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# Power-with and Power-to and Building Asian Studies in Africa: Insights from the Field

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## Abstract

Taking seriously Chinweizu's (2004) call for Asian Studies in Africa this article examines the ways in which African Asianist scholars with their partners elsewhere decided to take counterhegemonic action, and how their approach differs from the status quo as a prefigurative politics of power-with society they seek. This work explores the establishment of Centres for Asian Studies in Africa as institutional actors in the counter-hegemonic project of decolonization. The processes that led to the setting up of the Centre for Asian Studies (the first in Black Africa excepting South Africa) at the University of Ghana serve as a case study. The article utilizes information gathered through the authors' ongoing participation over the last eight years in the ideational, organizational, logistical, financial and institution building moves that are aiding the establishment of an ultimately emancipatory Asian Studies in Africa research framework. To establish the contextual challenge, the article engages discursively with how hegemony (power-over) functions within Global North/Western/modern research agendas, funding, and institutions; and explains how and why its colonial project is most evident in Area Studies in particular. The work concludes with pointers on how these moves for building Centres for Asian studies in Africa may be useful for other institutional intellectual decolonial efforts.

## Keywords

Chinweizu – Africa – Asia – power – Asian Studies in Africa

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So, today the consensus is that part of what is wrong with our institutions of higher learning is that they are ‘Westernized’. What does it mean ‘they are Westernized’? They are ‘Westernized’ in the sense that they are local instantiations of a dominant academic model based on a Eurocentric epistemic canon.

ACHILLE MBEMBE (2016:32)

• • •

He seems to get the best of the bargaining who has the greatest power.

MARY FOLLET (2003:72)

## 1 Introduction

In his perceptive work *Ubuntuology* (2004) Chinweizu argues that African scholarship must turn its gaze in a direction that places Africa’s interests at the centre. By this, he implies “the scientific study of all of humanity from the Black World’s standpoint” (2004:55). Chinweizu indeed construes this tendency as Black Africa’s “right to study both itself and the entire world, from its own standpoint and in its own interest” (2004:55). Ultimately the point about Africa’s interest in the Chinweizuan sense is about scholarship that is consciously directed at building Black Africa’s capacity to solve problems on its own drawing from experiences from all parts of the world.

In this undertaking Asian studies comes in for special mention by Chinweizu. For him, Asian Studies in Africa directed at Black Africa’s interests is essentially “Black Asian Studies.” This focus in his view has a psychological value as well in curing Black Africans of what he terms “the nigger disease of cultural self-contempt” (Chinweizu 2015:4), which the study of all things European has both inspired and entrenched. Indeed, Chinweizu (2004) has drawn attention to and provided the preliminary framings for Black Strategics, a discipline by which Africa will deliberately and consciously map her future. This article draws inspiration from Black Strategics. The setting up and running of the

Centre for Asian Studies at the University of Ghana is therefore postulated as part of mapping this African future.

China's phenomenal economic transformation in the last three decades of the 20th century has generated interesting responses. In Africa there is ample evidence of increasing and deepening trade, political, diplomatic and strategic ties between the continent and China. Trade between Ghana and China (the two countries marked sixty years of diplomatic relations in 2020; one of the longest in Africa south of the Sahara) crossed the \$6billion mark in 2017 (Amoah 2020:159) up from insignificant numbers just a generation ago. Through the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) African countries and China engage in a plethora of areas including infrastructure and peace keeping. One critical outcome of this interaction though has been the rise of interest in understanding not just China but Asia for pragmatic reasons (to guide say bureaucrats in negotiations with their Chinese, Japanese or Korean counterparts) and for intellectual and cultural motives. But vexing questions have arisen on how to engage Asia for the reasons adduced on a continent that had not built any systematic knowledge base on Asia : where to start?, which models to follow ?, and how to go about it?

The US Area Studies model deployed after World War II and bankrolled by financially endowed foundations like Carnegie, Rockefeller and Ford (through a vast network of universities and think tanks) seemed both an alluring and easy fit for an Africa that came to adopt neoliberalism as her foremost socio-economic mode of organization in the 1980s. This is precisely because neoliberalism succeeded in drawing Africa ever more intimately into the Euro-American space and thus generated increasing intimacy with the educational ideas, experiences, values and processes of this world region. This work concerns itself with examining how this occurred through a power-over process and how this can be overcome via a power-with approach by tapping into the authors' ongoing participation in the ideational, organizational, logistical, financial and institution building processes that are aiding the establishment of an authentic, ground up, participatory and ultimately emancipatory Asian Studies in Africa framework. The article highlights in particular the agential, solidaristic and even serendipitous processes that made the setting up of this Asian Studies in Africa framework possible in record time as a contribution towards navigating and overcoming *power over* strictures in the African academy and elsewhere in neoliberal times. It is useful to recall Polanyi's (1957:57) far-reaching claim:

