A Quest for Knowledge Democratization: Implications for Averting Africa's Knowledge Dependency

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to implicate Africa's knowledge (in)dependency by assessing African universities' knowledge production and dissemination gaps vis-à-vis indigenous knowledge, and constraints to- and opportunities for- knowledge democratization. A qualitative approach was employed to generate information by reviewing extant literatures and conducting interviews. The results have shown that there were constraints emanating from historical antecedents; ideology; Eurocentric and global North/West epistemic dominance; re-westernization designs, African resource, technology, and science limitations; and language barriers to participate in knowledge co- creation. As a result, African universities and intellectuals were not sensitive to the interests and needs of their research communities and subjects. Whereas there were opportunities to democratize knowledge, failure to expedite them catapulted the constraints/hurdles to reinforce power imbalance, to exacerbate the gaps/conflicts, and to sustain African Knowledge dependency. This, therefore, calls for revitalizing and reinvigorating concerted energies and talents to connect knowledge production to practical concerns of everyday life of the knowledge users and/or participants; and to engage in production and utilization of relevant, responsive, and competent knowledge responsive to methodological, epistemological, ontological, and socio-political realities.

Keywords: knowledge democratization, opportunities and constraints, participatory action research, knowledge dependency, African universities, indigenous knowledge

INTRODUCTION

The study dealt with knowledge democratization and its implications for averting Africa's knowledge dependency. The paper, therefore, outlines the conceptual and theoretical background, problem, purpose, and method of the study; results; discussions and conclusions; and recommendations. The discussions and conclusions analyzed the gaps/conflicts between African universities' knowledge production and dissemination, and local/indigenous knowledge; constraints to knowledge democratization; and opportunities for knowledge democratization have been discussed.

- **Conceptual and Conceptual Background**

The current global landscape of knowledge creation, preservation, dissemination, extension and application calls for empowering knowledge users in identifying, planning and implementing their respective agendas (Firdissa, 2009, Hall, 1992). This entails Knowledge democracy, which finds its roots in the works of Fals Borda (1979), Fals Borda and Rahman (1991), Freire (1985, 2005), Hall (1992), and de Sousa Santos (2007) (Seeley, McAteer, Sánchez, César & Kenfield, 2018). Community Based Research (CBR), Participatory Action Research (PAR), Ccritical feminist and Ccritical race scholarship movements, and different deliberative forums also had instrumental roles in advancing Knowledge democratization thoughts and debates.

Knowledge democracy for Seeley et al., (2018: 3), "addresses issues of how knowledge is generated, by

whom, how it is used, and for what purposes". The same source (p.14) further considers knowledge democracy as "… an approach to educational processes which recognize that there are many ways in which individuals and communities produce knowledge". Knowledge democracy recognizes the values and importance of a variety of forms of knowledge and knowledge production including academic knowledge, community knowledge in addition to other forms of knowledge such as storytelling, arts and literature (Seeley et al. 2018). For Tandon (1988), knowledge democracy is a search for epistemological justice and the recognition of pluralism.

Knowledge democracy is, therefore, an approach, a system, and a processes which recognizes many ways of knowledge production, and diversity of actors (dominant and non-dominant) holding relevant knowledge with no restrictions to its access, share, and use for decision-making and addressing important societal problems (*Bunders et al.,2010*; Seeley et al., 2018).

CBR, whose principal roots can be found in Latin America, Tanzania, India, and Canada, is an umbrella term that refers to different participatory approaches to knowledge production and dissemination with the purpose of addressing societal problems.

These include: action learning, action research, arts-based research, community action research, community based participatory research, community service learning, community-university research partnerships/engagement, collaborative/co-operative inquiry, indigenous research methodologies, knowledge democracy, knowledge mobilization, knowledge translation, organizational action research, PAR, participatory development, participatory evaluation, participatory research, participatory video, and science shops. (Tandon et al., 2016:302)

CBR has been informed by a number of critical disciplines and areas of research emanating from the liberatory critical traditions and emancipatory origins of participatory and/or transdisciplinary researches that produce knowledge of immediate relevance for solving complex societal problems (*Bunders et al., 2010* ; Glassman & Erdem, 2014). The aims of CBR are vividly expressed in the techniques and philosophy of PAR that is known for knowledge co-generation/co-creation; community inquiry and action; challenging hierarchies, power imbalances, and top-down design of development policies (Seeley et al., 2018; *Bunders et al., 2010*; Pant, 2014).

PAR differs from other forms of social inquiry due to three distinctive characteristics: i) its participatory character, ii) its democratic impulse, and iii) its aim to produce knowledge that is both useful and action-oriented (Seeley et al. 2018, & Schwandt, 1997). PAR is also dynamic, enduring, and goes beyond usual institutional boundaries by actively involving knowledge producers and users in generating knowledge relevant to all. Consequently, the term PAR is favored in current usage for any kind of research incorporating action and/or participation of the actors (Grange, 2001).

Citing Creswell (2013) and Creswell and Clark (2011), Kaushik and Walsh (2019) nindicate that participatory action research is conducted with an agenda of reform and empowerment with a focus of transforming the lives of socially marginalized populations, and is often associated with qualitative methods and rhetoric of advocacy and change.

The 1st World Symposium for PAR took place in 1977 in Cartagena (Seeley et al., 2018). By the 1980s, PAR movements advanced alternative ideas about 'development' that empower beneficiaries and the stakeholders to represent their cases in the stages of knowledge generation as well as its use. These ideas were perceptible within the works of critical feminist, and that of critical race scholarship movements that began in American law schools in the mid-to-late 1980s. Whereas the arguments put forward by feminist action researchers challenged alienated knowledge generation; critical race scholarship movements, advanced epistemic philosophies that used critical theory to examine society and culture as they related to

categorizations of race, law, and power (Reid & Gillberg, 2014; Haraway, 1988, Harding 1987, in Tandon et al., 2016).

