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Indexing for Communication Journals in Africa: The global knowledge economy and the politics of knowledge distribution

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Abstract

Globalization, the attempt by organizations to expand beyond their domestic boundaries in a manner that assures social and cultural integration, is shaping and reshaping how knowledge is constructed, produced, and distributed in the international arena. Informatization, the utilization of advancements in communication and information technologies, while altering individual lifestyles and the cultural landscape of many societies, has also hastened the pace of globalization. How to become a part of this evolving global knowledge economy has been the focus of discourse among scholars involved in the knowledge industry in different global regions. This essay explores attempts by African scholars to integrate 'African knowledge' into the evolving global knowledge economy. Through the work of the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa, this essay also examines the politics, challenges and promises of 'internationalizing' knowledge.

Key terms

Indexation, peer review process, ComAbstracts, Psyclit, Sociological Abstracts, knowledge economy, knowledge production, knowledge distribution

Résumé

Globalisation, la tentative par des organismes d'augmenter au delà de leurs frontières domestiques en quelque sorte qui assure social et l'intégration culturelle est formante et remodelante comment la connaissance est construite, produit, et distribué dans l'arène internationale. L'informatisation, l'utilisation des avancements en technologies de communication et d'information, tout en changeant différents styles de vie et le paysage culturel de beaucoup de sociétés, a également accéléré le pas de la globalisation. Comment devenir une partie de

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cette économie globale de évolution de la connaissance a été le centre du discours parmi des disciples impliqués dans l'industrie de la connaissance dans différentes régions globales. Cet essai explore des tentatives par les disciples africains d'intégrer la 'connaissance africaine' dans l'économie globale de évolution de la connaissance. Par le travail du Conseil pour le développement de la recherche en sciences sociales en Afrique, cet essai examine également la politique, les défis et les promesses connaissance de internationalisation de 'de la'.

Mots clés : Indexation, évaluation scientifique, *Com Abstracts*, *Psyclit*, *Sociological Abstracts*, économie de la connaissance, production de connaissances, partage des connaissances

Introduction

There is a growing discourse in Africa regarding how best to position African scholars as strategic partners and competitors in knowledge production and distribution. Across the globe, similar discussions are taking place in different regions (Santos 2003). Previous essays in this volume provide several reasons for this growing discourse—For example, the need 'to become active players in the global flow of information and scholarship, controlling our own means of production and distribution, or at the minimum, having a strong voice in the process' (Le Roux and Nwosu 2006). Other reasons are linked to the publicity, trustworthiness and accessibility of the scholarship in question, and the increasing utilization of the global reach of one's scholarship in making determination about tenure, research grants, promotion, and so forth in a number of institutions of higher education.

How knowledge is constructed, packaged, and distributed today is being shaped and reshaped by two forces: first, by globalization and second, by advances in information and communication technology. As Masuda (1981) has noted, in the information society, knowledge or the manner it is produced and distributed will be the driving force of society rather than industrial technologies (p. 29). It is true that we face an era where information and communication technologies have enhanced the interconnectedness of the world; thus minimizing social and cultural barriers. What is of great significance to the issues explored in this essay is the possibility of distributing/sharing 'African knowledge' far and wide in the context of globalization and information and communication technologies. We want to look at this possibility as made feasible by the advances in these two areas. I recognize that globalization has been defined in various ways. For the most part, scholars use the term to refer to 'the interconnectedness of political entities, economic relationships, or even computer networks' (Kluver 2006). From an economic standpoint, others

see it as 'the attempt by organizations to expand beyond their domestic boundaries' (Olaniran 2003). For purposes of this essay, I will draw from these definitions, but more important, I will use the term to also refer to ways in which globalization is seen as a value, that is, the extent to which globalization seeks cultural and social integration and assures that multiple voices (not just the dominant voices) are also heard in the evolving discourse about the global knowledge economy (Kluver 2006).

In his fascinating book, *Information Society as Post-Industrial Society*, Masuda (1981) argues that advancements in information technologies will profoundly hasten the pace of globalization, and radically alter the way in which cultures and societies have lived their lives and conducted their own affairs. Wang (1994) has employed the term 'Informatization' to refer to the phenomenon whereby the utilization of advancements in communication and information technologies, while altering individual lifestyles and the cultural landscape of many societies, has also hastened the pace of globalization. Some of the radical changes that have taken place in most societies in such areas as culture, politics, economy, and so on in the last twenty years, and the 'unprecedented growth in the speed, quantity, and popularity of information production and distribution' (Wang 1994) are a consequence of the profound effect of information technologies on our lives. We have seen in the last twenty years a massive transformation in the nature of social relations and human interactions, brought about, in part, by advances in information and communication technologies. Africa has not been immune to this transformation.

