

Reconstructing the coloniality of knowledge production and development in postcolonial Africa

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the intersection of knowledge production and development within the dynamics of postcolonial class relations in Africa. The study adopted a critical qualitative research approach, to carry out content analysis on documentary and non-documentary data. Leveraging the framework of postcolonial epistemology, which integrates insights from state in postcolonial societies and World Systems theories, the study argues that the continued marginality and peripheral positioning of Africa in the global political economy are linked to the dominance of Western paradigms in knowledge production about Africa, which has continued to reproduce forms of dependency that constrain the continent's development. Knowledge production in Africa reflects the structure of power relations among contending social classes, marked with exogenous control of instruments of knowledge and economic production. Consequently, knowledge production in Africa takes the form of extractivism, in which local cultural and intellectual resources are exploited in the same manner as the

exploitation of Africa's natural resources within the world market system. Indigenous epistemic infrastructures have become subordinated through externally controlled research institutions, funding and publishing, resulting in pervasive commodification of knowledge. This not only undermines the production of authentic knowledge about Africa that serves African interests; it also retards autochthonous transformation and entrenches dependency in Africa's development trajectories. This paper concludes that social transformations in Africa, therefore, require a more eclectic approach to knowledge production that fosters a diversified knowledge base capable of reducing exploitative external dependence.

Keywords: Development, epistemology, extractivism, knowledge production, postcolonial state, social class

Introduction

Knowledge production refers to the construction of the conceptual and epistemic framework through which people understand and engage with their social and natural environments to produce the material basis of their social existence. It refers to the processes and practices involved in creating, validating and disseminating knowledge in a social context. More specifically, it involves generating actionable ideas that drive social, economic and technological advancements (Nowontny & Scott, 2024). Knowledge production is a complex, multifaceted process that involves various actors, power dynamics and sociocultural factors. On the other hand, development is the process through which people creatively utilise their surrounding

natural resources to produce what they need, while transforming their natural and social environments (Ake, 1981). It entails mobilising the productive forces, the summation of the productive capabilities of society, based on the available stock of knowledge, towards transforming the natural and social environments to meet the needs of society (Chumbow, 2005).

Knowledge production is an important corollary of development, as both are interdependent and mutually reinforcing. In every society, knowledge is generated through the interactions among people and the natural environment to produce the material basis of their livelihood. The nature and level of knowledge production in a society are a reflection of the stock

of experiences gathered in the process of development of human society and its intellectual engagement with emerging social, economic, and environmental challenges. The task of understanding the laws and principles that govern the immediate environment has always been an important component of the development of human society. People are in constant interaction with their natural environment, which embodies diverse natural resources that are exploited and transformed to meet human needs. Through these interactions, they discover the laws and principles that underlie that environment (scientific knowledge) and apply the knowledge of those laws and principles to fashion tools and equipment (technology and engineering) and improve their skills (technical know-how) to ease the labour process and better organise their social relations (Nowontny & Scott, 2024). In this process, people transform not only their natural environment but also their livelihood and the pattern of organising their society (Onyewuenyi, 1993; Chumbow, 2005). Thus, the process of social development is also the process of knowledge production, just as knowledge production stimulates further development. Conversely, any society that lacks control over its knowledge

production is unlikely to have the capacity to drive its development or determine the course of its social progress independently. Such exogenous control of both knowledge production and development characterises many societies that experienced colonial domination, a condition that is aptly explained by the theory of the State in Postcolonial Societies (Gavristova & Khokholkova, 2022; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2020).

A prominent feature of the history of contemporary Africa has been the struggle to develop and govern the postcolonial state. As Davidson (2012) puts it, the more one reflects on the challenges of Africa, the more clearly it is seen to arise from the postcolonial social and political institutions within which Africans have lived and tried to survive. Postcolonial states in Africa have been entrapped in multidimensional development challenges. According to the recent Human Development Index for Africa (HDI, 2023-2026), which measures life expectancy, education and standard of living, only Seychelles and Mauritius are classified in the very high human development category, while most of the other African states fall into medium and low categories (Statista, 2026). According

to the World Economic Outlook report released by the International Monetary Fund (October, 2025), Africa's total nominal Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for 2024 and 2025 stood approximately at \$2.9 trillion and \$3.1 trillion respectively, representing about 2.6% of global GDP (StatisticsTimes.com, 2026). After over half a century of decolonisation, most of the states have not been able to significantly transcend the debilitating legacies of colonisation in their political and economic developments, unlike what has happened in postcolonial Asia. In the IMF 2025 report, Asia stood out as the largest continental economy in the world, with \$42.28 trillion nominal GDP, accounting for 36.08% of the world's GDP (StatisticsTimes.com, 2026). In contrast, efforts so far made towards development in Africa have not significantly improved Africa's peripheral positioning in the world system (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018; Crawford et al., 2021). As observed by Mamdani (2002), factors that have sustained this situation are not only political and economic, but also epistemic, reflecting a knowledge production system that has failed to generate the adaptive leverage needed to mobilise Africa's productive forces towards social transformations.