The effects of these movements have resulted in changes in the meanings of both development and participation. Overtime the focus of participation has changed from effective and efficient ways of delivering development to ownership of development through active engagement, paying for developmental benefits, and the engagement and demand for accountability. Eventually, the meaning of development has changed from service delivery to means of empowerment and then to governance (Mohanty, 2006).

The movements have facilitated knowledge democratization thoughts and actions that have advanced the struggle for diversity of knowledge, plurality of players and scenarios, justice, peace, free and inclusive participations, and equality. At the heart of knowledge democratization is putting the less powerful at the center of the knowledge creation process, and moving people and their daily lived experiences of struggle and survival from the margins of epistemology to the center (Hall, 1992; Seeley et al., 2018). Knowledge democratization, therefore, deals with the production of, availability of, and access to knowledge by virtue of examining how: knowledge is produced and distributed in societies, to replace deficit or linear models of knowledge production, authority and economic growth emerge from it; and it eventually influences power relationships among the actors (Turnhout, 2010, cited in Seeley et al., 2018; Innerarity, nd).

Overall, knowledge democratization is all about reflecting on and transforming the very framework and processes of knowledge production itself, its perceptions and implicit aims, as well as its governance. The ultimate purpose of knowledge democratization is to empower and reward all the parties involved in and/or affected by the knowledge to be produced and/or utilized. This line of thought opposes the top-down approach: pushing knowledge to where it is needed or applied (Hauschild, Licht & Stein, 2001; Seeley et al. 2018).

- **The Problem**

The movements towards knowledge democratization have not been without historic and transitory impediments. These impediments have made African knowledge producers and users to depend on- and to be subservient to- deep-rooted hierarchies and dominant cultures. Africa's knowledge dependency resulted from three sources and/or consequences.

First, Western scholarship pertaining to Africa is more attuned to the dictates of the Western academy than to the needs and interests of Africans. Second, there are allegations that African universities and intellectuals are alienated from African communities and thus fail to achieve relevance. Third, the concepts and theories used to study Africa are drawn from non-African experiences and fail to aid in the understanding of African contexts (Matthews, 2010; Mignolo, 2011a). As Collyer (2018) hints, "…less is known about the inequalities of global academic knowledge production, and even a smaller amount about the nature of the publication industry upon which this production process depends" (P. 1).

African universities and intellectuals have, therefore, been drawing concepts and theories from non-African experiences in the efforts to study Africa. Consequently, they failed to mainstream knowledge production, utilization, and dissemination to the needs of their respective communities, and nations. This then has jeopardized possible interplay among scientific knowledge, politics and society in Africa. This eventually blurred Africa's feasible strategic directions for deepening engagements on knowledge democratization.

A quest for knowledge democratization by way of deterring Africa's knowledge dependency, therefore, signifies the need for indigenous knowledge production and dissemination. This in turn implies two scenarios. First, there is a need for proper, mutual interactions between Africa's universities and the dominant knowledge producers and/or Western-based scholarship concerning Africa. Second, there is an

outcry for African universities to consider indigenous knowledge, and produce relevant and responsive forms of knowledge that local communities can easily access and utilize. Both scenarios call for gauging knowledge democratization possibilities to curb hierarchies, inequalities and imbalances in knowledge production and utilization.

- **Purpose of the study**

The purpose of this study was to assess African universities' knowledge production and dissemination gaps vis-à-vis indigenous knowledge, constraints to- and opportunities for- knowledge democratization; and to implicate Africa's knowledge (in)dependency. To achieve the purpose, the following three questions have been formulated:

- What gaps/conflicts are there between knowledge production and dissemination in African universities, and local/indigenous knowledge?
- What are the constraints/hurdles within the movements of knowledge democratization?
- What opportunities are there for paving fertile grounds to democratize knowledge?

The first question has triggered inquiries into the difficulties to objectively and dispassionately discuss the gaps between knowledge production and dissemination in African universities and local/indigenous knowledge. The second question also prompted a look into the complexities of knowledge democracy approaches, experiences, and challenges in seeking alternatives to a monolithic knowledge enterprise. The third question has also initiated a quest for searching favorable scenes for the advancement of knowledge democratization movements, albeit the gaps and the constraints. By so doing, the study has sketched directional interplays among gaps between African universities' knowledge production and dissemination and local/indigenous knowledge, constraints to- and opportunities for- knowledge democratization in the way they influence one another, and affect Africa's knowledge (in)dependency (see Figure 1).

- **The Research Methodology**

This study employed a qualitative approach by reviewing extant literatures and conducting interviews. From the literature reviews, I have learnt that there are different world views and variations in the terminologies, frameworks, and antecedents in relation to knowledge democratization. I kept on being selective in picking up relevant ideas of interest, perspectives, and reports of different platforms so as to feed into the paper. Many of the sources I used to get the ideas were journal articles, books, revisions and communications related to the issue under discussion.

The reasons for the different world views and the variations, among others, could be due to the differences in time; place; and authors' perspectives, consciousness, experiences, and discipline specificities. The different world views and the variations in turn obscured efforts to understand knowledge democratization possibilities and to avert Africa's knowledge dependency.

Structured, semi-structured, and improvised interview questions related to the gap between knowledge production and dissemination; constraints/hurdles within the movements of knowledge democratization; and opportunities for knowledge democratization were posed to 7 professionals (one each from Anthropology, Linguistics, Psychology, Philosophy, and Sociology; and two from Education disciplines). Earlier, just five professionals from the first five disciplines had been interviewed. Later, two other professionals were added from Education following demanding comments from reviewers of the manuscript. The information collected during the interview process was supplemented with understanding from literature, personal reflections. With the purpose to maintain anonymity principle, the interviewees were given codes as: Int_1, Int_2, and Int_3…Int_7.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

This section deals with analysis and results regarding knowledge democratization movements synthesized by reviewing extant literatures, and by conducting interviews. In doing so, it follows a sequence of: gaps, inherent constraints, and opportunities within knowledge democratization movements.

