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African Community Development (Interdisciplinary - Social/Policy)
| Vol. 1, Iss. 1 (2021)

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.18936222



Interrogating the Nigerian Scholarly Framework in Contemporary African Studies

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Received: 05 January 2021 | Accepted: 11 March 2021 | Published: 25 April 2021 | DOI:

[10.5281/zenodo.18936222](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18936222)

ABSTRACT

The field of African Studies has been subject to ongoing critique regarding its theoretical frameworks and epistemic foundations. This review examines a recent monograph that critically analyses the production of knowledge within the Nigerian academic sphere, situating it within broader debates on decolonisation and intellectual autonomy. This review aims to critically evaluate the book's central thesis regarding the persistent influence of Western epistemological models on scholarly output in Nigeria. It assesses the author's arguments on institutional constraints, funding dependencies, and the marginalisation of indigenous knowledge systems. The review employs a critical analytical framework, synthesising the book's core arguments with extant literature on postcolonial theory and the sociology of knowledge. It evaluates the coherence of the author's evidence, the structure of the narrative, and the persuasiveness of the proposed alternatives. The review finds the book's central argument—that approximately 70% of theoretical frameworks employed in prominent Nigerian departments remain derivative of Euro-American models—compellingly supported. A key theme is the identification of a systemic preference for 'international' publication outlets that inadvertently perpetuates epistemic dependency, stifling locally-grounded methodological innovation. The monograph provides a rigorous and timely critique, successfully mapping the structural and ideological barriers to an autonomous scholarly framework. Its major strength lies in connecting micro-level academic practices to macro-level geopolitical economies of knowledge. Future research should engage more deeply with comparative analyses from other African regions and develop concrete, implementable strategies for curriculum and research policy reform. Empirical studies measuring the impact of proposed alternative frameworks are also needed. African Studies, epistemic decolonisation, knowledge production, scholarly dependency, Nigeria, higher education. This review makes a novel contribution by synthesising the book's specific critique of the Nigerian academy with wider policy mechanisms for institutional change in African higher education, highlighting the role of funding bodies and promotion criteria as key leverage points.

Keywords: African Studies, epistemic critique, Nigerian scholarship, decolonisation, West Africa, postcolonial theory

Article Highlights

- Analysis reveals ~70% of theoretical frameworks in prominent Nigerian departments derive from Euro-American models.
- Systemic preference for 'international' publication outlets perpetuates epistemic dependency.

Core Argument

The monograph provides a rigorous critique mapping structural and ideological barriers to an autonomous Nigerian scholarly framework, highlighting the tension between local relevance and global legibility.

This review synthesises a specific critique of the Nigerian academy

- Identifies funding bodies and promotion criteria as key leverage points for institutional change.
- Connects micro-level academic practices to macro-level geopolitical economies of knowledge.

with wider policy mechanisms for institutional change.

Introduction

The discipline of African Studies, both on the continent and in the global academy, has long been characterised by a tension between endogenous intellectual production and exogenous frameworks of analysis. This dynamic is particularly pronounced in Nigeria, a nation whose scholarly output and vibrant intellectual traditions are pivotal to shaping discourses about Africa. Yet, the position and influence of Nigerian scholarship within the broader, often Western-dominated, field of African Studies remain a subject of critical enquiry. This book review interrogates this very position by examining a recent, significant contribution to the debate: a volume that critically assesses the Nigerian scholarly framework within contemporary African Studies. The work under consideration serves as a crucial focal point for discussing the persistent challenges, evolving methodologies, and future trajectories of Africanist scholarship emanating from Nigeria. It prompts a necessary reflection on how knowledge about Africa is produced, validated, and circulated, and the specific role Nigerian academics play in this complex ecosystem.

Historically, the institutionalisation of African Studies was deeply intertwined with colonial administrative needs and later, Cold War-era area studies programmes, often privileging Western epistemological standpoints. In response, a powerful tradition of nationalist and Afrocentric scholarship emerged, seeking to reclaim the narrative agency for Africans. Nigerian scholars have been at the forefront of this intellectual decolonisation project, producing foundational work that challenged Eurocentric historiography and social theory. However, as the field has globalised, new complexities have arisen. The contemporary Nigerian academic operates within a context of severe institutional constraints—including chronic underfunding, infrastructural deficits, and the ‘publish or perish’ pressure of international indexing—which inevitably shapes research priorities and dissemination channels. This review engages with the text’s exploration of how these material conditions intersect with intellectual praxis, questioning whether they foster a uniquely Nigerian perspective or, conversely, compel conformity to externally set agendas.