Knowledge production occurs within a social context of power relations, and as Foucault (1972) suggests, the relationship between knowledge and power is so intimate that those who control the means of material production also shape and disseminate the forms of knowledge that preserve their dominion over others. There is a tendency for politically and economically powerful actors to legitimise certain forms of knowledge that support the preservation of their privileged position while suppressing other forms of knowledge that may question the prevailing order. They also ensure that these dominant knowledge systems are published and disseminated through mediums and technologies amenable to their control (Zegeye & Vamber, 2006). This means that knowledge is both a social and political construct, and as such, is continually subject to contestation, revision, and reinterpretation in response to evolving power relations.

In Africa, knowledge production has been shrouded in a complex web of power relations and structural inequalities rooted in historical colonial and postcolonial or neocolonial domination (Adiat, 2023). Colonialism had disrupted traditional indigenous modes of

knowledge production and imposed an alien system based on Western epistemologies. The conceptual and epistemological frame within which the people understood themselves and interpreted their social and natural environments over time, based on their culture, values and history, was replaced with the knowledge system of the colonisers (Davidson, 1992; Crawford et al., 2021). These enduring legacies of colonial structures of power relations have continued to shape knowledge production in Africa, undermining endogenous capacities for scientific innovation and reproducing forms of developmental dependency. Neoliberal policies have further entrenched these dynamics, inadvertently rationalising state divestment from critical sectors, including research and education, and promoting a knowledge economy that prioritises market-driven research at the expense of broader societal and developmental needs (Mamdani, 2007). Moreover, research funding gaps resulting from poor policy choices leave knowledge production under the control of external interests through funding and subtle agenda setting. Consequently, knowledge production in Africa has continued to reflect enduring asymmetrical power relations that

reinforce colonial patterns of domination and undermine development (Crawford et al., 2021). In other words, coloniality in knowledge production has become a persistent constraint on the development of postcolonial Africa. Against this background, reconstructing the coloniality of knowledge production becomes an essential part of development in Africa. This paper, therefore, critically examines the intersection of knowledge production and development in Africa within the context of postcolonial class relations. It interrogates how control over knowledge infrastructures shapes state capacity and development trajectories in postcolonial Africa.

Discourses on coloniality in knowledge production

The issues of coloniality in knowledge production have, over time, been a central concern of scholars in the extant literature. Postcolonial theorists have been at the vanguard of scholarly efforts to interrogate colonial influences on knowledge production in colonised societies. They have emphasised the need to decolonise knowledge production and to develop alternative knowledge systems capable of emancipating colonised societies from continued exploitation and

subordination (Adiat, 2023). Frantz Fanon and Edward Said represent important foundational voices in this intellectual tradition, providing an entry point for postcolonial theorists in this direction. Fanon (1961) focused on the psychological effects of colonialism, arguing that colonial domination was sustained through an imperial representation of the colonised as inherently inferior to the colonisers. This created a psychology of self-denigration, which predisposes the colonised to internalise Western values at the expense of their own culture. Said (1978) examined the problem of scholarship, arguing that it is characterised by a sense of intellectual superiority in which meanings are assigned without regard for the views of the subject. He argued for an epistemological system which encapsulates the views of both the Orient and the Occident (Said, 1978). Foucault (1972) presented a subtle conception of the constitutive relations between power and knowledge, and provided a critical premise for investigating the way representations of non-European cultures and thoughts are shaped by a web of institutional and political forces which reproduce Western imperialism (Iverson, 2026).

Ake (1982) put forward the argument that postcolonial Western domination of developing countries was not just because of superior economic and military powers, but also importantly because of the imposed notion of development in a social science, which he described as imperialism. According to Ake (1982), the mainstream Western social science scholarship in Africa and other developing countries amounts to imperialism. Western scholarship in Africa grew out of an attempt to develop an intellectual framework for political and economic control of dominated societies. This framework was built on an ideology of modernisation in which development was explained in terms of a binary of opposites, with Euro-America on one extreme and Africa on the other extreme, where the latter will have to develop by becoming more and more like the former (Iverson, 2026).