- The gaps/conflicts between African universities' knowledge production and dissemination, and local/indigenous knowledge

Objective and dispassionate discussion of the gaps between knowledge production and dissemination in African universities and local/indigenous knowledge are difficult for three interconnected reasons: knowledge growth variations, unavailability of relevant and quality data, and subjectivity towards democratization of knowledge. First, the fact that the growth of scientific knowledge has divided the world into two- the one that generates knowledge and the other a passive recipient of the generated results- could have obscured African writers' and/or researchers' consciousness and awareness about Africa's knowledge dependency.

Second and partly emanating from the first is absence of reliable and dependable data which reflects the depth and magnitude of Africa's knowledge dependency. Third, the issue has ideological dimension and is open for subjective interpretations. Consequently, not all African researchers support democratization of knowledge and equally not all advocates of knowledge democracy are comfortable with the stances and practices of the researchers. Whereas some dominant writers disregard African realities, some African writers are also moved by 'not invented here syndrome'-vainly magnifying domestic endeavors to produce and disseminate knowledge. As a result, there has been unabated gaps between African universities' knowledge production and dissemination, and local and indigenous knowledge.

Related to absence of reliable and dependable data, one interview (Int_7) indicated that "inaccessibility of- and poor quality of available- research data hindered production of relevant knowledge, and obscured presence of any gap in knowledge production and utilization". He went on addressing the difficulty "…to get quality research data, baseline information, and relevant research infrastructure that have created imbalance between African universities' knowledge production and dissemination, and local/indigenous knowledge".

Basically, African countries lack the baseline scientific and research capacities and infrastructure required to collaborate on a more equitable footing with their partners in the developed countries (Jowi, 2012). It has been argued that Southern higher education and research institutions seem to enter research collaborations and partnerships primarily for the financial benefits that can be obtained (Ishengoma, 2016). As a result, some models from the developed world dominate Africa's knowledge production and utilization efforts (Firdissa, 2017). For instance, PAR was emerged as reaction to the dominance of positivist science in knowledge production. It has, therefore, remained the Western model of research for knowledge production and validation. The case in African context is epistemological dominance, cultural assimilation and inequitable distribution of resources of all sorts eventually putting Africans with the tension between universal claims of global science on the one hand and the claims to recover the African past on the other (Grange, 2001).

This tension in turn has resulted in overlooking the importance of considering the local communities as frontline partners instead of as mere objects. Other than securing data from the local communities, there is no conscious effort to engage communities in research agenda setting, implementation, monitoring and evaluation that could eventually lead to develop and utilize indigenous knowledge. One interviewee indicated that "university researchers go to communities just to solicit data or to get information, and/or to

disseminate any sort of knowledge or research produced at universities without engaging the communities" (Int$_6$). By implication the communities have been considered as objects of research agendas rather than as subjects and partners to engage in co-production of knowledge.

Furthermore, requested specifically to tell the gaps between African universities' knowledge production and dissemination, and local/indigenous knowledge, two interviewees indicated that knowledge produced in most cases disregards indigenous knowledge, cultures, and mores; and considers little of the livelihood of the local community, and does not base on local communities' values (Int$_6$, Int$_7$).

One interviewee from the Department of Anthropology (Int$_1$), nonetheless, tried to associate the case of moving and staying within the vicinity of the identified target population for any study with the purpose to learn their past and present conditions both culturally and biologically. This could be a typical case whereby people become subjects of research without being involved in research planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluation.

It has also been learnt from the interviews that many African universities have offices and officers for university-industry linkage, technology transfer, incubation centers, outreach, communality service, and similar issues. Two of the interviewees (Int$_2$, Int$_3$) hinted that there could be slight variations (from university to university) in possessing such offices and structural arrangements due to differences of focus. They further indicated that university-industry linkage, technology transfer, incubation centers, and outreach are common mainly in research intensive universities.

Whatever structural arrangements, nonetheless, the focus of any university researcher is to take his/her products to the users/consumers and/or to solicit information/data rather than engaging the users/consumers in research priority setting, knowledge co-creation and its utilization decisions vis-à-vis the local communities' indigenous knowledge. African universities as well as researchers, therefore, remain subservient to the epistemologies of the dominant world.

One interviewee argued that there has been an established dominance of the developed countries' epistemologies and methods over the African indigenous epistemologies and traditions in the process of PAR (Int5). He went on indicating that most of the African researchers are products of the Global North/West, and many of their research agendas are donor-driven. In support of this idea, Grange (2001) addresses three challenges for PAR processes in Africa: 1) how PAR processes could be liberated from being dominated by the industrialized countries' ways of knowing; 2) how indigenous ways of knowing might be adopted in PAR processes; and 3) what might serve as a conceptual framework for the industrialized countries' epistemologies and African indigenous knowledge to be performed together within PAR processes.

Furthermore, two interviewees (Int$_4$, Int$_5$) addressed that many of the African knowledge production schemes are borrowed wholesale from the developed countries. They may also be dictated by multilateral organizations without being adapted to African local contexts. Tanzania's 'Big Results Now' program (BRN), which is funded by external donors including the World Bank and the IMF is one example (Ishengoma, 2016). Basically, BRN was initiated following the Tanzanian president's visit (with his delegates) to Malaysia in 2012 to learn (from Malaysian experience) about the principles, methodology and techniques of a transformational government program with the purpose to achieve a middle-income country as per its Development Vision-2025. Following the visit, the Tanzanian Cabinet resolved to "adopt and customize the Malaysian BIG FAST RESULTS model to suit the Tanzanian environment" (Janus & Keijzer 2015: 6-7). The efforts, nonetheless, are not bearing fruits due to wholesale adaptation, starting some initiatives including education off on the wrong foot, corruption, rampant embezzlement and other maladies draining away the BRN returns (Ishengoma, 2016; Why, 2013).