However, of concern to the knowledge industry in Africa is how best to access these new technologies in pursuit of the production and distribution of 'African knowledge,' and in a way that sees globalization as a value that ensures the inclusion of multiple voices. There is general agreement among knowledge industry scholars in Africa that control or access to technology in the context of the production and the distribution infrastructure will largely permit Africans to shape the nature of the discourse about them in the new global economy. How this might happen was the focus of a two-day annual meeting of journal editors of the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA). The meeting, which took place in Nairobi, Kenya in November 2004, focused attention on the utilization of the global system of indexation as a strategy for moving 'African knowledge' beyond the boundaries of Africa.

Indexation, the knowledge economy and globalization

Indexation is a method of organizing knowledge and classifying information in a manner that permits greater access, visibility, marketability and readership, as well as global/international recognition. This process has become even more enhanced with advances in information and communication technologies. A journal becomes international when it is indexed in international academic reference databases (Rui Santos 2003; *e-JPH*, Volume 1, Number 2). In this sense, a journal published in Nigeria may be international or global if it is indexed, while one published in the United States may not be, if it is not indexed.

Indexation assures that a journal has passed the test of international scholarly scrutiny consistent with a specific referencing system's academic and linguistic traditions, as well as disciplinary boundaries and coverage. Of course, those who own, manage, and maintain the referencing system set the parameters for such scrutiny. Thus when a journal is referenced or indexed in data bases such as Com Abstracts (Communication), Psyclit (Psychology), Econlit (Economics), MLA International Bibliography (Linguistics and Literature), ERIC (Education Sciences), International Index to Music Periodicals, to name a few, such journal is said to have met rigorous standards and criteria.

There are several advantages to journal indexation. First, indexation encourages high quality manuscript submissions to the journal from a wide range of scholars and researchers around the globe. Second, some academic institutions rely upon indexation when decisions are made with respect to receiving research subsidies or with respect to retention, tenure and promotion (RTP). A number of universities in Africa now rely on this in the RTP process. In South Africa, for example, publishing in a journal that is indexed assures that the researcher receives subsidy for his/her work from government. Third, indexation increases journal credibility, visibility and accessibility among a community of scholars, researchers, and policy makers. Fourth, through indexation, international interest and journal marketability/sales are enhanced, especially with respect to institutional subscriptions. To what extent has the knowledge industry participated in this international indexation process in order to expand the boundaries of African scholarship beyond the continent?

African scholarship and control

African participation in the international indexation system can be described as fragmentary and uncoordinated because there has not been any focused attempt to internationalize/globalize 'African knowledge'. There are many

reasons for this. Among them are these: centuries of European influence in Africa which has left the ownership of the knowledge production and distribution industry in Africa largely in the hands of outsiders; the common focus on local production which has largely ignored marketing and distribution to an international audience; funding challenges at local levels which have affected the growth of the production and distribution sectors; lack of local audience patronage for the production/publishing industry; and the politics of knowledge production and distribution in which scholarship that supports vested interests gets to see the light of the day (Nyamnjoh 2004). Let us address briefly each of these points.

First, for nearly fifty years since most countries in Africa became independent from colonial rule, the production and distribution sectors of knowledge about Africa, in Africa, by African scholars, have remained largely foreign in the hands of European and American publishing companies or their affiliates. Both Nyamnjoh (2004), and Zegeye (2005) have articulated the negative consequences of this kind of ownership on the knowledge production industry in Africa. Zegeye, for example, has called for the democratization of the knowledge production space to permit more access for local publishers. In an era of globalization, how we begin to democratize the space for knowledge production as well as distribution about Africa in ways that permit an African presence/voice is an essential project. Here, two central questions must be addressed: how can Africa produce and market its own scholarship? How can African scholars begin to democratize the knowledge production and distribution space in ways that catapult African scholarship in the international arena? These questions were raised at the Nairobi meeting. I will return to these questions later.

Second, while discourses about African scholarship have generally focused on the local production of knowledge and the forces that enhance or impede such efforts, not much has been written about the dissemination or distribution of such knowledge beyond the boundaries of Africa. While local publishing does exist in many parts of the continent, Western publishers who are largely in control of the production infrastructure, generally dominate the publishing industry in Africa. They also dominate the distribution industry.