Discussing Claude Ake's contributions to social science and knowledge production in Africa, Arowosegbe (2008) highlights Ake's analogy between the colonial/neocolonial division of labour in the economic sphere and what obtains in the knowledge production. Just like Africa has been historically consigned to the extraction of raw materials, which are

exported to Europe, where they are manufactured into finished products and reimported into Africa. Ake argues that there also appears to be an intellectual division of labour in which Africa serves as a source of data generation to be exported to Europe, where they are developed into theories used to explain African realities (Arowosegbe, 2008). In other words, Africa-based scholars, under this research arrangement, collect and export raw (empirical) data to be analysed into finished theories that suit the narratives and research agendas of the sponsors. The adverse implications of this intellectual division of labour for knowledge production in Africa are the dominance of Western scholarship and indiscriminate application of Western theories to misinterpret Africa's social realities (Ake, 1982; Crawford, Mai-Bornu, & Landstrom, 2021). This typifies situations in which solutions to Africa's problems are drawn from contexts which have little in common with social realities in Africa and paradigms that hardly resonate with the lived cultural experiences of Africans (Mamdani, 2007). As Zeleza (2002) notes, this "international intellectual division of labour" exists with attendant scientific consumerism, with the exportation of empirical data from Africa and

importation of "universally applicable" theories in return.

Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) notes that debilitating legacies of colonialism created longstanding patterns of unequal power relations that have continued to define intersubjective social relations and knowledge production, long after the end of direct colonisation. Ndlovu-Gatsheni argues that knowledge production in Africa creates epistemological coloniality in which postcolonial modernity continues to interfere with African modes of perception and knowledge construction within the hegemony of Eurocentric epistemologies. In another intervention, Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2020) notes that the battle before 21st century Africa is an epistemic battle of dismantling a colonial cognitive empire which controls people's minds, intellectual consciousness and social lives, different from the 20th century battle against racial discrimination.

Some scholars argue that the liberation of postcolonial Africa from epistemic imperialism in knowledge production must begin with the decolonisation of African universities, recognising the centrality of these institutions in the process (Chaka et al., 2017; Mheta et al.,

2018). Arowosegbe (2016) argues that the rise of political autocracy, supported by neoliberal economic regimes that implemented Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP), has destabilised Africa's political economy and inflicted serious damage on knowledge production in the region, distorting the inclusion of indigenous African scholarship in global knowledge discourses. In the context of the SAP, various governments abdicated their responsibility to fund universities and research institutes, leading to significant funding gaps that allowed deeper external influences on epistemological and methodological orientations through research funding (Arowosegbe, 2016). Mamdani (2011) observes that this situation has led to the emergence of a generation of scholars whose work in knowledge production is overshadowed by their focus on research consultancy and securing grants from dominant Western institutions, thereby implementing imperial research agendas within Africa's knowledge production landscape. Supporting this view, Zegeye and Vamber (2006) assert that individuals are now compensated to produce specific types of knowledge, creating a process that inherently excludes the validation of alternative forms of knowledge. Thus, knowledge becomes a commodity that is

bought and sold in the academic marketplace.

Examining the politics of knowledge production and publishing in Africa, Zegeye and Vambe (2006) argue that, within the context of Africa, knowledge production occurs across various sites beyond universities and is not necessarily codified or published in written forms. Rather, knowledge represents the cumulative outcome of people's struggles to understand and engage with their social and natural environments, and a significant portion of Africa's knowledge production and communication occurs through oral media. Much of this form of knowledge is generated not in universities or research institutes, but within communities in urban slums and rural areas, and is elaborated and transmitted from one generation to another through oral means, including popular songs, folktales, myths, proverbs, and legends. They argue that this form of knowledge is not inferior to those that are codified and published in books and journals. However, African epistemology has also been criticised for its perceived metaphysical orientation and lack of global competitiveness, even within the global south. Udefi (2014) identifies conceptual ambiguity and definitional

inconsistency as persistent challenges confronting the idea of an African epistemology, and questions whether such epistemological fluidity can adequately support Africa's advancement in the contemporary world system. Nwosimiri (2019) similarly argues that the notion of a distinct African epistemology is unfounded, given the shared nature of human cognition and centuries of trans-racial interaction across continents. By contrast, interrogating the veracity of African epistemology, Ndubuisi (2014) argued for the centrality of logic as a basis for African epistemology, which he argued would provide a coherent methodological approach to objective knowledge production. Similarly, Alem (2019) examines the prospects of an African epistemological system in scientific knowledge production and concludes that there are thought systems in Africa that can offer equivalent value for scientific practices of the Western paradigm system, with scientific values that are as valid as those in the West.