The market pattern, on the other hand, being related to a peculiar motive of its own, the motive of truck or barter, is capable of creating a specific

institution, namely, the market. Ultimately, that is why the control of the economic system by the market is of overwhelming consequence to the whole organization of society: it means no less than the running of society as an adjunct to the market. Instead of economy being embedded in social relations, social relations are embedded in the economic system. The vital importance of the economic factor to the existence of society precludes any other result. For once the economic system is organized in separate institutions, based on specific motives and conferring a special status, society must be shaped in such a manner as to allow that system to function according to its own laws. This is the meaning of the familiar assertion that a market economy can function only in a market society.

Neoliberalism has become the most pervasively powerful expression of this Polanyian insight across the globe in the late 20th century till date. The rise to power of Thatcher in 1979 and Reagan in 1980 provided neoliberalism (which already begun to flower in post-Welfare North America and Europe) with its most ardent and gleeful advocates in the heartland of power in the Global North. Thatcher (1993:156) herself crowed about this:

The election of Ronald Reagan as President of the United States in November 1980 was as much of a watershed in American affairs as my own election victory in May 1979 was in those of the United Kingdom, and of course, a greater one in *world politics*. *As the years went by, the British example steadily influenced other countries in different continents, particularly in economic policy.* (emphasis added)

To be sure social and economic strains in the industrialized West marked in the main by diminished growth rates, a wave of unemployment and cumulative inflation in preceding decades had set the tone for this widespread influence of neoliberalism (Saad-Filho and Johnston 2005). As a consequence the view that the post 1945 good years – of large growth rates, sustained technological change, an increase in purchasing power and the development of a welfare system-had reached an existential limit took hold and solidified.

The free market came to be seen as the answer to an interventionist state and all its putative deleterious prescriptions-pensions, subsidized healthcare, employment security and the like. In fine, post 1945 Western society, had to be remade in the image of the free market and that meant strangulating if not totally eliminating those institutions and ideas responsible for maintaining and reproducing the status quo ante. Thatcher (1993:11) was a thoroughbred for this kind of undertaking “Before I read a line from the *great liberal economists*,

I knew from my father's accounts that the *free market* was like a vast sensitive nervous system, responding to events and signals all over the world to meet the ever-changing needs of peoples...." (emphasis added). Thatcher's running battles with the trade unions in Britain was a typical example of this reconstructive drive and was most exemplified in the year long miners' strike of 1984–1985. Africa will not be spared this reconstruction writ large across the globe which both prescribed and imposed a Western understanding of how best to organize society; in this case a market driven one. In *Ubuntuology* (2004) Chinweizu is at pains to show how such externally imposed ideas and values undermine Africa's progress by undercutting the intellectual autonomy of the continent. The rest of the sections in this work show the pervasive power of such ideas and values in Africa and how this can be overcome.

## 2 Africa and the Neoliberalization Project

Neoliberalism's politico-economic project referred to above will find a willing handmaiden in academia. Western academics, especially in England, proffered theoretical disquisitions which challenged the state as the sole and critical arbiter in the making of public decisions. These ideas pitched their tent under what has come to be known as the governance school. Bevir<sup>1</sup> (2012:1), one of its leading lights, best captures what the governance school is about:

Since the 1980s the word 'governance' has become ubiquitous. Newspapers bemoan crumbling standards of corporate governance. The European Union issues White Papers on Governance.... the US Forest Services calls for greater collaborative governance.... New theories and practices have drawn attention from the central institutions of the state and towards the activity of governing, and much of the activity of governing now involves private and voluntary organizations as well as public ones.... *governance differs from government in that it focuses less on the state and its institutions and more on social practices and activities. To understand governance requires that we look at abstract theories of hierarchy, market, and network as types of organizations, and then at more concrete debates about the shift from hierarchy to markets and networks in corporations, the public sector, and global politics.* (emphasis added)

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1 At the policy formation level some of the foundational ideas of new public management will be enunciated in the work of Osborne and Garbler (1993).

At its core, regardless of appearances to the contrary, the governance school argued that the state and its institutions had to necessarily adjust to the logics of the market or become redundant: “*Governance here differs from government because social organization need not involve oversight and control, let alone the state. Markets and networks might provide governance in the absence of the any significant government*” (Bevir 2012: 3; emphasis added).

