

This PDF includes a chapter from the following book:

Reassembling Scholarly Communications

Histories, Infrastructures, and Global Politics of Open Access

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OA Funding Provided By:

- Arcadia Fund
- Birkbeck, University of London

The open access edition of this book was made possible by generous funding from Arcadia—a charitable fund of Lisbet Rausing and Peter Baldwin.

The title-level DOI for this work is:

[doi:10.7551/mitpress/11885.001.0001](https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/11885.001.0001)

3 Social Justice and Inclusivity: Drivers for the Dissemination of African Scholarship

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The Open Access Movement, which gained traction in the early 2000s, was driven in part by the philanthropic principle of sharing scholarly literature for the acceleration of research and the enrichment of education. The Budapest Open Access Initiative (BOAI), a founding document for the openness movement, encourages the philanthropic sharing of scholarly literature for the advancement of society.¹ Arunachalam and Aulisio, amongst others, stress this philanthropic ethos when they assert that open access frees up the spread of ideas and knowledge for the growth and development of humanity.² The fundamental premise, acknowledging the cost of subscriptions and licensing barriers, was that all other influences were equal and that this free and unrestricted online access to scholarly literature would advance scholarship and societal development. However, in Africa³ and the better part of the Global South, the cost and licensing barriers are exacerbated by a myriad of other challenges such as poor access to the internet, frequent blackouts, poor information technology infrastructure, and dire lack of skills. Hence, for those in Africa and the Global South, the philanthropic principle thread must be reinforced with the social justice and inclusivity fiber. It must also consider, as does Bethany Nowviskie in this volume, the principles of Afrofuturism and especially the ways in which we can control and build our own infrastructures.

Africa is desperate to find solutions to the myriad of challenges that have a stranglehold on its development. To fast track a positive development trajectory, Africa needs to generate solutions to local challenges at an exponential rate. Hence, there is growing dependency on freely accessible channels of dissemination of scholarly information to ensure the sharing of research. As much as there is strong advocacy for free access, there has to be

equal support for inclusive participation for local solutions by Global South researchers.

We here argue that African academic libraries need to provide, as a medium for the dissemination of research and educational content, a proactive “library as publisher” service. These services should be delivered for nonprofit purposes and be underpinned by “philanthropic-social justice” principles if they are to work in this environment. Such a diamond open-access publishing model is gaining momentum in Africa, albeit very slowly.⁴ It is proposed that this “library as a publisher” service must become mainstream for academic libraries in Africa because it is a significant conduit for inclusive and free access to scholarship for the marginalized and can strongly promote unhindered participation. Further, it facilitates relatively unhindered participation in knowledge production. As pointed out by Roh, these library publishing services could allow for “new voices to find their way into disciplinary conversations, reach new audiences, both academic and public, and impact existing and emerging fields of scholarship and practice in a transformative way.”⁵

We further turn here to the extent to which the principles of social justice can be seen as a driver for the openness movement. The chapter will also present an exemplar library publishing service with a social justice agenda to openly publish content on a coequality basis. This publishing service provides free access to scholarly content and unhindered participation by African researchers in the production and dissemination of African research.

Ubuntu and Social Justice

Africa, including South Africa, has been subjected to years of colonialization and, as a consequence, has been ravished in the postcolonial period by inequality and deprivation. This deprivation extends to access to scholarly literature, which has relegated Africa to the periphery of the world’s knowledge production. We contend that the Open Access Movement and its social justice principles will usher in some level of equity and equal opportunity; further, it will facilitate the participation of new African voices in the research landscape. We base these initial arguments on the theses of John Rawls, who posits that social justice promotes the protection of equal access to liberties, rights, and opportunities, as well as taking care of the least advantaged members of society.⁶ Further, Buck and Valentino, and Miller argue that at least part of the notion of social justice is concerned

with ways in which information resources are accessible to the citizenry through social institutions.⁷

Koutras maintains that John Rawls's theory of social justice is centered on the notion that a society cannot be just until there is equality and that will include equal access to information.⁸ Open access is viewed as a means for social justice because it gives opportunities to everybody to acquire knowledge through growing opportunities for equal access to information. However, what is often missing in these applications of Rawls's theory is the equity in the participation process of knowledge *creation*.