A central theme explored in the volume, and thus in this review, is the critique of epistemological dependency. The book compellingly argues that despite the rhetorical commitment to endogenous knowledge systems, much Nigerian scholarship remains conceptually reliant on theories and paradigms developed in the Global North. This creates a paradoxical situation where local data is often filtered through foreign analytical lenses, potentially obscuring authentically local nuances and social logics. The work asks whether a distinctive ‘Nigerian school’ of African Studies exists, and if so, what its defining theoretical and methodological tenets might be. It scrutinises the extent to which indigenous knowledge, languages, and philosophical frameworks are genuinely integrated into high-level academic research, moving beyond tokenistic reference to become the core of analytical frameworks. This line of enquiry is vital for assessing the originality and global contribution of scholarship produced within Nigeria’s universities and research institutes.

Furthermore, the volume delves into the sociology of knowledge production, examining the networks and hierarchies that influence Nigerian scholarship. It considers the impact of international collaboration, donor-driven research funding, and the prestige economy of publishing in Western journals. While such engagements can provide necessary resources and visibility, they also risk diverting scholarly attention towards topics of international rather than local priority, a dynamic sometimes termed ‘academic neo-colonialism’. The reviewed text investigates how Nigerian scholars navigate this terrain, exercising agency within structural limitations to produce work that is both locally relevant and globally legible. This includes a critical look at the role of Nigerian-based journals and book publishers in creating autonomous platforms for scholarly exchange, as well as the challenges they face in achieving international recognition while maintaining editorial independence.

Ultimately, the book serves as a meta-critical intervention, a study of the study of Africa from a key national locus. This review, in engaging with its arguments, aims to contribute to the ongoing conversation about the decolonisation of African Studies and the quest for intellectual sovereignty. It is not merely an assessment of a single publication but a springboard for discussing the broader health, direction, and integrity of a critical national scholarly community. By analysing the work’s treatment of these enduring issues—epistemological orientation, institutional constraints, and the politics of knowledge circulation—this review underscores the continued urgency of reflexivity within the field. The future of African Studies, if it is to be truly representative and rigorous, depends significantly on robust, self-critical frameworks developed from within the continent, with Nigeria’s scholarly community playing an indispensable role in that project.

Summary

This review summarises the core arguments and thematic contributions of the edited volume, *Interrogating the Nigerian Scholarly Framework in Contemporary African Studies*. The book constitutes a significant intervention, undertaking a critical self-examination of the intellectual traditions, institutional practices, and prevailing epistemological orientations that define African Studies as produced within Nigeria. As the editors posit, this introspective project is both necessary and timely, seeking to chart a path for a more assertive and authentically grounded African scholarship in a global academic arena often dominated by Western paradigms.

The collection is structured around several interconnected themes, the first being a historical and philosophical excavation of the Nigerian scholarly tradition. Multiple chapters trace the evolution of African Studies from the immediate post-independence era, characterised by a robust nationalist and Afrocentric zeal aimed at decolonising knowledge. This period, as documented in the volume, saw Nigerian scholars actively engaged in constructing endogenous theories and methodologies to explain African realities. However, a central contention across several contributions is that this assertive tradition has waned, giving way to what some authors describe as an uncritical reliance on Western theoretical frameworks that are often ill-suited to local contexts. The book argues that this has resulted in a form of intellectual dependency, where the validation of Nigerian scholarship is frequently sought from Western academic institutions and publication outlets, thereby marginalising locally generated knowledge.

A second, and related, theme explored in depth is the institutional and pedagogical framework within which African Studies is conducted in Nigerian universities. The volume provides a critical

assessment of curricula, research funding mechanisms, and the structure of academic promotion. It identifies a persistent disconnect between the formal curriculum and the lived socio-political realities of Nigeria and the wider continent. Contributors note that the pressure to publish in internationally indexed journals, which often prioritise certain methodologies and topics, can divert scholarly attention from pressing local issues that may not align with global academic trends. Furthermore, the book highlights the challenges posed by inadequate funding, infrastructural deficits, and the brain drain of talented academics, which collectively weaken the institutional base for producing sustained and innovative scholarly work .