The 1980s will provide the ideal temporal context for exporting the ideas and practices of the governance school to Africa. African states emerged into the early 1980s ravaged by the debt burden, global commodity price fluctuations, and political instability among other ills whose provenance lay in the immediate post-independence period. The debt burden proved quite debilitating for its effects are still largely present. The Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries’ (OPEC) abrupt price hike in 1973 flooded the treasuries of the cartel’s member states with what became known as petro-dollars. OPEC had been set up to allow the leading petroleum exporting countries gain control of the pricing and supply of the commodity on the international market. These price hikes threatened the health of their balance of payments and they sought means to offload these. Developing countries were actively cultivated to take these petro-dollars with the active support of the International Monetary Fund (Cutler 1976/77)<sup>2</sup> which eventually translated into strangulating debt in the 1980s. These were the circumstances then which turned a majority of developing countries to the Bretton Woods institutions and therefore targets for the emergent governance school’s ideas and practices.

Once African countries were locked tightly in the embrace of the IMF and the WB these institutions became vectors of neoliberalism utilizing to the hilt the ideational apparatus of the governance school. Amoah (2011:334) has drawn attention to this: “these two institutions in particular have served as the key vectors of neoliberal ideas in Africa and have been particularly successful at this in the last three decades.” Amoah (2011) argues that the WB and IMF must be understood as part of a global elite ensemble hegemonically promoting its peculiar understanding of how the world must function; what Hardt and Negri (2000:xii) describe as a “single logic of rule.” To understand better this reconstruction project in Africa, the role of conditionalities in the process stands out. Killick (1984:129) describes conditionalities as:

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2 Cutler provides an insightful account of the flow of petro-dollars to developing countries through the IMF. See also Lütkenhorst & Minte (1979).

policy changes which an aid donor agency stipulates a government must undertake to obtain, or retain, access to the donors financial support; it is an exchange of money for policy action. It arises in connection with the 'adjustment' programmes of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank but bilateral donors have made greater use of it in recent times.

The first batch of conditionalities that the WB and IMF applied to African countries were economic in nature. The overarching aim was to reconfigure African economies into free market ones based on Washington Consensus parameters. Killick (1998:280) describes this process as marked by three fundamental concerns:

- The avoidance of large macroeconomic imbalances;
- 'Market friendliness': working in cooperation with and in support of the private sector, and through market signals rather than in opposition to them; and
- Taking maximum advantage of opportunities in foreign trade and for the attraction of foreign investment.

In our view the "market friendliness" concern was the pivot around which the other concerns revolved. This particular concern embodied the move to apply in Africa, in a far thoroughgoing way than ever before, the ideas of the Austrian tradition of Ludwig von Mises, Friedrich von Hayek and their neo-Austrian successors, and the US monetarist school linked in particular with Milton Friedman and the Department of Economics, the University of Chicago (the Chicago School) in general. These ideas, presented in logically incompatible and sharply differing ways by these schools, insist (to simplify things) that the exchange of goods, services and information by unequally endowed property-owning individuals in barely regulated markets represent the most efficient way for allocating resources. The interventionist state, it was argued, undermines this process. Thus in Ghana, for example, which was considered as one of the good students of the Bretton Woods institutions, the fixed exchange rate regime was replaced with a flexible one; state owned enterprises were privatized and development banks were replaced with retail banks as part of moves for constructing a market friendly economy (Aryeetey and Fenny 2017). While the application of these economic conditionalities led to some modest economic gains Aryeetey and Fenny (2017:53) offer a sobering account of the overall impact:

The period of stable but modest economic growth was accompanied by successive bouts of still high inflation and unsustainable balance of payments deficits. Ghana's experience in this period was similar to that in

many poor sub-Saharan countries, which saw deteriorating economic conditions leading to high levels of poverty and unacceptable levels of external debt. *The World Bank initially attributed the situation to inadequate reforms in many countries.* (emphasis added)

The WB's response to what it considered "inadequate reforms in many countries" was to introduce political conditionalities, which pushed for a range of institutional reforms under what came to be known as good governance; the governance agenda had found fertile soil in Africa. This governance focus of the 1990s arose from the belief that inefficient and ineffective institutions (on account of corruption and mismanagement among other causes) played a central but hitherto largely ignored role in the economic stagnation and decline of developing countries.

The emergence of New Institutional Economics (NIE) to prominence as an academic discipline on the back of the influential writings of scholars such as Douglass North<sup>3</sup> will cement this turn to good governance in Africa. North's (1990) argument is that institutions (which he conceptualizes as formal and informal rules) and with them institutional change are important variables in understanding the variation in economic prosperity across countries and time especially in their impact on transaction and production costs. It is fair to surmise that North's views greatly influenced the World Bank via his consultancy and advisory roles in 1990 and 1997 respectively (a period in which NIE ideas spread and flourished).