A third major and related factor is funding. In some instances where there is local production, the support for such efforts has come from external donor agencies and governments. The Heinemann African Writers Series (AWS), a major publishing series in African Literature for many years, ended its operations in 2003 due to 'persistent financial losses occasioned

by the fact that only an elite few in Africa read in English ...and amongst those who do, few who can afford to buy a book want to read African authors' (Nyamnjoh 2004:1).

Related to this is the lack of local support for the local production industry. While works from local production outfits such as AWS, 'delighted many people...in Africa and beyond' (Achebe 2000: 51), many of these works failed to be supported by the reading audience in Africa. Nyamnjoh has argued that the lack of patronage of African authors by African readers has been a major challenge to the local production industry in Africa. Ironically, this lack of patronage may be a good reason for exploring external audiences beyond the boundaries of Africa, and for integrating the knowledge industry into the global system.

Finally, there is the politics of production and distribution which has become a huge impediment to the knowledge industry in Africa. In this instance, for example, vested interests of national and foreign governments as well as multilateral institutions who seek to control and manage the citizens' right to know and what they should know become important stakeholders in the process. In his writing about similar challenges in the United States, Ali Mazrui (1990) notes that 'reputable publishers turn down manuscripts, edit out ideas, or surgically remove chapters likely to offend powerful groups in the nation'. The decision regarding what to turn down, edit, or remove is sometimes guided by profit motive. Those whose ideas help to generate profit are published regardless of the consequences. Authors whose ideas reflect the preferred and prevailing societal ideology also get published.

Thus, despite local efforts, the infrastructure capacity for knowledge production and knowledge distribution in Africa remains essentially foreign, a point fully recognized and discussed at the Nairobi meeting.

Africa and the global knowledge economy

In his essay titled 'Knowledge production and publishing in Africa', Abebe Zegeye (2005) writes that knowledge production in Africa 'has become an institution or a conglomeration of institutions with distinct sites at universities, in civil organizations, commissioned research and education systems'. In a sense, the knowledge production industry has become what Zegeye (2005) refers to as the "purveyors of the knowledge economy". A knowledge economy 'is one in which the generation and exploitation of knowledge play the predominant part in the creation of wealth' (United Kingdom Department of Trade and Industry 1998). In a previous essay, I noted that the knowledge economy has four component parts: It is fast. It

is global. It is technology-driven. It is networked. A knowledge economy is fast because it involves expediting the process for getting products to the intended market. It is global because companies and individuals now have greater access to diverse and geographically dispersed consumer audiences worldwide. We have entered the era of global connectivity—when people are not physically mobile, yet they are connected through technology. The knowledge economy is also technology-intensive because it involves the utilization of an increasingly complex set of technical tools to innovate ideas, goods and services. Finally, a knowledge economy is also networked because it makes the interconnectedness of multiple processes and parties necessary in order to bring products, goods and services to the market (Nwosu 2005:61-66). If the knowledge industry in Africa is to become a part of the evolving global knowledge economy, then scholarship produced in Africa, about Africa(ns), by Africa scholars must also become widely distributed and accessible to international audiences. Such distribution would require participation in a global system of indexation that assures consistency, regularity, and usefulness. As Rui Santos note, internationalization is about the boundaries of writing, reading and usefulness (Santo 2004:1).

In this sense, several questions must be posed: Where is ‘African knowledge’ in this matrix of internationalization/globalization? What can scholars do to ensure that the knowledge industry in Africa becomes a part of the evolving global knowledge economy and becomes widely distributed and accessible to international audiences? This was the focus of the Nairobi meeting.

The Nairobi meeting and CODESRIA

In the previous sections, I argued that Africa’s participation in the internationalization matrix has been, at best, fragmentary and uncoordinated, because there has not been any focused attempt to internationalize African scholarship. The Nairobi meeting sponsored by CODESRIA was specifically designed to pursue this effort, and to begin a focused process of ensuring the wider distribution and international recognition of African scholarship, especially journals produced in Africa, about Africa, by Africans, beginning the works of CODESRIA.