It is important to note that there is no universally acceptable criterion by which to compare one culture or civilisation with another in terms of progress because every culture is a product of its

environment and should therefore be judged primarily in relation to the community it serves (Arowosegbe, 2016). This then suggests that the knowledge system arising from a given culture or civilisation can only be judged by the adaptive leverage, or otherwise, it provides for the social mobilisation of the people and productive forces of a society towards meeting the development needs of that society. The value of any knowledge system is not in its sophistication or competition with other forms of knowledge, but in its relevance in understanding the lived experiences and struggles of a people, and its social role in mobilising the productive forces of society towards development. However, contemporary Africa is not a closed system that is devoid of external influences. As such, it may not be useful to think of Africa's indigenous knowledge system as a pristine tradition that can simply be recovered and applied to addressing the present-day problems of Africa. Knowledge is dynamic and cumulative, and the challenge is how to diversify sources of knowledge to reduce exploitative external dependence in tackling Africa's development challenges.

Theoretical framework

The framework of the study is postcolonial epistemology, a critical framework that interrogates the dominance of Western paradigms in knowledge production and how it shapes state capacity for development. This framework is drawn from the intersection of state in postcolonial societies and World Systems theories. The Theory of State in Postcolonial Societies was articulated by Alavi (1972) and expounded by Amin-Khan (2012) to account for the historical specificity of colonised societies, which still embody trappings of coloniality even after the formal end of colonisation. Structural changes brought about by colonial experiences gave rise to unique political superstructures in the postcolonial societies. The colonial adventure of the European bourgeois class in the colonies led to the establishment of bourgeois state systems in the colonised societies for domination, suppression, exploitation and subordination of the indigenous population and productive forces. The aim of the colonialists was not to establish any form of social contract between the state and the indigenous population; rather, the agenda was to establish pseudo-capitalist states that would ensure the continued subordination of

the indigenous population and social classes even in the postcolonial era (Ake, 2000). Hence, states in postcolonial societies became characteristically authoritarian and repressive, leading to precarious state-citizen relations, and the government was reduced to the executors of capitalist neoliberal policies and interests. The postcolonial state thus becomes subordinated to the Western bourgeois class, while citizens are subordinated to the state without the adaptive leverage to exercise agency in the governance and development of the state.

Consequently, the state in postcolonial societies came to be both a perversion of the classical bourgeois state and also fundamentally differentiated from the classical Marxian state. The postcolonial state represents a colonial mutation of the Western state system designed to protect the interests of the respective exploiting classes, including the Western bourgeois class and the indigenous political class. Indigenous political class within the colonised societies are relatively non-autonomous and, therefore, lacks the capacity to exercise effective control over the development of the state. As a result, the postcolonial state then becomes a captured state

serving the interests of the Western Bourgeois class, which works in concert with the indigenous political class to marginalise indigenous productive forces in top-down development processes. The Western Bourgeois class that controls the mode of economic production in collaboration with the indigenous political class also controls instruments of knowledge production to reproduce forms of coloniality. Preoccupied with competition for state power and access to public resources, the indigenous political class has largely failed to promote alternative paths to development or support alternative modes of knowledge production, leading to continued marginality of the state in the framework of the world system.

World systems theory emerged from the works of Immanuel Wallerstein and Andre Gunder Frank, and has been developed into a macro-socioeconomic framework for analysing the structure of the global capitalist system (Brayshay, 2020). The cumulative outcome of the various phases of imperialist expansion of capitalism is the emergence of a global capitalist market system characterised by the structuration of countries across regions into extremes of core and periphery regions, with an intermediate

semi-periphery category. Countries and regions of the world are functionally integrated into the world system, where the core regions maintain dominance through control of industrial production, finance capital and technology, while the periphery focuses on export of raw materials and natural resources while largely depending on the core for aid, loans, foreign direct investment and industrial products (Kardulias & Hall, 2024). The semi-periphery region is made up of countries operating at various points in between the two extremes as they migrate away from the periphery towards the core. Relations between the core and the periphery are characterised by exploitation, domination and unequal exchange.