The third major thrust of the book concerns methodology and the politics of knowledge production. Several chapters advocate for a deliberate shift towards methodological pluralism, with a particular emphasis on incorporating indigenous epistemologies and qualitative approaches that can capture the complexity of African societies. The authors critique the over-reliance on quantitative methods and theoretical models imported without sufficient adaptation, arguing that this often leads to analytical distortions. Instead, the volume calls for methodologies that are historically deep, culturally sensitive, and capable of centring African voices and experiences as primary sources of theory. This, it is argued, is essential for producing scholarship that is not only about Africa but is meaningfully for and from Africa .

Gender and representation form a critical sub-theme within the volume. A dedicated chapter, among others, interrogates the androcentric biases that have historically shaped the Nigerian scholarly framework. It examines how mainstream African Studies narratives have often marginalised women's experiences, contributions, and perspectives. The book argues that a truly transformative scholarly framework must be inclusive, integrating feminist scholarship and gender analysis as central, rather than peripheral, components of understanding power, society, and history in Nigeria. This requires a conscious effort to deconstruct patriarchal assumptions within academic practice itself and to promote the work of women scholars .

Finally, the book engages with the question of relevance and public engagement. It challenges the notion of the academic as a detached observer, proposing instead a model of the scholar as a public intellectual. Contributors stress the imperative for Nigerian scholarship in African Studies to directly address contemporary challenges such as governance, conflict, development, and identity politics. The knowledge produced in universities, the volume asserts, must speak to policy debates and public discourse, thereby bridging the gap between the academy and society. This entails not only the choice of research topics but also the communication of findings in accessible formats to a broader audience beyond academic peers .

In synthesising these diverse contributions, the volume presents a coherent, if sobering, diagnosis. It concludes that while a distinctive Nigerian scholarly framework in African Studies exists and has a proud history, it is currently in a state of crisis, constrained by external dependency, internal institutional weaknesses, and methodological limitations.

Critical Analysis

The book's central thesis, that Nigerian scholarship must consciously decolonise its epistemological foundations, is compellingly argued but occasionally falters in its practical application. The editors

rightly identify a persistent ‘methodological dependency’ on Western theoretical constructs, which often act as a Procrustean bed for African realities. The critique of how imported frameworks like neoliberalism or certain strands of post-colonial theory can distort local historical specificities is particularly acute. However, the volume’s contributors sometimes replicate the very issue they critique. For instance, while advocating for endogenous knowledge systems, several chapters rely almost exclusively on Euro-American critical theorists to validate their arguments, creating a paradoxical citational hierarchy that undermines the call for intellectual self-reliance. This inconsistency highlights a core tension in the decolonial project within the academy: the necessity of engaging with global discourse while simultaneously attempting to subvert its hegemony.

A significant strength of the work lies in its nuanced treatment of language and knowledge production. The discussion extends beyond the superficial advocacy for publishing in local languages, delving into the more profound epistemological implications of linguistic framing. As Nwadike articulates, the conceptual universe embedded within the Igbo or Yoruba language offers alternative categorisations of social relations and historical time that challenge universalist assumptions. This analysis is invaluable. Nevertheless, the book largely sidesteps the formidable institutional and pragmatic obstacles to implementing such a vision. There is scant critical engagement with the political economy of academic publishing, the career incentives for young scholars to publish in internationally recognised, Western-dominated journals, or the lack of infrastructure for peer-reviewed publishing in many Nigerian indigenous languages. This omission renders parts of the discourse somewhat utopian, lacking a roadmap for navigating the entrenched systems that sustain the status quo.

The interdisciplinary approach championed by the volume is both its most ambitious feature and a source of its occasional lack of depth. The attempt to synthesise insights from history, sociology, literature, and political science provides a holistic view of the Nigerian scholarly landscape, effectively demonstrating how disciplinary silos can fragment understanding of complex social phenomena. The chapter analysing the Biafran war through intertwined historical, literary, and sociological lenses is a standout example of this methodology’s potential. Yet, this breadth sometimes comes at the cost of analytical rigour. Certain sections, particularly those addressing contemporary digital humanities and their relevance to Nigeria, are treated in a cursory manner, offering more of a literature survey than a critical, original intervention. Consequently, while the interdisciplinary intent is laudable, the execution is uneven, with some chapters achieving a powerful synthesis while others remain confined within superficial disciplinary overviews.

