The Importance of Local Knowledge Production for African Rising Powers

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As many scholars argue, education is one of the most important ways in which the participation of African nations in global affairs can be improved. Due to the colonial framework, African history and knowledge production have always been dominated and influenced by European countries. In addition, Western exploitation has led to the creation of stereotypes and the deepening of power asymmetries. As education builds on this, many debates within African academia argue the need to reassess African narra-

tives by decolonizing and reexamining the continent's history and political economy from a local perspective. This is why it is so important for emerging countries to be able to speak for themselves, through independent education and local research.

Challenging Colonial Frameworks

Several local scholars argue that in order to achieve a serious break with Western concepts and 'the cycle of deepening inequality, dispossession and ecological devastation' it is necessary to radically rethink previous frameworks and narratives- Pillay (2015) argues that this is only possible through 'bottom-action', challenging those currently in power.

"Reworlding the world from the global south, the coloniser's model of the world, containing the coloniality of knowledge, can be challenged."

Another way to break with Western theories is to develop new ones that offer a different perspective. The World system theory is an academic example of how the Western-dominated world order can be changed and modified to allow marginal countries to enter the global stage. It places "the world itself rather than the nation-state, at the centre of the analysis of economic distribution". Through the division into three domains of the global system – the historical development of the modern global system, the contemporary crisis of the global capitalist economy, and the structures of knowledge – the academics attempt to move away from the notion of the "third world". They argue that the best way to understand the fragmentation of the world is to look at it as a unit, connected by a complex network of economic exchange relations.

Unlike conventional IR theory, this theory puts development into a broader perspective by showing the unequal distribution of wealth and development across the world and showing that even the peripheries are able to break out.

Struggles for Independence

However, the quest for independence by turning away from the West can lead to anti-Western sentiments, which can directly lead to new sympathies and dependencies, for example with the BRICS. China is trying to find new ways to gain power by expanding its influence on the African continent. Ports, among other infrastructure projects, are an example of the development of so-called 'Indian Ocean gateways' through which Asian powers are trying to bind African countries such as Tanzania and Kenya closer to them. New dependencies can also be created by influencing small countries such as the Seychelles or Mauritius. Such countries do not have the power to fight for a fair deal in these projects, which perpetuates structural imbalances. It is important to remember that these powers have no supporting motives for African countries, as these projects are simply instrumental, which can lead to unsustainable debt for the countries concerned.

Hopeful Pathways

It is important to keep in mind that in the past years, several movements towards democracy took place and African countries started to coexist peacefully with each other. This development supported the rise of more education and awareness of their own position and perspective in the world order. However, it does not necessarily mean that African countries start to aspire to Western values and fall back into new dependencies. Rather, it is an approach to find new ways of independence and to seek stable state systems apart from certain power asymmetries within the countries themselves or their role in the global order.

Nevertheless, it is important to bear in mind that African studies will always lack neutrality because of its historically determined position, known as the ideological imperative: "a generative principle of modern African concerns and expressions". Regarding this, it makes sense to question the neutrality of scholarship in general and to ask whether there can be independent knowledge production and scholarship at all.

Why You Should Care!

To understand the current development challenges facing African nations, one must understand their origins, the reasons behind the current underrepresentation of local knowledge production and why it is important to educate and raise awareness on this issue. Because of the continued dominance of Western-centric academics, it is essential to create space for local scholars from other parts of the world and understand the background of the historical and systemic exclusion of African knowledge production. This will allow for an inclusive and broad academic research sphere. In this regard, there is a particular need to give more consideration to African voices and scholars and to put each African country at the centre of its own history.

Recommendations for Engagement with Non-Western Literature:

Journals

Books

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