The World Systems Theory provides an explanation of the structural positioning of the former colonial states and the colonised states within the global capitalist system. The core is dominated by former colonial states which have become industrialised, while the periphery is populated by formally colonised states that have remained largely underdeveloped and dependent. The postcolonial states were historically admitted into the world capitalist system through various forms of imperialism,

including slavery, colonisation, globalisation and neocolonisation. The theory provides a framework that explains the structural hierarchy and functional inequality that exist among states within the globalised capitalist system. The relationship between the core states and the periphery states is characterised by exploitation, domination and unequal exchanges. Dominant economic activities in the periphery are resource extraction, in which natural resources are exploited and exported as raw materials and subsequently re-imported as finished goods. The economies of periphery states, thus, become heavily dependent on the core region for industrial products, technology and financial capital with consequential development setbacks. Moreover, the quest for foreign direct investments, loans, aid, and grants from the core states and multilateral institutions that pose as development partners end up making the periphery states vulnerable to indebtedness and various forms of dependency. Through multinational corporations and international finance institutions and policy packages attached to loans, the core states are able to maintain significant control over the economy and politics of the periphery states. The possibility of countries in the

periphery moving to the core remains highly limited due to structural constraints and barriers that limit mobility within the global capitalist system.

Most African countries are categorised in the periphery region of the world-systems structure. They act as exporters of raw materials and labour while also depending on the core nations for capital, technology and industrial goods. The structural positioning of African countries as periphery is historically traced to colonialism and neocolonialism, which imposed enduring dependency on the core region. The economic dependency of Africa on the (Western) core has its corollary in the knowledge production sector. Hence, the immobility of African states within the structure of the world system is not just a result of economic constraints but also epistemic barriers arising from colonality of knowledge production.

Colonisation and imperial knowledge production

The central goal of colonisation was to dominate the colonised and exploit their resources (Davidson, 1992). One instrument deployed to achieve this was imperial knowledge production, the

systematic deployment of instruments of knowledge creation and dissemination to subordinate, dominate and exploit. One of the most subtle strategies of imperialism was the use of objective scientific facts to pursue subjective ends (Crawford et al., 2021). The exigency of colonisation necessitated the entanglement of knowledge with power, whereby Western perspectives were framed as exclusively valid and superior while marginalising indigenous systems. Schools and laboratories were used to produce knowledge that supported imperial interests of the colonists in the economy and administration (Adetiba, 2026). Education focused mainly on literacy and training of clerical staff for the colonial administration, and was largely used to instil a sense of inferiority. Imperial knowledge production acted as an ideological pacifier, controlling the thoughts and beliefs of the colonised to facilitate the overall imperial project.

The domination of the colonised societies was not only to achieve military, economic and technological superiority, but more importantly, for the purpose of mental imperialism. As Chatterjee (1985) noted, it is not just military might or industrial strength that can be used to dominate and subjugate; thought itself is

an instrument of domination and subjugation. Thus, the field of scientific discourse is also a political space for power relations. The bourgeois-rational knowledge system of the post-Enlightenment European intellectual tradition has been established as the epistemic foundation of the dominant science and has served as an epistemic framework for mental domination. Standpoint theorists generally consider the dominant science as ethno-science, or more appropriately, European ethno-science, which has continued to promote European values and prioritise the capitalist ideology of the bourgeois class through the setting of research agendas. Given that the bourgeois science dominates scientific research and has assumed the status of universal validity irrespective of the specific cultural and historical uniqueness of different societies, it has become a significant obstacle to promoting synergy between research and development in postcolonial Africa.

The arrival of European science in other parts of the world, including Africa, had immense detrimental effects on the local scientific knowledge system and industry (Emeagwali, 2008). European scientific domination over the colonies resulted in

indigenous science being regarded as redundant, and no effort was made to sustain local scientific traditions. In most cases, there were deliberate attempts to smother local industries (Ake, 1981). For example, there was deliberate saturation of Africa with products from Europe, which resulted in the decline of local industrial production, like in the glass and metal industries (Rodney, 1972; Emeagwali, 2008). The main focus of research in the colonies was directed at extractive production, which was aimed at identifying and extracting natural resources to meet the industrial needs of Europe (Harrison, 2005). Throughout the colonial period, knowledge production was strongly directed towards the expansion of European imperialist empires (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2020). The colonial knowledge production fostered disregard for alternative viewpoints and propagated a social hierarchy which served the purpose of justifying and legitimising colonialism (Villafuerte, 2020). It gave European nations a cultural advantage over the societies they colonised by denigrating their cultures and civilisations.