Our analysis in this section points to the reconstructive hegemonic power of neoliberalism in the African context first in the economic sphere where accumulation, distribution and exchange processes are subsumed to the dictates of a putative free market. Political conditionalities reflect the impact of neoliberalism on social reproduction. These political conditionalities led to the setting up of multiparty democracies across Africa which have entrenched a liberal order on the continent. Dardot and Laval (2013:14) capture this well: "the originality of neoliberalism is precisely its creation of a new set of rules defining not only a different "regime of accumulation", but, more broadly, a *different society*" (emphasis added). For this "different society" a new African academy had to be called forth to which we turn.

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3 See North (1990).

### 3 The African Academy in Escrow?

By the late 1980s, some of Africa's leading thinkers begun to notice the corporatization and marketization of African knowledge production (Ake, 1986; Amin, 2009). This process was initially reflected most vividly in what has become known as the third sector where a variety of Non-Governmental organizations sprung up dedicated to promoting good governance (or better still African societies run on the logic of unhindered markets). The booming literature on NGOs in Africa which subsequently emerged will point to the dependence of African NGOs on external funding. Fowler worried about this trend speculated thus: "... for the foreseeable future, Southern NGOs will remain dependent on surpluses derived from Northern economies in which official aid will become dominant; and that NGOs will increasingly function as a component of an international system of social welfare because this role serves the international reproduction of capital" (1992:10).

To Fowler's warning about "the international reproduction of capital," we must add the international reproduction of dominant Western norms and values; a new moral economy of individualism, free marketry and consumerism. This funding dependence anchored on proposal writing for projects and programmes made these NGOs (especially the think tanks among them) ardent advocates of this new moral economy. To be an expert of note or even merely survive as a knowledge producer demanded joining this circuit; it was the new game in town. Armah (2006:297–298) described it as the "the whole paraphernalia of the begging bowl game.... cadging money for salaries and perks from governments and foundations. This was already the hot game in Africa...."

It will be useful here to sketch the context in which Armah's concern is expressed. The context is the perennial failure, as he (2006:299–300) perceived it, of African intellectuals to autonomously (in spite of their unending complaints about the continent's challenges) and institutionally bring to bear forcefully on social change their processed ideas without the constant mediation of others:

Economic wellbeing depends on the application of human intelligence and ingenuity to the processing of selected quantities of natural resources. Africa's economic situation is suicidal because African intelligence is not applied to selective processing of African resources ... for just as African rulers thoughtlessly export great volumes of gold, diamonds, coltan, timber, and other raw materials, guaranteeing low prices on the world market and chronic poverty at home in return for personal use of

imported gadgets, so the African intelligentsia has become hooked into a beggar economy based on the ignorant export of raw materials.

Armah points, in particular, to the book publishing enterprise which he characterizes as a paradigm case of critical value addition which Africa's knowledge producers had virtually outsourced and with it all the economic and ideational benefits that could accrue to Africa:

... as a rule African intellectuals and writers, having dipped into our continent's cultural resource base to extract inspiration and information for our texts, export the raw manuscript to some foreign publisher for industrial processing and sale, in return, if the publisher is honest, for a paltry 10% of earnings, or often much less. Now books produce economic and social spinoff benefits of inestimable value, including steady work for secretaries, illustrators, typesetters, editors, designers, agents, printers, binders, accountants ... normally Asian authors writing for Asian publishers contribute these spinoffs directly to their societies; American authors writing for American publishers do the same for American society. The same is true for European authors and their society.

The African Academy will find itself enmeshed in this new "hot game" (Atuahene 2011; David and Motala 2017; Mbembe 2016; Moyo, Yeros & Jha 2012; Klees 2017; Molla and Cuthbert 2018; Munene 2015) in which scholarship has become habituated to the disciplining regimes, interests and ideas of external funding entities directed in the main at the skill requirements of neoliberalism. This reskilling revolution in particular has become virtually the central normative concern of universities on the back of a much touted Fourth Industrial revolution (popularized in Schwab's book, *The Fourth Industrial Revolution*).

The upshot of all this is the emergence of what Cox (2020:1) describes rather ominously but precisely as the emergence of "marketplaces of cognitive capitalism"; universities must consciously feed this market or simply perish. Scholarship as a consequence, to be worth its calling, has morphed into consulting and dexterous grantsmanship to keep this machine pump-primed and well oiled. Mbembe describes these web-like changes in the university's role worldwide in which the African Academy has been entangled helplessly: "global markets are in many ways shaping university reforms worldwide. Contemporary changes in higher education are based on the deepening of functional linkages between higher education and knowledge capitalism at a time when capitalism has become thoroughly transnational and ruling classes

worldwide have become partially denationalized” (2016:39). This entanglement has transformed and is transforming African higher education into an active participant in the construction of a particular political-economy of life and living:

Such neoliberal globalization involves an entirely new governing rationality through which everything is ‘economized’. It is economized in a very specific way in the sense that human beings become market actors and nothing but; every field of activity is seen as a market; and every entity (whether public or private, whether person, business, state or corporation) is governed as a firm. It is not simply that commodification and monetization have been extended everywhere.

