

Epistemological Constraints and Methodological Futures

A Comparative Analysis of African Studies Research in the Central African Republic (2000–2026)

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ABSTRACT

Research within the field of African Studies, particularly when conducted on the continent, faces distinct epistemological and methodological challenges. The Central African Republic represents a critical yet under-examined case, where protracted instability intersects with complex knowledge production dynamics. This comparative study aims to systematically analyse the dominant epistemological frameworks and methodological practices employed in African Studies research focused on the CAR. It seeks to identify constraints and evaluate emerging methodological innovations that could shape future research trajectories. The study employs a comparative document analysis of a purposive sample of peer-reviewed journal articles, research reports, and doctoral theses. A structured coding framework was applied to analyse epistemological orientations, methodological designs, and author institutional affiliations. Analysis reveals a pronounced reliance on external epistemological frameworks, with over 70% of sampled works applying theoretical models developed outside the continent with minimal contextual adaptation. A significant thematic finding is the predominance of crisis and conflict narratives, which often marginalise analyses of everyday resilience and endogenous development processes. The research landscape is characterised by a persistent epistemological dependency that limits the generation of contextually grounded knowledge. However, nascent shifts towards participatory and decolonial methodologies indicate a potential pathway for more emancipatory research praxis. Funders and academic institutions should prioritise grants for methodological training in participatory action research and indigenous knowledge documentation. Journal editorial boards should adopt policies encouraging epistemological reflexivity in submitted manuscripts. epistemology, methodology, knowledge production, decolonial research, participatory methods, conflict-affected research This paper provides the first systematic, comparative mapping of epistemological and methodological trends in African Studies research concerning the CAR, introducing a novel analytical framework for assessing epistemic positioning in conflict-affected contexts.

Keywords: *Epistemology, Methodology, African Studies, Central African Republic, Research Constraints, Comparative Analysis, Postcolonial Scholarship*

Article Highlights

- Systematic mapping reveals persistent epistemological dependency in CAR-focused research.
- Crisis narratives dominate, marginalizing analyses of everyday resilience and endogenous development.
- Nascent shifts toward participatory and decolonial methodologies indicate pathways for emancipatory praxis.
- The study introduces a novel analytical framework for assessing epistemic positioning in conflict-affected contexts.

Editorial Implications

Journal editorial boards should adopt policies encouraging epistemological reflexivity in submitted manuscripts to foster contextually grounded knowledge production.

This paper provides the first systematic, comparative mapping of epistemological and methodological trends in African Studies research concerning the CAR.

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