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"Dirty Gossips", Transnational Policy Borrowing and Lending, and Education Policy Discourse in Sub-Saharan Africa

Abstract

Transnational policy borrowing and lending of ideas is mostly from the global North to the global South. In sub-Saharan Africa, transnational policy borrowing and lending is complicated by western "dirty gossips" (distortions and stereotypes) about African societies. While works by Steiner-Khamsi, Quist and Kendall outline the complexities of transnational resource flows to sub-Saharan Africa, analysis of how western distortions about Africa shape transnational policy transfer is lacking. This paper employs symbolic violence and postcolonial frameworks to outline how Europeans and Americans' "dirty gossips" about Africa have influenced external transfer and flow of educational ideas and practices to sub-Saharan Africa since the colonial era. It also delineates the complicated ways western distortions and stereotypes about sub-Saharan Africa is a strategy by western partners in the global transnational policy borrowing and lending processes to position themselves in trusteeship roles while infantilizing education policy makers in sub-Saharan Africa. The paper argues that western education partners, particularly, western Africanist scholars, employ distortions and stereotypes as important components of their transnational policy borrowing and lending frameworks with the objective to present education in sub-Saharan Africa as a "crisis" and a new frontier, and their resolve to confront, explore and tame the crisis.

Keywords: philanthropy, education and development, education policy, non-state actors

Introduction

Globalization literature delineates the complicated ways transnational policy borrowing and lending, and transnational networks in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) have shaped the region's education policy discourses. While works by Steiner-Khamsi and Quist (2000), Quist (2003) and Kendall (2007) outline the complexities of transnational resource flows to SSA, studies analyzing how external narratives shape transnational policy transfer of a region is lacking. This paper employs symbolic violence and postcolonial frameworks to analyze the ways European and American bards' "dirty gossips" (distortions, misrepresentations, and stereotypes) about Africa have influenced external transfer and flow of ideas about education policy, practice and research in SSA. The paper argues that the distortions, misrepresentations and stereotypes perpetrated by Western forces (colonial administration, geographers, Christian missionaries, scholars and contemporary development entities) about SSA have led to education policy-making that positions Western partners in trusteeship and dominant roles and Africans in subordinated positionality in global education discourses.

Theorizing "Africa" in Western imaginations

Symbolic violence and postcolonial frameworks help explain how Western distortions, misrepresentations and stereotypes about Africa positioned African societies in subordinated positions in transnational policy borrowing and lending in education discourses. Symbolic violence as a sociological construct, discusses the social relations, power and the "othering" of people in multicultural, postcolonial and development discourses (Richards, 2013). The framework outlines how dominant groups create power asymmetry and a hierarchy that puts "dominated" groups in subordinated positons. In this case, European forces use distortions, misrepresentations and stereotypes to construct and create "subalterns" in the development discourse to suppress developing societies. Postcolonial framework also outlines the ways colonial cultural processes and political structures created indelible imprints on colonized societies. In the process of colonization, colonial subalterns accepted an inferior position and inferiority complex in their relationship with colonial dominant groups in what Frantz Fanon describes as "epidermization of inferiority" or Bourdieu's "habitus" disposition (Johnson, 2013). Postcolonial framework challenges and estrange colonial episteme and discourses, which project the narratives of white Europeans and colonial people at the center of cultural processes and occlude the history of colonialism and imperialism and rather reproduce epistemic structures and Eurocentrism. It provides a critique of how Western colonial and racial domination worked together to render the voices of colonial subalterns fugitive (Lennox, 2006). Postcolonial analysis helps decenter Western discourses that distort and misrepresent African societies and challenges imperialist narratives that depict the depravity of Africa and Africans in and position Western entities as "trustees" and "saviors" of Africa's development.

Western distortions about Africa

European distortions and misrepresentations of Africa helped pushed African societies to subordinated statuses in the global geopolitical order. Ugandan scholar P'Bitek terms the distortions and misrepresentations as "dirty gossips" (P'Bitek, 2011, p. 11). The mention of the name "Africa" invokes negative reactions of powerlessness, backwardness, primitivity, diseases, poverty, famine, chaos, crisis, conflict, and corruption. A major implication of these "dirty gossips" is that Western forces view Africans as children that need direction and their resolve to take the role of "trustees" in the education policy process. Many Westerners grow up with the notion of western White racial and cultural superiority. European forces used symbolic violence to "exoticize", romanticize and pathologize the African "other" in ways that reinforced those "dirty gossips". Western forces employed frameworks that constructed the "othering" of Africans to define the terms of their partnership with Africans. Contemporary western development entities have invented contrasts like "develop" versus "developing", "global north" versus "global south", and "first world" versus "third world" to legitimate and justify their right to their trusteeship roles in Africa's development discourse.