MBEMBE 2016:39

As a purveyor of this “governing rationality” the African Academy has worked to sharpen the divide between the sciences and the humanities. To be sure the former has come to be increasingly privileged over the latter. This is because it is considered better fine-tuned to the logics of profit on account of its putative concerns with matters of fact and not merely descriptively and argumentatively derived issues of culture, meaning and values; the world of profit ostensibly does not work that way.

In the light of all this, the question that presses urgently on the African Academy seemingly locked down in escrow in this suffocating atmosphere of epistemic hegemony in the era of neoliberalism, is how the humanistic disciplines will survive and continue to be relevant. As shown above the formidable apparatus of the Folletian (2003:78) notion of power over (“So far as my observation has gone, it seems to me that ... power usually means power-over, the power of some person or group over some other person or group...”), is palpable and forces us to muse over the profound limits neoliberalism sets on African intellectual pursuits in the Academy. This question is made more profound by the explosion in interaction between Africa and Asia in recent decades and how to make some sense of it and to deal with the inherent power asymmetries with which it is inevitably laden. Such sense making necessarily involves Asian Studies and in the next section we detail the empirics of a real case of how in the interstices of a suffocating power-over framework African Asianists and their counterparts on other continents are constructing counterhegemonic spaces to realize *power-with* and *power-to* in their field specifically and in academia more generally. The suffocating *power-over* framework is today’s Empire with its “*decentered* and *detrterritorializing* apparatus of rule that progressively incorporates the entire global realm within its open,

expanding frontiers. Empire manages hybrid identities, flexible hierarchies, and plural exchanges through modulating networks of command” (Hardt and Negri 2000:xii). The question then is can the Empire’s set up be used against it?

#### 4 Orientalism, Area Studies, Asian Studies and Africa – Three Waves and Inventing a Fourth?

We have traced above the ideational, historical and policy contexts within which the politics of knowledge production in contemporary Africa has played out. In our view, at this particular historical juncture, the *power-over* mode dominates knowledge production in one of the most critical spaces for such processes, the African Academy. The pervasiveness of this mode of power and its portends weighed heavily on the minds of African scholars who wanted to research on Africa-Asia relations as the interactions between the two continents deepened in recent times. This angst was aggravated by the well documented histories of Area Studies and Asian Studies and their suffusion with *power-overness*.

Imperialism (and its modern paradigm case, Empire) has always been spatial; it sought territories to conquer and dominate. But this spatiality must be understood in a dual sense, the corporeal and the incorporeal. The latter is the intellectual part which allows the former to reproduce itself infinitely if possible. Orientalism (as a discourse)<sup>4</sup> will lay the basis (in the nineteenth century) or better still, inspire, Area Studies to play this reproduction role as the West dealt with the other. Orientalism sought insights about the non-Western world that were static and non-generalizable; “frozen structures that have been hanging there for centuries” (Kolluoglu-Kirli 2003: p. 96) in order to understand, predict and ultimately make malleable that world for domination and control. Edward W. Said (1978:2–3) describes Orientalism as:

the corporate institution dealing with the Orient – dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, *ruling over it*: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for *dominating*, restructuring, and having *authority* over the Orient” (emphasis added).

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4 As a discourse we mean here following Said (1978) that Orientalism had its peculiar ontology and epistemology that distinguished the essentially White Western world from the non-White non-Western. On these Mills (1997) provides fascinating but sobering insights.

If Orientalism as an academic discipline was more inclined initially toward theological ambitions, this will all change with the Western colonial onslaught following Napoleon's Egyptian Campaign (Fück 1962). The central value in this particular stage of the evolution of Orientalism was its role as the cerebral handmaiden of the political, economic and cultural exploitation of the colonies. The emergence of liberation movements in the colonized world stopped Orientalism in its tracks for the rise of new sovereign states turned the colonized into subjects (Fanon 1963; Abdel-Malek 1963) not static objects of study for the economic and other goals of imperialism. Area studies will fill up the vacuum that Orientalism left as it was pressed into the supreme service of American hegemony in the twentieth century. The hegemonic interests that marked Orientalism's hey days found expression in the rationale for the emergence of Area Studies during World War II and its aftermath in its: "originating in specialized military training programs to train soldiers and civilians assigned to administer occupied territories in Europe and the "Far East;" Area Studies was constituted as a field of enquiry on the U.S. ascension to a position of global hegemony" (Palat 1996:270–271). Lambert (1973:13) corroborates this: "... in recent years language and area studies, however defined, have been one of the most remarkable growth industries on American campuses..." Knowledge and *power-over* were thus fused; an old combine in a new expression :

Orientalism was a distinctively European enterprise. It emerged with the European capitalist expansion and reached its maturity at the point when Europe's expansion was being consolidated with colonialism. It lost its ground with the loss of Europe's hegemonic position. Area studies is a distinctively American enterprise. It emerged with the Second World War, which witnessed the United States' ascent to a hegemonic position in the world-system....

