



Gatekeeping African studies: A preliminary insight on what do editorial boards indicate about the nature and structure of research brokerage

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ABSTRACT

Issues of inequality and distribution of different sorts constitute salient aspects in the agenda of development studies. As globalisation unfolds new indicators are needed in order to update the capacity identify, capture, and interpret its dynamics and asymmetries. Notwithstanding the many changes in the world's socio-economic landscape, Africa, in particular, remains a marginal geographical and cognitive space. This research deals with a particular segment of the development studies "academic value chain". Unlike much of the contemporary work on scientometrics, this paper does not primarily analyse publications or citations. Our data regards the composition and characteristics of editorial boards in the field under analysis.

INTRODUCTION

From the periphery globalisation all too often understood as a polarized phenomenon. Indeed, issues of inequality and distribution of different sorts have constituted salient aspects in the agenda of development studies. As globalisation unfolds new indicators are needed in order to update the capacity identify, capture, and interpret its dynamics and asymmetries. Notwithstanding the many changes in the world's socio-economic landscape, Africa, in particular, remains a marginal geographical and cognitive space. Renewed effort is needed to empirically understand the cognitive locus of this space amidst a globalising, but asymmetric, process of science, technology, innovation and broader economic change.

GOING UP THE VALUE CHAIN OF AFRICAN STUDIES

This research deals with a particular segment of the development studies "academic value chain". Here we concentrate in the academic research on social-economic development and we take as object the research outlets that themselves take development as their object. Specifically, we focus on the top journals that delve with African studies.

Journals are fundamental institutions in the contemporary sector trying to understand and build policy approaches. They offer and certificate repertoires of attitudes and policy stances for engaging with big development challenges. However, little is known about peer-reviewed international research journals and our paper hopes to provide a first look into this black-box.

APPROACH AND PRELIMINARY RESULTS

Unlike much of the contemporary work on scientometrics, this paper does not primarily analyse publications or citations. Our data regards the composition and characteristics of editorial boards in the field under analysis.

Editors play a central role in scholarly governance. These groups of scholars have executive and consulting responsibilities that ultimately select and mould the research that is academically validated, formally published and readily accessible in general. So far the profiles of these roles have not been subject to systematic scrutiny. We do this, at an exploratory level, through the prism of a number of variables: geography, gender, affiliation, etc.

Our paper focuses on the five leading journals in African studies, the older one being *African Affairs*, and compiles information regarding its 239 editors (as of March 2016). We show that Africa-based editors constitute a minority of total editors (just under one third). Among African South Africans are dominant, followed by Nigerians, Tanzanians and Botswanians.

Northern hemisphere Anglo-American editors comprise the larger community (130 out of 239). For instance, the two chief editors of the *Journal of Modern African Studies* are located in Britain and the US. European editors the largest overall continental contingent, 118 in total (23 of which non-British).

Female editors are 27.2% of this elite academic population, ranging from about 14% to 35% in our sample of journals. What is more, 22.7% of the African-based editors are women, whereas 30% is the case for the European ones. The *Journal of South African Studies* is the outlet with the greater gender balance.

Regarding affiliation 15.5% of the editors have non-academic affiliations. Such institutions are governmental agencies, NGOs, museums, etc. Most non-academics are located in European think-tanks. The *ROAPE* journal concentrates 47.4% of these non-academics.

IMPLICATIONS

This paper tries to cast some light into the structure of scholarly publishing. It seems to be the first to document in any systematic way how editorial groups are structured. Many challenges remain. The actual editorial decisions remain unobserved. Their discussions and the handling of papers are not publicly available. This empirical study can only draw general inferences regarding the key characteristics of boards based on publicly available data.

Given the uncertainty about how editors actually operate, researchers may strive to come with other complementary indicators along these lines (for a related approach see Adams et al., 2010, and Schwartz-Ziv and Weisbach, 2013). For instance, more research can be done regarding the different roles of editors inside the same journal. This remains work for further research and we sketch how such an agenda could look like.

REFERENCES

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