Furthermore, the book’s critical gaze, while sharply focused on external epistemological impositions, is less incisive when turned inward. The analysis of internal constraints within Nigerian academia—such as bureaucratic inertia, funding crises, and sometimes the gatekeeping practices of established scholarly cliques—is noticeably subdued. There are passing references to ‘institutional challenges’ and ‘resource limitations’, but these are seldom interrogated with the same theoretical vigour applied to colonial legacies. A more robust self-critique would have strengthened the argument, acknowledging that the path to a revitalised African Studies is obstructed not only by residual colonial structures but also by contemporary local failures in academic governance and intellectual patronage. This gap leaves the reader with an incomplete picture, potentially over-attributing current shortcomings to historical external forces while underplaying agency and accountability within the domestic scholarly community.

In terms of theoretical contribution, the book makes a persuasive case for ‘situated relevance’ as a core criterion for scholarly validation. It successfully destabilises the notion that theoretical sophistication is synonymous with the application of metropolitan theory, arguing instead for rigour derived from deep, contextual engagement. However, the work occasionally conflates ‘relevance’ with an uncritical nativism or a defensive posture against all foreign theory. The most compelling chapters avoid this pitfall by advocating for a critical, selective, and adaptive engagement with global knowledge, not a wholesale rejection. Where the volume is less convincing is in its delineation of how this ‘situated’ knowledge can enter into a dialogue with global theory on equitable terms, beyond merely stating that it should. The mechanisms for this dialogue—whether through revised curricula, new

Contextual Evaluation

The preceding critical analysis reveals the volume’s core arguments and internal tensions. Placing these findings within the broader landscape of Nigerian and international African Studies scholarship is now essential to gauge the book’s true significance and potential limitations. This contextual evaluation considers how the work engages with, and potentially alters, prevailing scholarly conversations, institutional practices, and geopolitical dynamics of knowledge production.

Primarily, the book enters a long-standing and often contentious debate regarding the locus of authoritative knowledge about Africa. As highlighted by Falola, the critique of epistemological dependency on Western theoretical paradigms remains a central concern for scholars on the continent. This collection directly confronts this issue, not merely by reiterating the critique but by attempting to model an alternative. Its insistence on privileging indigenous epistemologies, languages, and historical experiences positions it firmly within the tradition of scholarly decolonisation. However, its contextual value lies in moving beyond abstract manifesto to applied critique, dissecting specific Nigerian case studies through these advocated lenses. In doing so, it provides a tangible, if partial, answer to the persistent question of what a post-dependent African Studies methodology might look like in practice, thereby contributing a concrete reference point for ongoing methodological debates.

Furthermore, the work must be evaluated against the institutional realities of Nigerian academia, which it explicitly seeks to influence. The contributors’ detailed examinations of curriculum gaps, archival neglect, and funding challenges resonate with the structural critiques outlined by Eze regarding the infrastructural decay within humanities research. The book’s significance is amplified by this direct engagement with the material conditions of scholarship. It does not solely propose theoretical correctives but implicitly argues that epistemological liberation is inextricably linked to institutional reform and resource equity. Its advocacy for centring local archives and oral traditions, for instance, is presented as both a methodological and a political act, reclaiming sources that are often more accessible and sustainable within the Nigerian context than costly subscriptions to international journals or archives held abroad.

The volume’s focus on Nigeria, as a specific geo-cultural zone within African Studies, also warrants contextual consideration. African Studies as a field has sometimes been critiqued for homogenising the continent’s diverse experiences. By offering a deep, multi-disciplinary interrogation of the Nigerian scholarly framework, this collection provides a necessary corrective of specificity. It demonstrates how global debates on decolonisation manifest in a particular national context with its own unique historical trajectory, political economy, and cultural diversity. This nuanced, nation-focused approach enriches the

broader field by showing that decolonisation is not a monolithic project but must be adapted to local intellectual histories and social structures. The book thereby serves as a potential model for similar critical evaluations of scholarly frameworks in other African nations.

Nevertheless, a contextual evaluation must also acknowledge potential gaps in the book's engagement with certain contemporary scholarly currents. While its internal critique is robust, its dialogue with parallel intellectual movements across the Global South—such as those in Latin American or South Asian subaltern studies—appears less developed. A more explicit comparative perspective could have strengthened its arguments by showing how Nigerian scholars might learn from, or contribute to, transnational dialogues on epistemic justice beyond the Africa-West binary. Additionally, while the work powerfully critiques existing structures, its contextual contribution to imagining detailed, practical pathways for institutional change—beyond broad recommendations—remains somewhat tentative. The formidable political and economic constraints facing Nigerian universities, as noted in the analysis, perhaps make such detailed blueprints difficult, but their absence leaves a crucial part of the conversation for future works to address.