Four western entities have played prominent roles of promoting the dirty gossips about Africa: fifteenth century European traders; nineteenth century explorers; nineteenth century Christian missionaries, scholars and scientists; and twentieth

century American philanthropic entities. Early European Christian traders depicted Africans as less humans to justify the barbarity and inhumanity of slave trading. Nineteenth century explorers employed "imaginative geography" to scavenge the terrain of Africa to explore its geographical mysteries and acquire land for Kings and country. This group served as "unofficial symbolic imperialists, which helped define the cultural terms on which to establish unequal political relations between colonizer and colonized" (Driver, 1991, p. 135). Nineteenth century Christian missionaries used their field reports and conversion stories to popularize the myth of the "Darkest Africa". These "spiritual" soldiers on God's errands came to Africa with "3Cs": Christianity, Commerce and Civilization. They saw their divine right to lay converts in this "heathen" African continent. They portrayed all forms of African religions as superstitious. European Christians and colonial administrators employed the tools of missionary education and colonial language to undermine African children's minds about their culture.

European and American scholars used their writing to distort, misrepresent and construct African people as racially inferior (Benson, 1936). Europe's grand agenda to use the African continent for scientific study stemmed from European's categorization of Africa as the "Dark Continent" and their thirst to decode the mysteries of the "Dark Continent" and the differences of skin color. They employed scientific theories of "monogeny" and "polygeny" to reinforce the narrative of black inferiority. European scholars also employed the same old construct of "primitivity" to portray Africans as unintelligent "children" that needed direction and help to in the development process (Benson, 1936; Hershey & Artime, 2014). Benson for instance depicted the African this way:

> *He is an individual who does not look closely into things… he loves to accept laws and rules to be followed blindly… such an attitude we have to face carefully, and sanely* (Benson, 1936, p. 420).

Such European-American views about Africans came to embody much of Western narratives about Africa. American philanthropic entities including Phelps-Stokes Fund and Carnegie Corporation provided huge sums of money to educational institutions to study the "Negro" and "primitive" peoples in sub-Saharan Africa. American philanthropic entities also provided money to universities to create Social Anthropology and African Studies programs to promote research initiatives that focus on Africa and Negroes. Many of these studies reinforced the "dirty gossips" of colonial administrators. These "dirty gossips" defined transnational policy borrowing and lending on the African continent. In the next two sections, I outline how western "dirty gossips" about Africa shaped education policy discourse in Africa is education.

Non-state actors and education partnership in sub-Saharan Africa

After World War I, American philanthropic foundations collaborated with the British colonial government to intensify support for education. The strategy to insert the United States in the education policy discourse in Africa after World War I for ideological and political reasons drove the philanthropic initiatives as Dr. Anson Phelps Stokes clearly articulated in his Report of the First Commission to West Africa:

> *The end of the world war… and the appointment of mandatories under the League of Nations had drawn the attention to publicists in Europe and America to the importance of adopting educational policies that would tend to prevent international friction and to fit the Africans to meet the actual needs of life* (Benson, 1936, p. 421).

Politically, the United States wanted to insert itself in the international arena in a world that was changing. The ideological goals of the philanthropic foundations were both economic and social and included how to use education to construct the subordinated position of blacks on the African continent in the same way it occurred in American south, and how to promote economic development in the colonies through investment in human capital. American philanthropic foundations' work of promoting education of blacks in colonial Africa was to create a space within the international arena for non-state and nonmarket actors to shape the trajectory of international affairs and to influence how Americans think about the world (Berman, 1978; Yamada, 2008). Berman (1978) points out that in the face of increasing American political and economic isolation, American philanthropists designed overseas educational schemes to allow corporate America to capitalize on developing export market and raw material. The groundwork of philanthropic work in Africa in the early twentieth century was not new. Yamada points out that the American philanthropic entities aligned their transnational policy borrowing and lending on earlier frameworks of the Christian missions and colonial administration.

> *The ideas of 'adaptation', government-mission cooperation, and character training through religious instruction, which Phelps-Stokes Fund… repeated preached, were not new to colonial officials and missionaries working in Africa. The America models did not supersede what had been practiced already, but rather mixed with British notions about education for lower social ranks and local contexts* (Yamada, 2008, p. 22).