KOLLUOGLU-KIRLI 2003:107

Asian studies emerged as an important component of Area Studies in the U.S. Indeed as at 1970 of the 312 area programmes on U.S. colleges and universities (Lambert 1973:15) 36.54% were linked to the Asian continent. The U.S. model for building Area Studies and with it Asian Studies was, at the risk of making simplistic a rather complex process, marked by the following (Kolluoglu-Kirli, 2003; Pye, 1975; Lambert, 1973): state funding (through the National Defense Education Act's Title VI), support from leading foundations especially Rockefeller, Ford and Carnegie and de-emphasizing of the humanities in favour of the social sciences. This was the model (especially the last two

elements) that given the prevailing hegemonic mode of knowledge production in the African Academy and in the absence of any compelling alternative was going to be normed. To borrow Fanon's description following such a norm will be an example of "nauseating mimicry" (1963:311). Fanon (1963:148) had presciently pointed out the dangers of hegemonic knowledge production: "it so happens that the unpreparedness of the educated classes, the lack of practical links between them and the mass of the people, their laziness, and, let it be said, their cowardice at the decisive moment of the struggle will give rise to tragic mishaps." Could an alternative be forged as a fourth but novel link in the inescapable necessity to understand and engage other cultures and regions with less instrumental discursive concerns and ontological and epistemological premises?

Here we attempt a distinction between positive and negative instrumentality. Negative instrumentality to borrow a Millsian term is about exploitation of the non-West; exploitation of their bodies, land, and resources/ and the denial of equal socioeconomic opportunities ... (Mills 1997:11). This is what hegemonic Asian Studies was concerned with. Positive instrumentality is about mutual nurturance wherein the study of Asia benefits both Africa and Asia and the world at large; this for us is a true model of *power-with*. A dedicated collection of Asianists working on the five continents decided that this alternative was possible, anchored in true mutual learning and exchange between Africa and Asia that will take into account both parties' historical and contemporary experiences and intellectual traditions in all their complex and diverse facets.

## 5 The Fourth Wave (FW) in the Making: Asian Studies in Africa

How did a collection of Asianists in Africa and other continents set in motion a fresh approach (FW) to Asian Studies with different logics? This question is made the more pertinent because the historical, material and technological conditions in Africa in particular (and the world generally) in the last two hundred years (at the very least), had conspired to make a pointed focus on Asian studies in many ways a virtual impossibility. Historically, Africa's intellectual compass was rigidly and firmly orientated Northwards; Asia was not even a peripheral consideration. Too few potential African scholars ventured into Asian Studies even though the Bandung Conference of 1955 had come to symbolize and herald Africa-Asia connections in all its facets including that linked to knowledge production (Ampiah 2007; Vitalis 2013; Wood 2012). It was uncharted territory given the palpable absence of a tradition, physical

facilities, programmes, clear research foci, language training, mentors, funding and journals; indeed all the works necessary for a decent and productive intellectual career. These stark realities on balance completely precluded any possibilities for the emergence of Asian Studies in Africa. The irony though is that in many Asian countries, local African studies associations or groupings were established. The reality though has begun to change.

We will postulate here three explanatory tropes (tied to agency) which reveal what we will describe as the vulnerabilities of Empire: counter-hegemony supporting entities (individuals and organizations), serendipity and technology (information technology). These, in our view, are critical weapons, in the arsenal of the forces of counter-Empire as they work towards “autonomously constructing a counter-Empire, an alternative political organization of global flows and exchanges” (Hardt and Negri: xv). These vulnerabilities point to the perceptive claim (Hardt and Negri: xv) that:

The struggles to contest and subvert Empire, as well as those to construct a real alternative, will thus take place on the imperial terrain itself – indeed; such new struggles have already begun to emerge. Through these struggles and many more like them, the multitude will have to invent new democratic forms and a new constituent power that will one day take us through and beyond Empire.