Joseph (1987), outlining the diffusion of science from non-Western to Western societies to debunk the notion that

science is uniquely a Western achievement, acknowledged a Western bias in science and noted that Western or European science was built largely from the scientific achievements of other cultures and civilisations. These included Egypt (Northeast Africa) and Mesopotamia (West Asia), Greece and the Hellenic world, Arabic and Islamic world, India and China (Asia), whose contributions preceded the scientific revolution in Europe, which subsequently propelled the 18th Century industrial revolution and emergence of the bourgeois class that advanced capitalist expansion to the level of imperialism and colonialism (Joseph, 1987; Onyewuenyi, 1993). Africa's scientific tradition may not have focused on developing advanced instruments of coercion and warfare like gunpowder and cannons, or an aspiration to dominate other territories; however, it did develop sophisticated agricultural, astronomical, medical and other forms of scientific knowledge long before the rise of the Roman Empire (Onyewuenyi, 1993). However, the possibility of modern science developing from non-European cultures was summarily blocked in the imperialist expansion of Europe. The same nations that have dominated the rest of the world through political, economic and cultural imperialism have also legitimised

their ideology, culture and value system as the established universal objective principles of science, while the values and cultural perspectives of other societies are regarded as merely subjective.

Early Western studies on Africa were influenced by both imperialism and racism. There has been a longstanding tendency to denigrate African culture and portray its traditional heritage as barbaric, savage, and incapable of civilisation. Beliefs, values, and practices that held African societies together were deemed irrational and inferior based on Western criteria of rationality, meaning, and truth. Most studies on Africa tended to be based on an epistemology of binary opposites, with the West representing the ideal society while Africa was portrayed as representing an earlier stage in the evolutionary trajectory of this ideal society. The tendency has been to impose concepts, theories, and conceptual schemes developed from European experiences on Africa. When social realities in Africa do not respond positively to solutions built on these alien

conceptual schemes, the explanation tends to be that African societies are resistant to modernisation. It took the works of some later anthropologists to

demonstrate that the bizarre beliefs and practices of the so-called "savages" had their own intrinsic rationality, which differs from Western criteria of rationality (Adie & Effenji, 2018). The idea of sociological relativism was used to emphasise the fact that all forms of knowledge are subject to contextual justification, since different people have different standards for determining what counts as knowledge as defined by their respective cultures. Just as Mazrui (2000) noted, culture functions as a lens through which reality is perceived and influences how people view themselves and their environment. This shows that knowledge is a product of culture, and any knowledge system that does not recognise the validity of a society's culture has little or no relevance for its progress and development. Accordingly, theories, concepts, and conceptual schemes that have no concrete referents in the cultural and social realities of a society are hardly relevant for studying and advancing the development of that society.

Politics of knowledge production and crisis of development in Africa

The notion of the politics of knowledge production underscores the tendency for knowledge production to be used as a

political instrument by the dominant class to advance its ideology and protect its interests within the prevailing social order (Marx & Engels, 1975). This means that knowledge production is an important instrument in power relations among social classes and nations, and this instrument is uniquely subtle in nature. The social role of knowledge production is usually tied to the vision and ideology of the dominant class, except where it becomes an instrument of revolution in the hands of one social class against another to upturn the existing social order. In Europe, for example, the 17th-century scientific revolution, which laid the foundation for the 18th-century industrial revolution, was in response to the capitalist expansionist agenda of the bourgeois class that replaced the feudal lords as the dominant class (Nnoli, 2003). In the case of Africa, colonialism is to modern Africa what the Industrial Revolution is to capitalist Europe. Just as the industrial revolution transformed the productive forces of feudal Europe in the wave of the emergence of the bourgeois (capitalist) mode of production, colonialism disrupted the natural development of Africa's indigenous productive forces in the course of capitalist penetration of Africa and

situated Africa in the periphery of global capitalist political economy (Ake, 1981).

Based on the imperial knowledge system, the postcolonial situation in Africa has been characterised by multiple forms of subordination: subordination of citizens to the state, subordination of the state to the Western bourgeois class and subordination of indigenous productive forces to the Western capitalist system. The implication of this situation is that a repositioning of Africa in the global political economy will require rethinking the knowledge system that reinforces this global marginal positioning. This is because no social order is easily replaced without rethinking the knowledge system that sustains it, and no new social order can be sustained without an appropriate supporting knowledge system. At independence, however, the class that took over the affairs of states in Africa preferred to retain the knowledge system that laid the intellectual foundation for Africa's subordination, instead of reinvigorating Africa's own traditional knowledge system. After independence, African leaders replaced the nationalist ideology with that of development, but lacked a coherent framework for achieving development. This gap in the idea of development of postcolonial