Equally, it has been learnt that African universities barely produce relevant and responsive knowledge that the local community can easily access and make use. Matthews (2010) has the view that there were concerns on the relevance of the knowledge produced by Africanists (in African Studies). In the same vein, Asante (1995), and Mbembe (2001, cited in Matthews, 2010) indicate that African Studies have not taken seriously the perspectives and indigenous epistemologies of the African people and have not attempted to seek out and understand African explanations of the African experiences. Mathews (2010) has further argued that many Africanists are criticized for producing knowledge that is misleading, damaging accounts of the African experiences, and is useful in furthering their careers and in refining existing theories, but is not useful to those being studied. Inherent within this critics are the political effects that the knowledge generated in African Studies bear. As Mkandawire (1997) indicates knowledge generated in African Studies has profound political effects, and that in the history of African Studies, many of those political effects have been negative for Africa. As Mkandawire puts it:

Too often in our history the quest for knowledge of Africa has been motivated by forces or arguments that were not for the promotion of human understanding let alone the welfare of the Africans to reinforce preconceived prejudices, or [to master] instruments of domination of our societies.(p. 27)

Inherent within the political effects of the knowledge generated in African Studies is a call for an explicit political commitment beyond intellectual commitment. There is a need to decide the relevance of knowledge in relation to its target population who are beneficiaries and/or who are affected by the knowledge produced and utilized.

Overall, the observed knowledge production/dissemination gaps in African universities vis-à-vis local and indigenous knowledge deviate from the essence of democracy in particular and democratization of knowledge in general. In principle democratization of knowledge fights against neoliberal global capitalism of knowledge monopoly, the 'banking' concept of education, and mythicizing practices of the dominant elites and 'intellectual colonialism' that disconnect intellectual pursuits from the practical concerns of everyday life of participants (Freire, 1993). The observed state, therefore, entails that African universities and intellectuals stand sensitive to the interests and needs of their surrounding communities and to the communities they study. This calls for overcoming Western/North dominance over the needs and interests of Africans, and engaging in epistemic disobedience as a gate to decolonial options.

- **Constraints to Knowledge Democratization**

Our world is full of complex social experiences, and dichotomies such as academy versus community, mono-versus multi-lingualism, rational discourse versus embodied knowledge, theory versus practice, scientific knowledge versus community knowledge, and global view versus local experiences, and absolute truth versus the contextual factors (Seeley et al., 2028). Contained within these contrasts are contentious and dynamics of power, which in one way or another make knowledge democratization movement a complex and a challenging task. It is, therefore, essential to acknowledge the complexity of knowledge democracy approaches, and the challenges in seeking alternatives to a monolithic knowledge enterprise.

As Seeley et al. (2028) further indicates, within educational institutions these challenges include recognition of differing methodologies, open participation and structures to support equity in knowledge production and dissemination. From other perspectives, knowledge democracy is related to political challenges in global, regional and local levels. In this sense, researchers and educators can articulate and address issues such as persistent colonialism and the neoliberal reform agenda which reproduces social, cultural, economic and power asymmetries in education. (p.15)

Overcoming these dichotomies requires more reflections and adaptation of a mode of research such as transdisciplinary, which produces knowledge of immediate relevance for solving complex societal problems. The academia, however, are the place where knowledge production still mainly takes place. It

does neither encourage nor reward transdisciplinary research nor appreciates the added value it can bring for enhancing the problem-solving capacity of societies. University curricula and careers still mostly proceed along lines of disciplinary specialization (*Bunders et al., 2010*). This in turn sustains the existing- and/or breads new constraints to knowledge democratization, which sooner or later contributes for Africa's knowledge dependency.

The constraints to knowledge democratization bear four features. In the first place, it may not be easy to break the practices of neoliberal global capitalism, and the deep-rooted positivist paradigm both of which disconnect the production of knowledge from the reach of its users by viewing knowledge as predictable and provable through testing or sensing following 'traditional forms of scholarship' and/or 'traditional research (McNiff, 2002; Wisker, 2008; Firdissa, 2017).

Second, the "problems of knowledge are political issues and political problems are also, to some extent, cognitive problems" (Innerarity, nd: 2-3). The nature of knowledge, our conception of science, and the meaning of political consulting have changed significantly causing blurring limits among science, politics, and society. Consequently, the interplay between science/knowledge, and political power/political decision making and society is not straightforward. Science might not provide politics with objective knowledge on which sound decisions can be made, supported and legitimized with proof. Though science provides knowledge to a society, society's readiness to respond to science is debatable. Equally, a great dilemma of contemporary democracy is pressurizing decision makers to adopt their decisions taking into account available scientific knowledge. Democratic legitimacy of these decisions, however, is contentious (Nowotny, Scott and Gibbons, 2004).

Third, failures of cognition, partly influenced by external and internal environments and partly rooted in an inadequate organization of knowledge hamper knowledge democratization efforts. As Innerarity (nd, P. 1) indicates, "…our main collective problems are not a question of public will, or of lack of determination, or immorality; they must also be considered failures of cognition". These failures are fiascoes caused by environments-and/or inadequate organization of knowledge from the point of view of its democratic legitimacy.

