds to explain why it is essential to promote an accurate conception of African teachers to foster diversity and inclusivity in global learning spaces and in China. The aim is to reiterate the need to teach Africa without transmitting or reinforcing negative stereotypes about the continent, its cultures, and its people.

In general, many African teachers in the Diaspora will relate to the challenge that I share here as they try to navigate global workspaces of learning and contribute to creating and sharing knowledge. As an African teacher navigating the halls of EMI universities in China, I have encountered a myriad of challenges, but none as profound as the biases and discrimination that have plagued my professional journey. One such moment stands out vividly, a poignant reminder of the uphill battle that individuals like myself face, striving for recognition and advancement in a foreign land.

The culmination of years of dedication, hard work, and a commitment to excellence led me to apply for a coveted leadership position within my department. With a résumé adorned with qualifications, experiences, and a passion for education, I embarked on the application process with unwavering determination. Little did I know that the harsh reality of bias and favouritism would soon mar my journey. The moment of reckoning arrived when the position was announced, and I eagerly awaited the outcome, confident in my abilities and suitability for the role. However, what transpired shattered my expectations and left me grappling with a sense of injustice and disillusionment. Despite being a qualified candidate amongst my peers, I was informed that the position had been awarded to someone with significantly less academic achievements and experience.

At that moment, the weight of disappointment threatened to engulf me as I struggled to comprehend the rationale behind such a decision. Was it biased? Discrimination? Favouritism? The answers remained elusive, leaving me to confront the harsh reality of systemic barriers that often hinder the progress of individuals from marginalised backgrounds. Nevertheless, amidst the darkness, a flicker of resilience ignited within me – a determination to defy the odds and forge ahead despite the obstacles in my path. It was a turning point – a moment of introspection that fuelled a newfound resolve to challenge the status quo and strive for change. In the aftermath of the ordeal, I refused to be defined by the limitations imposed upon me. Instead, I channelled my energies into effecting positive

transformation within the academic landscape, advocating for inclusivity, diversity, and equal opportunities.

My journey serves as a testament to the resilience of the human spirit – a reminder that in the face of adversity, we possess the power to rise above and transcend barriers, emerging more assertive and more determined than ever. Though the road may be fraught with challenges, each obstacle serves as a stepping stone towards greater heights of achievement and fulfilment.

As I navigate the intricate web of academia, I do so with a renewed sense of purpose and conviction – a beacon of hope for those who dare to dream beyond the confines of societal expectations. In the pursuit of excellence, there are no boundaries – only endless possibilities waiting to be explored. Furthermore, our collective efforts can pave the way for a future where meritocracy triumphs over prejudice and every individual is allowed to shine.

My experience in higher education allowed me to reflect critically on creating more inclusive and culturally sensitive learning spaces, which is essential for promoting accurate conceptions of African teachers and fostering a positive educational environment. As an educator committed to fostering inclusive and culturally sensitive learning environments, I am deeply aware of the importance of promoting accurate conceptions of African teachers and cultivating a positive educational atmosphere in EMI contexts in China. Reflecting on my experiences and interactions with African colleagues, I recognise the transformative power of creating spaces that celebrate diversity, challenge stereotypes, and promote mutual respect and understanding.

One of the most inspiring aspects of my journey as an educator has been the opportunity to collaborate with African teachers and witness the richness of their cultural perspectives and pedagogical approaches. Through personal anecdotes and examples, I have seen how African teachers bring unique insights, experiences, and knowledge to the classroom, enriching the educational experience for students

and colleagues. From engaging storytelling sessions to thought-provoking discussions on global issues, African teachers have consistently inspired curiosity, critical thinking, and empathy amongst learners.

However, despite their invaluable contributions, I have also observed African teachers' challenges in navigating cultural differences, language barriers, and stereotypes in EMI contexts. Personal anecdotes shared by African colleagues have shed light on moments of misunderstanding, discrimination, and isolation that they have encountered in their professional journey. These stories are powerful reminders of the importance of creating supportive and inclusive learning environments where all educators feel valued, respected, and empowered to thrive.

To enrich this reflection further, it is essential to acknowledge cultural sensitivity and empathy's role in building meaningful connections and fostering a sense of belonging amongst diverse learners and educators. By actively listening to the experiences and perspectives of African teachers, engaging in open dialogue, and challenging our biases and assumptions, we can create spaces that honour and celebrate the diversity of voices and experiences within our academic community.

Moreover, pedagogic reflections should emphasise the need for ongoing professional development and training programmes focused on cultural competence, intercultural communication, and inclusive teaching practices. By equipping educators with the knowledge, skills, and resources to navigate diverse cultural landscapes sensitively, we can create transformative learning experiences that promote cross-cultural understanding, empathy, and collaboration. Overall, the need to develop inclusive and culturally sensitive learning spaces for African teachers in EMI contexts in China is not just a professional obligation but a moral imperative. Through personal anecdotes, examples, and reflections, African teachers can inspire meaningful change, challenge stereotypes, and cultivate a positive educational environment where diversity is celebrated and all voices are heard.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has illuminated the transformative impact of African teachers in Chinese EMI universities, offering insights into the multifaceted dynamics of cultural exchange, educational practice, and social change. Through the lens of Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital and an interdisciplinary approach, we have elucidated how African teachers' cultural connection, authentic language use, diverse teaching approaches, positive role modelling, and transformative learning experiences contribute to a student's educational journey.

African teachers play a vital role in shaping students' perceptions and experiences in the classroom by fostering trust, belonging, and cultural understanding. Moreover, their presence challenges stereotypes, inspires academic excellence, and promotes equity and inclusivity in educational spaces. Recognising and celebrating African teachers' expertise enriches language education and contributes to broader societal goals of diversity, equity, and social justice.

As we seek to overcome misperceptions of Africa in this globalised era, it is imperative to decolonise education on Africa, as highlighted earlier in Part I of this edited book, while utilising student-centred, active pedagogic strategies for confronting misconceptions as explored in Part II and centring African views and experiences in teaching Africa, as suggested in Part III. This multifaceted education-based approach's potential to dismantle stereotypes about Africa is enhanced by encouraging Africans to participate in teaching and learning about Africa, including in non-African institutions. Through the presence of African teachers in higher education classrooms, students enrich and diversify their learning while cultivating competencies and sensitivities concerning Africa, its people, values, and cultures. Engaging and empowering African teachers while fostering intercultural dialogue and understanding amongst students can create more inclusive, equitable, and compassionate learning environments that prepare students for the challenges and opportunities of a diverse and interconnected world.

## Acknowledgements

I gratefully acknowledge Nubia Moreno's invaluable feedback which enriched this chapter.

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