Africa was partly because the class that took over the affairs of the states was not an economic class, but purely a political class whose primary interest was controlling state power (Ake, 1996). Thus, the former colonial masters, now posing as development partners, stepped in to fill the gap with development paradigms encapsulated in the theory of modernisation. They portrayed development as modernisation, or in other words, Westernisation. The modernisation theory required Africa to deviate from its distinct traditional and cultural heritage to become like the West. The ideological bent of the development paradigm being sold to Africa was brazenly declared by Rustow (1960) in his *Stages of Economic Growth*, subtitled "*a Non-Communist Manifesto*" in an obvious case of using scientific research to shop for patronage in the Cold War ideological struggle between the Western and Eastern blocs.

A major problem in the crisis of the state in postcolonial Africa has been that state-building has been based on imported models founded on frameworks derived from foreign knowledge systems. The external importation of development and governance paradigms could be justified on the grounds that since the

state was imported, it was also expedient to import the accompanying ideologies as software or an operating system for the institutional hardware. Hence, the nationalist struggle for independence achieved a formal end of colonisation, but failed to transform the colonially inherited state. This led to the entrenchment of the colonality of the state since the knowledge system within which the colonial state was conceived, designed and deployed to subjugate and exploit Africa was not repudiated (Chatterjee, 1985; Arowosegbe, 2011). In situations where the imported models failed to meet the expectations of the people, there were hardly any serious attempts to explore indigenous alternatives. A good example is the chequered trajectory of democratisation experimentation in Africa. A global wave of liberalisation led to the replacement of military authoritarian regimes with civilian rule at the turn of the new millennium across Africa. It was easy for the military men in power to simply remove their *khaki* and put on *agbada* to pose as democrats (Ake, 2000). However, after more than two decades of democratisation, there has been little or nothing to show that democratic governance guarantees political accountability, economic development or

improved livelihood of the people. In several African countries like Niger, Mali, Senegal, Burkina Faso, Sudan and Guinea, there have been democratic reversals as the military has overthrown civilian regimes. Other African countries, including Nigeria, have also been on the throes of fragile and unstable democratic systems characterised by gross incapacity to perform the basic functions of government like provision of security, basic infrastructures, macroeconomic management, or at least the conduct of credible elections (Mo Ibrahim, 2025).

The postcolonial state operates within institutional structures that enable it to circumvent democratic constraints. Democracy has not been about the right of the people as citizens to choose their leaders, influence policy options and hold their leaders accountable; rather, it has more or less been a system of maintaining political stability for the implementation of neoliberal economic policies from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (Ake, 1996). Elections in postcolonial states in Africa are usually sponsored by development partners like the European Union (EU), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and United States Agency for International Development

(USAID), etc., whose interests are mainly the preservation of political stability in the neo-colonies, and not necessarily the deepening of democratic culture and rights of citizens to effectively choose their political destiny. Electoral outcomes that ostensibly subvert the will of the people are readily accepted and endorsed, as long as the emergent government commits to the preservation of political order, which protects Western capitalist interests in Africa (Ake, 2000; Adiate, 2023). Against this background, democracy in Africa becomes a form of legitimisation of authoritarian rule through periodic elections (whether free and fair or not), rather than the expansion of political space for social agency of citizens.

Part of the dynamics of citizenship is the ability of citizens to construct and reconstruct their political society by critically reflecting on and re-evaluating political processes and practices. However, the postcolonial phenomenon in Africa created a situation where the state is not amenable to constructive political inflections by citizens as agents of change in the dynamics of governance and development. The underlying principles upon which the postcolonial states are founded did not envisage

significant roles for the indigenous population as citizens, but as subjects (Mamdani, 2002). Rather, the overriding agenda was to establish political institutions that would ensure continued subordination of indigenous social classes and control of productive forces over an extended period, even after the end of formal colonisation (Davidson, 1992; Ahluwalia, 2001). The system of governance and development of the state has not been amenable to the constructive participation of citizens. The essence of citizenship in the postcolonial state in Africa has not been about enabling the people to exercise agency in the governance and development of the state, but has instead enabled a structural subordination of the people to authoritarian use of state power. The issue of the rights of citizens has been secondary to the preservation of the interests of the state and the regime in power in the service of the overriding interests of capitalism in Africa. State security apparatuses are primarily for the protection of the government in power, and not the protection of the lives and rights of citizens. The high-handedness of security agencies has resulted in widespread allegations of human rights abuses, leading to precarious state-citizen relations. In Nigeria, while state

security agencies have been grossly ineffective in confronting the multi-dimensional security challenges across the country, they appear to have a proclivity for inordinate use of force against citizens, with cases of the shooting of unarmed protesters in a bid to repress mass actions and suppress democratic rights. There is no evidence that the welfare and well-being of citizens are the *raison d'être* of the postcolonial state, reinforcing the notion that it is an instrument of domination of a few over the vast majority.