Fourth, researchers lack commitment to fully recognize the critical voices of the communities on their agendas. They do not directly involve the communities in determining the directions and goals of change as subjects rather than objects (Evans et al, 2016). Such lack of commitment comes from researchers' little to no empowerment to assertively take ownership of standing answerable to roles and involving communities to participate into their agendas. Moreover, researchers hardly problematize their practices, and de-absolutizing taken for granted approaches and ideals to propel democratization of knowledge.

Requested to tell the likely constraints in the knowledge democratization movements, two interviewees (Int_6, Int_7) listed the following to be among the bottlenecks to materialize knowledge democratization movements in Africa

- Eurocentric and westernization cultures,
- Global North/West epistemic dominance,
- African Resource limitations to participate in knowledge co- creation forums,
- African technology, and science limitations,
- Attitudinal problems and "not invented here syndrome" of some African elites to adopted knowledge produced somewhere,
- Lack of collegial environment in some African HEIs,
- Language barriers, and
- Poor research data quality.

Remarkably, "Global North epistemic dominance can suppress 'peripheral' theoretical debates and methodological approaches, and can limit Global South's contributions in discussions and knowledge co-creation endeavors (Seeley et al., 2018: 4). The authors went on enquiring how to "…converge different theories, epistemic approaches, multiple languages, and symbols in an effort to promote and support knowledge democratization".

The tenets of *Eurocentric* and *westernization* cultures and dominances are evident in *re-westernization* designs through European origin concepts such as 'modernity' and 'postmodernity', epistemic breaks and paradigmatic changes (Mignolo, 2011b). Cognizant of the Eurocentric and westernization epistemic dominance, Seeley et al. (2018:16) indicate the importance of recognizing and creating "alternatives to the cultural legacy and epistemic violence from traditional and Eurocentric points of view expressed in some methodologies, theories, and educational approaches". This has resulted in challenging *re-westernization* designs through *decoloniality* project that defines and motivates the emergence of a global political society delinking from *re-westernization* and *de-westernization*. As Mignolo (2011b: 280) points out, today three scenarios are seen in which global futures will unfold: 1) *Re-westernization and the unfinished project of Western modernity, 2) De-westernization and the limits of Western modernity, and 3) Decoloniality and the emergence of the global political society delinking from re-westernization and de-westernization.*

Practically, nonetheless, decoloniality project cannot be simple and straight forward as things are complex, ambiguous, mixed, changing, and constraining knowledge democratization movements. Our age, therefore, calls for searching, identifying, and using available opportunities to overcome the constraints to knowledge democratization movements.

- **Opportunities for Knowledge Democratization**

Our age is witnessing a favorable scene for the advancement of knowledge democratization movements. We are living in a dynamic world characterized by interconnectedness, entrepreneurial ventures, burgeoning technology, and a shared common sense of purpose. These, in one way or another, heighten interests for knowledge democracy along with the emerging political commitments at global, national, regional and local levels and in many social institutions. For instance, recent interests that have been witnessed in many of the African Studies' literatures are part of the political commitments. They, for Matthews (2010), include producing relevant knowledge about Africa by way of exposing and eliminating exploitation, oppression, and marginalisation of the continent and its peoples. This is a revitalized recognition after the 1960's and the 1970's social movements and the liberatory critical traditions and emancipatory origins of PAR counter to the dominance of positivist science in knowledge production (Glassman & Erdem, 2014; Grange, 2001). This is part of the politics of knowledge, which deals with empowerment and commitment of the knowledge users and producers to social justice by ensuring the relevance of knowledge, and standing responsive, answerable, and competent to deal with the challenging times and conditions of black people in Africa, in the United States, and in the whole black world (Matthews, 2010).

The growing recognition of the politics of knowledge can, therefore, be an opportunity for democratization of knowledge production and utilization. If such an opportunity is not utilized politically, it turns out to be gaps/conflicts and constraints. This is because knowledge can never be politically neutral. All knowledge and its production have political effects. Political processes, therefore entail the need for producing knowledge that will have different effects on people with very different political ideologies and agendas. By implication, any attempt to make knowledge relevant to a particular societal group requires that critical attention be given to the knowledge itself, to reveal the underpinning political philosophy and perspectives informing the particular body of knowledge for people and by people.

This in turn challenges power imbalance and deep rooted outlooks constituting knowledge production and utilization anomalies, practices of indoctrination, mythicizing practices of the dominant elite, the domain for

academics in their ivory towers, and isolation of knowledge production from users. Such recognition has a power to consider different level stakeholders in planning, implementing, and assessing knowledge production and utilization endeavors. This boosts the interests of all stakeholders to advance answerability, rule of law, and community engagement movements leading to deliver relevant results as part of social justice.

Moreover, a similar move has been witnessed to challenge the practices that disconnect knowledge production from utilization. This advances the idea that education and knowledge for real life contexts are critical to ascertain liberation of the mind of the parties involved in- and affected by- the knowledge produced. Such a move has resulted in the idea that social change needs to happen from the grassroots, the communities, the marginalized, rural populations, and engage in conscientization in which the oppressed become aware of and critically analyze the conditions of their own oppression (Freire, 1970; Fals Borda & Rahman, 1991, cited in Tandon et al., 2016).

The ideas and ideals advanced along with participatory and transdisciplinary research have also created awareness of the ways in which people get involved in knowledge production as opposed to the practices that dictated or limited knowledge by existing power structures. This, along with the political activism accompanying the social movements of the 1960s and the 1970s, sparked a variety of PR projects by North American social scientists. John Gaventa, for instance, investigated political and economic oppression in Appalachian communities and the grassroots' efforts to challenge the status quo (Pant, 2014; Fals Borda, 1987, in Tandon et al., 2016). Recognition of the oppression and the efforts to challenge the status quo were significant to initiate mechanisms and approaches to produce knowledge that is useful and relevant to the specific community. This calls for empowering knowledge producers and users including the marginalized populations through knowledge co-production (Tandon et al., 2016; Seeley et al., 2018).