The choice of CODESRIA as the leader in internationalizing African knowledge is fairly obvious. For more than thirty years now, the organization has distinguished itself as the top non-governmental centre of social knowledge production about Africa and Africans on the continent. Today CODESRIA boasts of 7 print journals, 5 online journals, nearly 200 hun-

dred books and monographs, and other special publications whose impact remain unquantifiable in terms of the intellectual advancement of the continent. More than any other publishing and scholarly agency in Africa, its publications, which embrace the continent's diversity, are produced in the four main working languages in Africa: English, French, Portuguese, and Arabic. Its other advantage is that it is an independent Pan-African research organization, and does not report to any government, although much of its funding comes from international donor agencies such as the Swedish International Development Corporation Agency, Ford Foundation, Rockefeller Foundation, United Nations Development Programme, and the Carnegie Corporation, among others.

How does CODESRIA begin this task of internationalizing African scholarship? At the Nairobi meeting, CODESRIA journal editors had robust discussions about the promises and challenges of internationalization, and agreed that CODESRIA should pursue a two-pronged strategy as follows:

1. Develop an online annotated bibliographic tool of all published work about Africa and its peoples, beginning first with all of CODESRIA's publications. Already work has begun on the CODESRIA's Indexation Project, an international indexation system dedicated to scholarship on and about Africa. This continent-based system would have clear, rigorous standards, indexation criteria, including relevancy, regularity, peer-review, quality, style, institutional affiliation, accessibility, and consistency.
2. Begin the process for indexation of all of CODESRIA's journals in major international indexation systems such as Social Science Index, PsychLit, Social Science Index, among others. The choice of indexation system for each of CODESRIA's journals should be based on disciplinary relevance.

Thus far, journal editors have started the process by taking the following steps: begun a process of retrieving copies of the criteria system for indexation in major international journals to the extent that they are relevant to journals published by CODESRIA's. Editors are using these criteria sets to develop plans for the indexation of specific journals. Contacts are also being initiated with specific indexing organizations as is relevant for each of CODESRIA's journals.

I will now review efforts being instituted by CODESRIA to advance the indexation of its premier communication journal: *Africa Media Review*

Africa Media Review (AMR)

As the leading communication journal in Africa, *AMR* is dedicated to the publication of original research as well as manuscripts on best practices, which advance communication policy, scholarship and application in the continent. As a collaborative publication of CODESRIA and the African Council for Communication Education (ACCE), *AMR* seeks to 'raise awareness and understanding about the interconnections between media, communication and social processes in Africa, and how these shape and are affected by policies and practices at global, regional and local levels'. (*AMR*, Volume 12, Number 1, pp. iii-iv).

AMR is the only continent-wide journal in communication, and is published twice a year and covers articles in English and French. Since the inception of *AMR* in 1986, publishing in the journal is generally regarded by peers throughout Africa as one of the best single measures of scholarly productivity. Scholars' reputation and career opportunities are perceived to be enhanced through publication in *AMR*.

By 2000, the journal, which had been published by ACCE with international donor support, had seized publication. At the 2003 biennial meeting of ACCE held in Abuja, Nigeria, the leadership of the organization negotiated with Codesria to take over the publication of the journal. After nearly four years in hiatus, *AMR* resumed publication in spring 2004, with a reorganized editorial structure (consisting of three editors) and an international editorial advisory board made of 20 leading scholars from across the globe. A number of changes are now being instituted to assure indexation in several international indexation systems. These changes include consistency in editorial style, regularity and timeliness in production, inclusion of abstracts and key terms, absence of major gaps with publication issues, affiliation of journal with reputable institutions; and identifiable website for the journal ownership institution, among others. Several of these criteria are already in place. With its long history of publishing and a strong peer review mechanism, *AMR* has a high international indexing potential. The current efforts at indexing the journal, when completed, will efforts move the journal as Africa's leading communication journal toward greater visibility and utilization by scholars world-wide interested in understanding communication processes and patterns in Africa.

Conclusion

The Nairobi meeting of journal editors offers a new opportunity for exploring strategies globalizing 'African knowledge'. Certainly a two-pronged approach as recommended by journal editors ensures participation in existing

distributive mechanisms and creates opportunity for involvement in the evolving global knowledge economy in ways that facilitates Africa's competitiveness. These efforts help ensure that scholarship produced about Africa and Africans in Africa is easily accessible to students and scholars around the world who are interested in studying and understanding Africa. It is hoped that the discussions at the Nairobi meeting will continue in different avenues and at different levels. Finally, it is suggested that a mechanism be put in place by CODESRIA to monitor and measure progress to date on this focused effort to place African scholarship beyond the boundaries of the continent.

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