In sum, the book's principal contextual contribution is its situated, applied intervention into the decolonisation discourse. It successfully translates a global theoretical imperative into a specific Nigerian academic critique, grounding lofty ideals in the concrete realities of curriculum, research praxis, and institutional viability. It reinforces and provides fresh evidence for existing critiques of epistemological dependency and institutional neglect, while its primary advance lies in its concerted effort to demonstrate alternative methodologies through example. The volume thus stands as a significant marker of the evolving maturity of the decolonisation debate within Nigeria, moving from proclamation to procedural examination, and will likely serve as a key text for scholars critically assessing the future direction of African Studies both within the country and beyond.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this volume offers a formidable and timely intervention into the state of African Studies as practised from Nigeria. It successfully achieves its core objective of interrogating the epistemological and institutional frameworks that both enable and constrain Nigerian scholarship. The work moves beyond mere critique, constructing a compelling case for the continued necessity of a robust, self-reflexive, and locally-grounded African Studies paradigm. As the contributors collectively argue, such a paradigm is not an insular project but a vital corrective and a source of theoretical innovation for the global academy, challenging hegemonic narratives and centring African realities, complexities, and intellectual traditions.

The book's principal strength lies in its nuanced exploration of the persistent tension between the global and the local. It meticulously documents how Nigerian scholars navigate the demands of international academic publishing, often shaped by Western theoretical preoccupations, while striving to address pressing local and national concerns. This 'dual mandate', as several chapters elucidate, creates a fraught but potentially productive space for scholarly engagement. The analysis convincingly demonstrates that the most impactful work emerging from Nigeria often stems from a deep immersion in local contexts, which in turn generates insights with broader comparative relevance. This effectively counters any simplistic notions of intellectual parochialism, positioning Nigerian scholarship as simultaneously specific in its concerns and universal in its analytical contributions.

Furthermore, the collection provides a sobering yet constructive assessment of the institutional challenges facing the field. The discussions on funding constraints, infrastructural deficits, and the brain drain are not presented as mere lamentations but are critically examined as structural factors that shape research agendas, methodologies, and the very circulation of knowledge. Importantly, the book highlights resilient responses to these challenges, including the growth of local scholarly networks, the strategic use of digital platforms for collaboration and dissemination, and the enduring role of individual scholarly dedication. This balanced perspective avoids fatalism, instead pointing towards pathways for institutional rejuvenation and sustainable support for research.

However, as noted in the contextual evaluation, the volume's focus, while deep, is not exhaustive. The relative under-examination of certain thematic areas and methodological approaches indicates fertile ground for future research. Subsequent scholarship must build upon this foundation to explore more fully the intersections between African Studies and burgeoning fields such as environmental humanities, digital cultures, and the study of non-elite urban formations. Additionally, a more sustained dialogue with scholars across linguistic regions of Africa would further strengthen the pan-African intellectual project the book advocates for. These are not shortcomings but rather invitations for further research that the book itself generates.

Ultimately, this work serves as both a milestone and a roadmap. It consolidates decades of scholarly reflection on the Nigerian academic condition and sets a clear agenda for the future. Its unequivocal call for epistemic confidence—for Nigerian and African scholars to trust in the validity and rigour of their own situated knowledge—is its most resonant contribution. By meticulously unpacking the frameworks within which knowledge is produced, the book empowers scholars to consciously shape those frameworks. It argues persuasively that the relevance and vitality of African Studies depend on an unwavering commitment to intellectual authenticity, one that is critically engaged with global theory while being firmly rooted in the empirical and philosophical realities of the African experience.

Therefore, this collection is indispensable reading not only for specialists in African Studies but for any scholar interested in the geopolitics of knowledge, the sociology of academic disciplines, and the decolonial project within the humanities and social sciences. It stands as a testament to the vigour of Nigerian scholarship and a powerful reminder that interrogating one's own scholarly framework is the first and most necessary step towards genuine intellectual renewal and impact. The task ahead, as the book makes clear, is to translate this critical introspection into sustained institutional practice and ever more ambitious, context-rich scholarly production.

Contributions

This study makes a significant scholarly contribution by synthesising and critically analysing the dominant methodological and theoretical debates within Nigerian African Studies during 2021. It provides a coherent framework for understanding the field's contemporary challenges, particularly regarding epistemic agency and the decolonisation of knowledge. Practically, the work serves as a crucial reference point for researchers and institutions seeking to reorient pedagogical and research agendas. By mapping these key issues, the book offers a foundational text that stimulates necessary introspection and guides future scholarly endeavours in the discipline.