The cumulative effect of the movements and the thoughts has advanced pragmatic practices for engaging the community in their affairs. As a result, universities were pushed to open their doors to the surrounding communities and to the communities they study to engage in knowledge co-production. More often than before, universities have become answerable to the public-to help the community access, make use of, own and extend relevant knowledge and skills at their disposal.

Our age is also witnessing expansion of higher education institutions in different parts of the world. This has come along with the demand to prioritize research agendas, to devise strategies of soothing the likely effects of globalization, to deliberate on- and engage in- knowledge sharing, and to consider (in research agendas) democratic and human rights stipulated in constitutions of different countries. For instance, FDRE (1995, Article 29) has stipulated seven points under: *Right of Thought, Opinion and Expression*. Of the points therein, the *right for freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, and access to information of public interest* (pp. 9-10) are some of the democratic rights that create possibilities for exercising the rights. Moreover, the document presents:

In the interest of the free flow of information, ideas and opinions which are essential to the functioning of a democratic order, the press shall, as an institution, enjoy legal protection to ensure its operational independence and its capacity to entertain diverse opinions (P.10).

Though the effort to include media freedom in the Constitution alone may not guarantee and directly lead to the actualization of knowledge democratization, it with similar constitutional provisions, contributes to pave fertile grounds for exercising democratic and human rights as a precursor for democratization of knowledge in Ethiopia in particular and in other parts of the world in general.

DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

This article has assessed the gaps/conflicts between African universities' knowledge

production/dissemination, and local/indigenous knowledge; constraints to-, and opportunities for- knowledge democratization; and has implicated Africa's knowledge (i)dependency. A qualitative approach was employed to generate information by reviewing extant literatures and conducting interviews.

The results have shown that there are: i) gaps between knowledge production/dissemination, and local/indigenous knowledge; ii) hurdles within the democratization of knowledge movements; and iii) (lost) opportunities for democratization of knowledge. Whereas the gaps and the constraints are explicit shortfalls, failure to effectively expedite the available opportunities for knowledge democratization heightened Africa's knowledge dependency.

Notably, knowledge growth variations, unavailability of relevant and quality data, and subjectivity towards democratization of knowledge have prohibited to make objective and dispassionate discussion of the gaps between knowledge production/dissemination in African universities, and local/indigenous knowledge. This breads knowledge dependency and deviations from the essence of democracy. Democracy deals with the principle of equality of right, opportunities, treatments, and/or the practices of this principle (Collins English Dictionary). Democracy for *Bunders et al. (2010*:149) focuses on "involving non-dominant actors" in knowledge production/dissemination endeavors. Seeley et al (2018:16) also indicates that democracy relates to "reducing the effects of colonialism and neoliberalism, which results in different communities, knowledge, and methodologies being excluded in educational institutions".

The results, nonetheless, show that African universities and intellectuals are not sensitive to the interests and needs of their surrounding communities and to the communities they study. Western dominance over their needs and interests prevailed. Consequently, the concepts and theories used to study Africa are drawn from non-African experiences. Consequently, epistemic disobedience as a gate to *decolonial* option, has become the last resort for Africa.

The fact that we are living in a complex and dichotomous world make knowledge democratization movement a complex and a challenging task. This in turn sustains the constraints to knowledge democratization, which sooner or later contributes for Africa's knowledge dependency. The constraints stem from the 1) the practices of neoliberal global capitalism, and the deep-rooted positivist paradigm both of which disconnect the production of knowledge from the reach of its users; 2) dubiousness of the interplay between science/knowledge, and political power/political decision making–leaving great dilemma and contested views towards democratic legitimacy; and 3) lack of commitment to fully recognize and involve the communities in determining the directions and goals of change as subjects rather than objects.

Dominantly, Eurocentric cultures and Global North/West epistemic dominance; African Resource, technology, and science limitations; some African elites' attitudinal problems; lack of collegial environment in some African HEIs; language barriers; poor research data quality; and *re-westernization* designs are among the bottlenecks to materialize knowledge democratization movements in Africa.

The fact that our age is characterized by a world of interconnectedness, entrepreneurial ventures, burgeoning technology, and a shared common sense of purpose heightens interests for knowledge democracy along with the emerging political commitments and the politics of knowledge, and calls for empowerment and commitment of the knowledge users and producers to social justice. This propels: 1) challenging power imbalance and deep rooted outlooks, and the practices of isolating knowledge production from users; 2) boosting the interests of all stakeholders to advance answerability, relevance of knowledge, responsiveness to needs, rule of law, and community engagement movements leading to address challenging times and conditions of their respective communities in particular and that of the global population in general; and 3) expediting expansions of HEIs, the tenets of participatory and transdisciplinary research, and the enshrined democratic and human rights for knowledge co-production purposes.

The observed constraints exacerbate the gaps, dwarf the possibilities of expediting available opportunities,

and sustain African Knowledge dependency. The gaps emanate from the supremacy of the developed countries' epistemologies and traditions over the African indigenous epistemologies. This is due to the fact that our social world is characterized by injustice, exploitation, political and economic domination, and inequitable distribution of resources worldwide (Grange, 2001).

The gaps between African universities' knowledge production and dissemination and local/indigenous knowledge, constraints to-, and opportunities for- knowledge democratization have interplays in the way they influence one another, and affect knowledge (in)dependency. The interplay among the variables can be seen from Figure 1 (see Appendix 1).

As can be seen from Figure 1, the arrows between: gaps and constraints (A), constraints and knowledge dependency (G), gaps and knowledge dependency (H), constraints and lost opportunities (F), opportunities and lost opportunities (E), and lost opportunities and knowledge dependency are unbroken lines and two way. This is because the constraints widen the gaps (A), result in lost opportunities (F), and sustain the existing- and bread new knowledge dependency (G). The gaps, lost opportunities, and Knowledge dependency also add back into the constraints. The gaps also bred knowledge dependency.