By serendipity (Quayson 2014:9) it is meant here the ways in which chance uncontrollably aids the agents’s purposes. In spite of the dire Asian Studies infrastructure some Africans still trained their scholarly interests on Asia. A Ghanaian scholar, Professor Kweku Ampiah, now currently at Leeds University and one of Africa’s foremost experts on Japan is a typical example. He informed this author that when he decided to go to Japan to pursue his undergraduate studies, the Scholarship Panel in Ghana were in utter disbelief. They considered him wayward and urged him to go study in the West. He, however, persisted and went to Japan where he mastered Japanese and has been one of the foremost scholars of Africa-Japan interactions. Dr. Webby Kalikiti (native of Zambia) comes in to the picture here as one of such Africans who proved a key link in the chain that has proved critical in the ongoing establishment of Asian Studies in Africa. Kalikiti went to Vietnam to pursue his doctorate in the 1990s and there serendipitously met the Frenchman Philippe Peycam who was also working on his doctorate there. The two forged a friendship and discussed with other friends the need for Asian Studies in Africa; this idea will begin to be realized decades later. Kalikiti returned to the University of Zambia to teach while

Peycam stayed in the region (Cambodia) to build, over a decade, the Center for Khmer Studies as its founding director. This was obviously a period in which Peycam built up his knowledge and networks on the financial, logistical and other perquisites for building Asian Studies in the non-Western world. And not just these but the fresh intellectual directions that such an undertaking must necessarily take as an exercise in counter-hegemony. Commenting in a foreword in a book that examines this vexing question in Eastern Europe Peycam (2018:viii) lucidly characterized this reframing project as “aimed at reconfiguring the “area studies” paradigm – and the inherent danger of an imbalanced approach or “gaze” that characterizes it – to create a new mechanism in which “Eastern” and “Western” academic milieus, as agents and “ecologies” of knowledge production, are placed on equal footing so as to enable truly culturally cross-connected research projects.” At the International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS) in Leiden, the Netherlands, where he moved to from Cambodia, he set about with like-minded colleagues including Kalikiti and Paul van der Velde to explore the possibility of realizing this in Africa.

## 6 Key Moves for Asian Studies in Africa-Lusaka, Accra and Dar es Salaam

Technology proved a critical facilitator in the moves to build a decolonial Asian Studies in Africa showing in the process what agency can do in counter-hegemony undertakings. This is clearly counter-intuitive given that technology is at the hub of the informational economy. According to Castells (2010, p.41)

The informational economy opens up *an extraordinary potential for solving our problems, but, because of its dynamism and creativity, it is potentially more exclusionary* than the industrial economy if social controls do not check the unfettered market logic. (emphasis added)

For Castells this informational economy, powered by information technology, has created a Network Society (in which “valuable people and territories are switched on, devalued ones are switched off” [Castells 2010:47]) controlled and dominated by the powerful such that “there is increasing accumulation of wealth at the top, and poverty at the bottom” (Castells 2010:43).

Through email, the African Asianists and their counterparts harnessed the “extraordinary potential for solving our problems” inherent in information technology. Lloyd Amoah did not know Kalikiti or Peycam. He was in

his little corner researching and writing on Africa-Asia relations. The internet allowed them to find his work and then make contact through email which in recent times tends to go with journal publications in particular. That is how Amoah participated in the first “strategic workshop” (Invitation Letter hereafter IL) on Asian Studies which was held in Lusaka, Zambia. The rationale was clear (IL):

The aim of this two-day brainstorming event will be to discuss concrete strategic steps toward developing coordinated educational capacity building activities in Asian studies in a number of African universities in partnership with Asian and other international institutions.... The long-term objective of the Asian Studies in Africa (ASA) initiative is indeed to encourage inter-African and African-Asian collaborative research on crosscutting themes between academic and research institutions with the shared purpose of shaping a real community of African scholars closely connected with their Asian and international counterparts. In the more immediate future, the initiative aims to contribute to the development of local expertise on *Asia taken in its cultural, geographical and socio-economic diversity, beyond the prevalence of the current focus on one single country.* (emphasis added)

This Lusaka (Chisamba) Workshop (November 9–11, 2012) attempted to provide a roadmap for two pertinent issues for Asian studies in Africa: institution building, and with it, making it possible for the emergence and sustainability of African Asianists. As part of the process it was decided that the first Conference on Asian Studies in Africa should be held at the University of Ghana (UG), Legon in Ghana’s capital, Accra. The workshop in Lusaka and the University of Ghana Conference were aided by counter-hegemony supporting entities (to the extent that they supported the vision for Asian Studies in Africa) on five continents. These included research focused organizations such as the International Convention of Asian Scholars (ICAS), Leiden; the International Institute of Asian Studies (IIAS), Leiden; the South-South Exchange Programme (SEPHIS), Amsterdam and the Southeast Asian Studies Regional Exchange Programme (SEASREP), Manila. The funding ones included the Chiang Ching Kuo Foundation in Taiwan; the Toyota Foundation, Japan; the Social Sciences Research Council, New York; the Mellon Foundation, New York and the Japan Foundation. Professor Ernest Aryeetey, then Vice-Chancellor of the University of Ghana, could be described as a counter-hegemony supporting individual as far as the conference at UG was concerned. The Committee working on

the conference canvassed him and he provided ample support including the superb facilities of the UG.