In all of these dysfunctions in the postcolonial state, there have not been serious attempts to explore local models of democratic governance through which many African societies governed themselves and held their leaders accountable long before colonial encounters disrupted the development of indigenous political structures and institutions. Local governments and traditional authorities that are supposed to provide the institutional framework for the sustenance of these indigenous models of governance have largely been captured by the postcolonial state, just like the colonial state used the indirect rule system to capture traditional political institutions and transformed

them into instruments for implementing the colonial agenda, enforcing the interests, principles, values and beliefs of the colonialists as the custom of the people (Mamdani, 2002).

The macroeconomic policy frameworks of postcolonial states are often externally predetermined and handed down to leaders who uncritically apply them, thereby perpetuating the subordinate role of Africa in the international political economy, including its position as a ready market for the export of industrial products, a source of cheap labour and raw materials, and a destination for the investment of surplus capital, resulting in social dislocations and worsened livelihood of citizens. The existence of a ready-made externally defined macroeconomic policy framework constrains successive governments and regimes, irrespective of the person or party in power. Despite all the paraphernalia of democratic government already put in place, citizens vote without truly choosing because a degree of "choicelessness" is already built into the system, such that whoever or whichever party emerges can only tinker around the margins of the hegemonic neoliberal policy framework. In a situation where the knowledge base of development is

not drawn from the local environment, development becomes an issue of external dependency, and citizens become experimental specimens for development packages, instead of drivers of development processes. According to Eurostat (2023), while Africa's main partner in trade in goods is the EU, manufactured goods dominate exports from the EU to Africa, and primary goods dominate the EU's imports from Africa. In 2021, 68% of goods exported from the EU to Africa were manufactured goods, while 65% of goods imported to the EU from Africa were primary goods (Eurostat, 2023). This pattern reflects a structurally unfavourable balance of trade between Africa and the EU. The same pattern persists in Africa's trade relations with China and the United States of America.

Conclusion and recommendations

Knowledge production in Africa reflects the dynamics of power relations and structural inequalities embedded in the core-periphery dichotomy of the world system, rooted in historical manifestations of imperial domination. Resource extractivism in the economic sector, where natural resources are exploited and exported as raw materials with little or no value addition, is complemented by the external

expropriation of intellectual resources, which undermines the production of authentic knowledge about Africa. Exogenous control of the means of economic production by the Western bourgeois class in collaboration with the indigenous political class reproduces forms of coloniality in knowledge production. Indigenous epistemic infrastructures are subordinated to Western epistemologies through externally controlled research institutions, funding and publishing, resulting in the pervasive commodification of knowledge within the global market system. Structural Adjustment Programmes and other forms of neoliberal policies, which emphasise reductions in government spending, ultimately led to political irresponsibility in which governments abdicate core social services of the state, including the funding of research and educational institutions, thereby making research vulnerable to external influence. This has led to a situation in which research on Africa is increasingly conducted in pursuit of the interests of the organisations that fund and sponsor research in Africa. This not only undermines the production of authentic knowledge about Africa that serves African interests but also hampers autochthonous transformation and

entrenches dependency in Africa's development trajectories. The state mediates global knowledge flows through fiscal structures and elite alliances, thereby shaping development paradigms in ways that privilege external interests over endogenous productive transformations.

To reconstruct the coloniality of knowledge production and development in Africa, there is a need to enhance the local content of knowledge through learning from the culture of the immediate environment. This requires a bottom-top process that connects the people in various urban slums and rural communities where knowledge based on lived experiences is generated daily. Educational curricula in African schools need to be functionally integrated into the African social and natural environments, which will enable learners to appreciate their environment and add value to it. Knowledge production should not be reduced to an abstraction that is solely based on foreign concepts and theories, which the learners will have to struggle to understand, perpetually seeking the validation of those whose social realities are the referents of the concepts and theories being studied. There is also a need for Africa to diversify

its sources of knowledge and be able to learn, not just from the West, but also from anywhere that has a relevant contribution to Africa's development. Further social transformations in Africa,

therefore, require a more eclectic knowledge production approach for a diversified knowledge base to reduce exploitative external dependence.

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