Available opportunities to democratize knowledge also have indirect and covert influence on the constraints. The arrow (N) from opportunities to constraints is, therefore, a broken line. Failures to expedite the available opportunities/Lost opportunities turn into constraints and exacerbate Africa's knowledge dependency. On the other hand, expedited opportunities result in knowledge independency. Equally, knowledge independency complements up the opportunities. The arrow (C) between opportunities and knowledge independency is, thus, unbroken line and, back and forth.

Moreover, Africa's knowledge dependency has resulted in the observed gaps between knowledge production and dissemination, and local realities, which in turn triggered the need for knowledge democratization. There is no direct relationship between knowledge dependency and opportunities for democratizing knowledge, albeit lost opportunities (E) contributes to knowledge dependency (M).

Finally, the gaps between African universities' knowledge production and dissemination and local/indigenous knowledge; constraints to knowledge democratization; and opportunities for knowledge democratization; knowledge dependency; and lost opportunities have weak linkages with knowledge democracy, and yet they have indirect and covert influences standing as rationales to think and act for knowledge democracy. A materialized knowledge democracy can also have repercussions to averting gaps, constraints, and lost opportunities and expedite for knowledge democratization purposes. That is why the arrows (D, I, J, K, & L) are broken, but back and forth.

Implied within the interplays among the variables are methodological, epistemological, ontological, and socio-political intents. The methodological intents deal with how the knowledge subjects and objects understand and do their practices by opening opportunities for stakeholders, and solving their practical problems following the processes of action research. Methodology in action research is characterized by a continuing effort to closely interlink, relate and confront action and reflection, to mirror upon one's conscious and unconscious doings in order to develop one's actions, and to act soberly in order to develop one's knowledge and skills (Firdissa, 2017).

The epistemological intent deals with how the knowledge subjects and objects come to know the origins, nature, methods, limitations, and validity of their knowledge and beliefs. In this line of thought, the nature of knowers, the legitimacy of knowledge, the kinds of things to be known and by whom, the way knowledge is possible, and scope of knowledge beyond the information provided by the senses (McNiff, 2002; Noffke & Somekh, 2009; Firdissa, 2017) are implied therein the results. This goes with the intents of knowledge democratization which addresses the prevailing politics of knowledge. In Mignolo's (2011b) words, the "theo- and ego-politics of knowledge was grounded in the suppression of sensing and the body and of its

geo-historical location" (274-275). The prevailing politics of knowledge shows that the dominant epistemology (imperial epistemology) is claiming universality. This epistemology has been grounded on theological (Renaissance) and egological (Enlightenment) politics of knowledge (*Ibid.* P. 274).

The ontological intents deal with how the knowledge subjects and objects see themselves, basic reality, human nature, free will and determinism, and personal and collective values and faith within the knowledge democratization process and living practices. Africa's knowledge subjects and objects are sensing that the prevailing world politics of knowledge has put them as second-class. Their awareness has come with the efforts made by the epistemologically dominant part "…to maintain the enunciative privilege of the Renaissance and Enlightenment European institutions, men and categories of thought" (Mignolo, 2011b: 275).

Africa's knowledge subjects and objects have two choices: either accept their inferiority (to accept the humiliation and assimilate to either rewesternization or dewesternization) or make an effort to demonstrate that they are human beings equal to those who placed them as second-class. Current trends show that the second option has been chosen and resulted in border thinking, which is the epistemic singularity of any decolonial project (Mignolo, 2011b).

Border thinking/sensing/doing and decoloniality is the road toward advancing the claims and growing influence of the global political society. Decoloniality project for Mignolo (2011b) deals with defining and motivating the emergence of a global political society delinking from rewesternization and dewesternization. Decoloniality requires epistemic disobedience, for border thinking is by definition thinking in exteriority, in the spaces and time that the self-narrative of modernity invented as its outside to legitimize its own logic of coloniality (*Ibid*).

Finally, the socio-political intents deal with what the knowledge subjects and objects hope to achieve in the democratized knowledge environments. Knowledge environments can be shaped by the state and the market, which in turn depend on the citizens and the consumers- both of which form civil and political society (Mignolo, 2011a). Democratized knowledge environment with empowered civil and political society is a fertile ground for educational knowledge both. Educational knowledge, which is mediated by knowledge democratization and living knowledge is a practical, experiential, and value-based form of knowledge. It is founded on *reflective rationality* as opposed to the abstract and propositional form of knowledge that is founded on *technical rationality* (Schon, 1983; McNiff, 2002; Firdissa, 2017). The interplay among the three variables (knowledge democratization, living knowledge, and educational knowledge) can be represented in Figure 2 (See Appendix 2).

Each of the variables have direct and reciprocal effects on one another. Knowledge democratization and living knowledge have direct relationships and reciprocal influences on one another. The two also mediate the conduct and practicality of educational knowledge. Educational knowledge in turn feeds back into both knowledge democratization and living knowledge.

The quest for knowledge democratization calls for replacing the former term *application* by *engagement*. Whereas the notion of *application* signifies that knowledge is produced somewhere (such as at universities) and goes for application at communities, the idea of engagement suggests that universities and community members collaborate in a way that allows for mutual beneficial influence (Matthews, 2010).

RECOMMENDATIONS

On the basis of the discussions and conclusions made so far, the following recommendations have been given.
- African countries have to liberate themselves from knowledge dependency and the traditional garb of authority that disconnects knowledge production from the practical concerns of users.