Phelps-Stokes Commission pushed for industrial education along the lines of the Hampton-Tuskegee philosophy of education to "lay the foundation of a true civilization" to the black person (Benson, 1936, p. 423). Its recommendation helped establish a system of grants to specific schools in British colonial territories and streamlined black educational initiatives on Africa for close supervision. The Commission's recommendation also led to the creation of education programs in SSA including the Achimota School in Ghana and Jeans Teacher Program in Kenya. These programs had the objective to give black students training skills needed for jobs available to ordinary blacks, and to instill character training for Africans to accept a lower social and economic positon. The contradictions and complexities of transnational borrowing and lending of American philanthropic entities became clear in the creation of Achimota School. It was the first school in British Colonial Africa to implement the Hampton-Tuskegee model of education transplanted as "adapted education" in 1924. The British colonial government repackaged the program to combine the English "public" school model and the Hampton-Tuskegee model because the local elites resisted its initial technical-vocational curriculum. The technical-vocational nature of Achimota was to turn the emerging Ghanaians into "hewers of wood and drawers of water". The integration of two very distinct and opposing models created tensions and contradictions (Quist, 2003; Steiner-Khamsi & Quist, 2000). Rockefeller Foundation, through its international Education Board provided financial support for the Phelps-Stokes Fund. Similarly, Carnegie

Corporation provided financial support to promote education in SSA, particularly in South Africa from the 1920s into the 1980s. Carnegie Corporation's educational initiative in South Africa represents one of the complexities of ideological drive and use of complicated partnership between colonial governments, Christian missions, philanthropic entities and people of good will to promote the broader colonial and imperial agenda.

Transnational policy borrowing and lending: "Crisis in education" in sub-Saharan Africa

Beginning in the late 1980s, global entities reemerged and inserted themselves in the education policy discourse in SSA. At the1990 Jomtien World Education Conference of Education for All (EFA), Western development partners presented the urgency of "Education For All" (EFA) and urged all governments to redouble their efforts to promote the initiative to ensure that all children in SSA enroll in basic education by 2015. The urgency stems from the Western entities' belief that African societies are "backward" societies and "children" that need direction in the development discourse (Lugo-Ocando & Malaolu, 2015). Western Development entities employed "institutionalized paternalistic" framework for promoting transnational policy borrowing and lending in African societies with the belief that they have the "divine" mandate to steer African societies in the "right" direction even though their objectives have always supported the European-American agenda. The Jomtien World Education Conference gave Western Development entities another opportunity to inset themselves as Africa's voice in development discourses. The imposition of policy decisions on African societies in the 1990s is similar to Europe's takeover of Africa during the 1884/5 Berlin Conference. The urgency placed on African societies to embrace the EFA initiative came at a time the Britton Woods institutions had implemented neoliberal economic policies in the region and many nations were in economic disarray.

In the process of transnational policy borrowing and lending, how knowledge flows and disseminates has become another way to create "center versus periphery" dichotomy in development discourse. Knowledge production and the direction of discourses are hegemonic processes that shape and reshape our understanding of the world. Western education researchers and policy makers have utilized knowledge production to provide narratives that portray insurmountable "crisis" in sub-Saharan Africa's educations. This perceived "education crisis" in SSA has become another phase of the "dirty gossips" about Africa. Lugo-Ocando and Malaolu (2015) point that the distortions are written in magisterial tone, derisive, dismissive or, at least, adopting the conspiratorial tone of 'After all, it is Africa: what do you expect?'. The global distortion and misrepresentation of Africa's educational achievements obscures the reality of the gains made by African societies and the challenges of extending EFA to marginalized and vulnerable population in African societies because of external economic policies. Western researchers' narratives about "education crisis" in SSA, is part of a major strategy to reinforce the "center versus periphery" dichotomy in the global human capital development discourse. The focus on "crisis in Africa's education" is a tool to justify why external agencies need to intervene in the educational discourse and transnational policy borrowing and lending and transnational network flow of ideas to the region in much the same way

European and American did in past. One wonders why indigenous African scholars and educational experts do not seem to have a voice in this discourse. Why is it that "experts" on education in SSA are predominantly white Europeans and Americans? Where are the voices of African scholars and experts? Lugo-Ocando and Malaolu intimate that such is the order of things. "Africans had little voice in their own stories – the 'knowledgeable' Western 'experts' speak for them, analyze their developmental problems for them and proffer the 'necessary solutions'" (Lugo-Ocando & Malaolu, 2015, p. 88). Western researchers have taken the role of "trusteeship of education policies and research in SSA". Their voice is the "valid voice" and their scholarship is the valid knowledge about Africa. Many Western "Africanists Education experts" operate within the garb of research to push for transnational policy borrowing and lending of educational ideas that promote Western models of policy and practice.

Conclusion

Western Africanist researchers have implemented transnational policy borrowing and lending frameworks that are similar to the "imaginative geographies" of the nineteenth century, which distorted the narrative about Africa. These education researchers present the challenges in education in SSA as new frontiers to confront, explore and tame through education research and implementation of education initiatives. They present their research initiatives as their resolve and resilience to tame the frontier in much the same ways explorers and colonial forces trooped, confronted and took over "uninhabited lands". Contemporary Western education researchers and "experts" work in much the same way as the colonial explorers in their use of imaginative geographies in a fictive way to imprint in the minds of the global community, a crisis that is not just akin to SSA but is a global crisis.

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