The conference, which took almost three years of planning, was held over three days, September 24–26, 2015 with a theme that spoke to the guiding vision of Lusaka, *Africa-Asia-A New Axis of Knowledge*. The Conference proved a resounding success in three key ways. Firstly, it brought together, as never before, in intellectual conversation African and Asian scholars and they in turn dialogued with their counterparts from the other continents on Asia (Amoah and Peycam 2015:2):

We believe that the development of a research and educational infrastructure, capable of delivering foundational knowledge in the two regions about each other's cultures and societies, is a precondition for a sustainable and balanced socioeconomic progress. If we limit ourselves to the question of developing Asian studies programmes in African universities, we think that access to knowledge about a world region as culturally diverse and economically powerful as Asia should enable the citizens of Africa to embrace this new intercontinental relation to its full potential. And because we live in a globalizing world, we think that others – European, North/Latin American and Oceanian institutions of Asian and African studies – of this new trans-regional configuration should play a role as contributors and facilitators.

In this vein the conference organizers made sure not to privilege the social sciences in this multilogue and therefore made an effort to make ample room for humanistic papers, roundtables and panels. Thus a paper with the title *Provoking a 'Conscious Reality': Uncovering Shared Histories between Asia and Africa through contemporary Art* was as welcome as one entitled *Policy-Making of Korean Aid to Africa*. Secondly the Accra Conference through a network of academics, foundations, research institutes and universities set off the process of institutionalizing Asia Studies in Africa conferences. The second of such conferences was held at the University of Dar es Salaam in September (20–22) 2018. The third was planned for Senegal (2021?) but has been delayed by the Covid-19 pandemic.

The value of these conferences lies in catalyzing critical networking between scholars and organizations in this emerging field and, for the former in particular, makes necessary and feasible generating long term research projects the findings of which can be presented at such conferences. The Accra conference coincided (serendipity at work here) with UG's own internal efforts at setting

up a Centre for Asian studies which were far advanced by then. The Centre for Asian Studies was subsequently set up the following year in 2016 making it the very first such centre in Africa below the Sahara. This showcased the third way in which the Accra Conference had proved successful and in particular setting of the process of institutionalizing Asian Studies in Africa. This institutionalization process has been expressed in other ways as well. The Africa-Asia Book Prize was set up in 2013 in close collaboration with ICAS which has been running its book awards schemes for many years. Two recipients have received the Africa-Asia Book Prize for 2015 and 2018. The first winner of the award Adam Lifshy had this to say on what it meant to him : “It was really a lot of fun and very meaningful. I am used to working in isolation.... Suddenly there were hundreds of people from around the world in this wonderful country who were congratulating me on the book. Everyone in Ghana was extremely nice to me and I really appreciated that. It was a good opportunity to meet scholars from Africa and Asia that I wouldn’t normally have a chance to meet in a Spanish [or] Portuguese department.<sup>5</sup> ” The Association for Asian Studies in Africa (A-ASIA) has also been set up as the coordinating body working with partners across the world on Africa-Asia research. It is clear that where there was nothing before through agency and solidarity a group of scholars and organizations have built novel ways of countering hegemony in knowledge production.

## 7 Conclusion

In the last 5 years a triennial conference on Asian Studies in Africa has been established; transcontinental networks of institutions and scholars forged; innovative *power-over* skirting funding mechanisms and sources have been tapped; an Asian Studies Centre has been set up at one of Africa’s leading and world famous universities; and a new generation of young African Asianist scholars are being nurtured. These are historic and unprecedented developments. It has been shown in this work that in contemporary times hegemony at its most pervasive is reflected also in the knowledge production sphere. In Africa this hegemony is routed through the neoliberalization project which has deployed its apparatus on the African Academy. How to effectively respond and overcome this is important because it has existential effects.

The means by which Asian Studies in Africa is emerging as a viable career option for young African scholars in the face of seemingly insurmountable

<sup>5</sup> <https://thehoya.com/spanish-professor-wins-book-prize/>.

odds has been reflected on showing that hegemony can be challenged. These ways we have described as the vulnerabilities of Empire and reckoned as well as the assets (ideational, financial and physical which are usually downplayed or even not recognized at all) which counter-hegemonic agents of change can draw on once they set upon their mission. To be sure such solidaristic and agency exercising moves come with formidable questions. For example as scholars and institutions from the North and South interact how does power play out? Should the partners be alert to this? Does power play out in old hegemonic tones but under fresh guises? How can this be identified and further countered? We leave these questions now for subsequent research. Overall the attempt here has sought to provide some useful guide-posts (drawing from close to a decade of field work on setting up Asian Studies in Africa from scratch) for other prefigurative political undertakings elsewhere. Clearly Chinweizu's (2004) ideas can find practical expression.

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