- The knowledge producers and users should note that genuine development comes when local people themselves represent their cases in the stage of knowledge generation as well as its use. In doing so, they should value their indigenous knowledge comprising of their history, culture, language, and customs as developed in direct response to their political, social, traditional, economic, physical, developmental and environmental realities.
- Africa universities should stand answerable, responsive, and sensitive to the interests and needs of the parties involved in and/or affected by the knowledge they produce.
- Industrialized countries, along with African countries, should explore on how the industrialized countries' knowledge epistemologies and African indigenous knowledge traditions can coexist and support each other rather than one dominating the other.

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APPENDIX

Appendix 1: Figure 1: Interplay among Constraints, Gaps, Opportunities, and knowledge (in)dependency vis-à-vis knowledge democracy
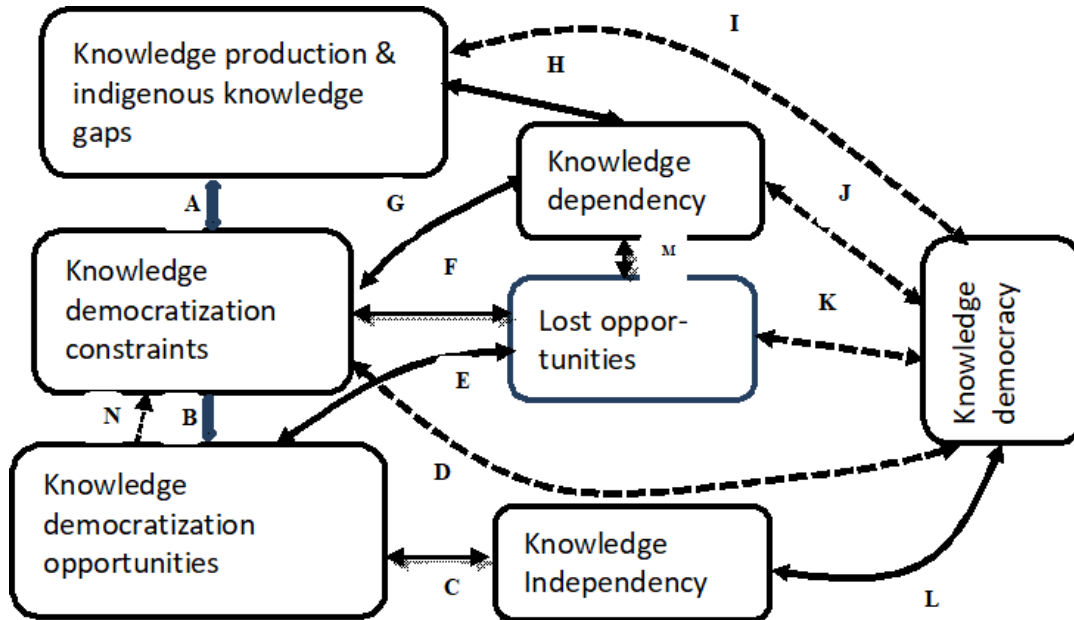

Figure 1: Interplay among Constraints, Gaps, Opportunities, and knowledge (in)dependency vis-à-vis knowledge democracy

Appendix 2: Figure Reciprocity among knowledge democratization, living knowledge and educational knowledge
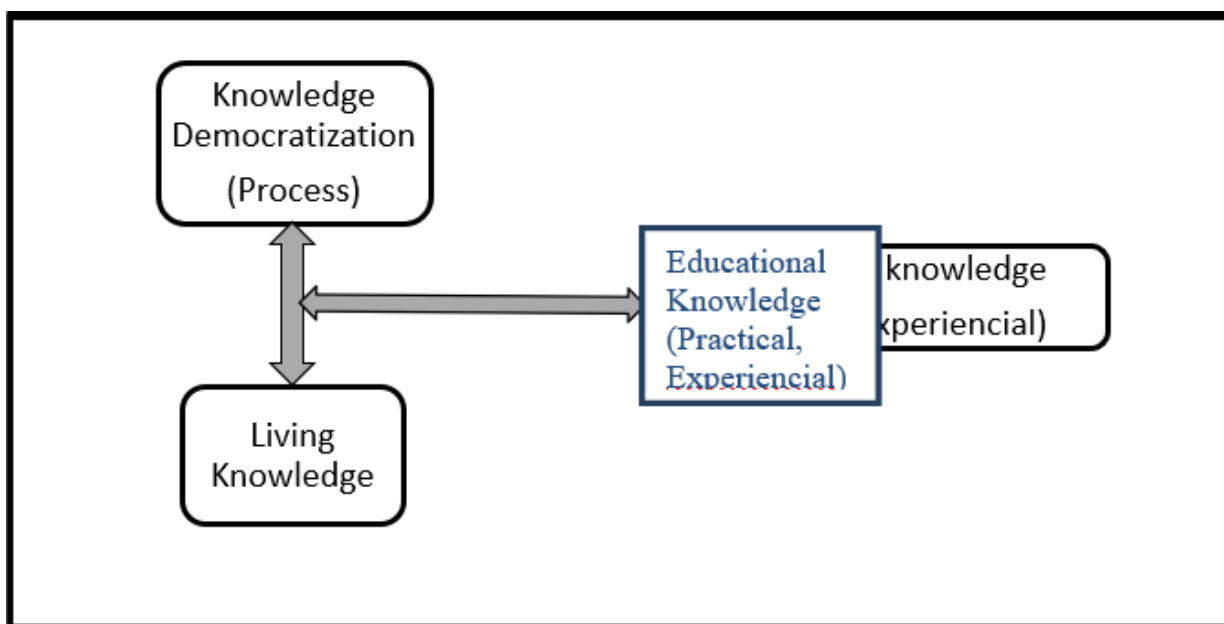

Figure 2: Reciprocity among knowledge democratization, living knowledge and educational knowledge