We believe that social justice and the African principle of Ubuntu could advance sharing for the eradication of information poverty and information unfairness. As pointed out by various authors, and despite claims to the contrary,⁹ the Open Access Movement is guided by the principle that access to information, an absolute necessity for any level of growth and development, must be made freely available to all end users.¹⁰ Social justice approaches to eradicating information poverty and injustice can use open access as the conduit for this eradication. Ubuntu, on the other hand, is a Zulu word advancing communal justice *en route* to promoting an egalitarian society.¹¹ The principles of fairness and justice underpin both Ubuntu and social justice. Academic libraries, be it from the perspective of the Global North (social justice) or from an African perspective (Ubuntu), have been rolling out open-access services to ensure information is made freely accessible to the widest reading audience possible. In response to an Ubuntu "agended" call for the open sharing of African scholarship, some academic libraries are now offering a "library as a publisher" service to take scholarly information to all parts of the "global village." This service brings to the fore and consolidates the social justice imperative of open access. Researchers, in this growing service model, are supported in their desire to share their research output for the growth of research and to find solutions to the myriad of challenges that beset African societies. Improved access to information will ensure that all sections of the "village" can contribute to the growth and development of the "global village."

Social Justice and Inclusivity through Library Publishing

In rolling out an Ubuntu "agended" library publishing service, some academic institutions have taken open-access publishing to an unprecedented

level in South Africa by offering diamond open access. Raju lists six South African universities that offer a library publishing program.¹² The South African institutions that offer this “library as a publisher” provision are:

- University of Stellenbosch—26 titles;
- Free State University—9 titles;
- University of Kwa-Zulu Natal—8 titles;
- University of Cape Town—5 titles;
- University of South Africa—5 titles;
- University of the Western Cape—2 titles; and,
- Rhodes University—titles.

The underpinning philosophy in offering such services is that public universities in South Africa receive substantial funding from national government.¹³ This funding is earmarked for, *inter alia*, the provision of innovative and relevant library services. Some of the academic libraries have taken the bold step of providing this innovative library publishing service, without any training in publishing. The authors hold the view that this service responds to the social responsiveness and transformation agendas of their institutions. This diamond open-access service delivers, amongst others, decolonized African scholarship through the creation of an alternative publishing model that facilitates the cocreation of knowledge, rather than merely its reception. The University of Cape Town (UCT) has extended its “library as publisher” service by publishing monographs and textbooks. Currently, UCT has seven monographs and two textbooks that have been published, with three more monographs that are currently being worked on for imminent publication. In the quest for social justice and an egalitarian society, access to knowledge and scholarship should not be dependent on economic affordability. The authors acknowledge that online access is a challenge in Africa (and Maura A. Smale notes, in her chapter, that this is true also in the United States). However, this service is, at the least, one barrier removed. Further, it promotes the principles of inclusivity, ensuring that African research output is included in the dissemination process.

Decolonization of the Colonized Publishing Landscape

The BOAI states that removing access barriers to scholarly content will accelerate research, enrich education and share the learning of the rich with

the poor and the poor with the rich. This statement supports the need for academic libraries to make innovative contributions to the dissemination of scholarship and contribute to the disruption of the colonized publishing landscape. The envisaged continental diamond open-access library publishing platform will assist in removing barriers to participation and ensure freedom of African representation. The envisaged platform, using open-source software, makes provision for the publication of African scholarship via their academic libraries. The opening of opportunities for the publication of African books and journals will address the dearth of African scholarship and remove barriers to participation in knowledge production and dissemination.

We assert, from our perspective, that over a period of time, there has been an unintended but systematic colonization of the publishing landscape which the library publishing service needs to challenge. This allegation is supported by comments from authors such as Crissinger, who make the point that there have been assumptions about the Global South remaining ignorant and underdeveloped until it has access to the Global North's knowledge.¹⁴ In an attempt to "eradicate" this ignorance and promote development, there has been a push for the Global North to focus on improving the flow of information to the Global South. This imperialist proposition supports the unidirectional flow of information instead of a facilitated process allowing for knowledge exchange. However, as pointed out by Burkett, the people of the Global South may be "poor" in terms of the information they can retrieve from the internet but what is not factored in is the richness in many other ways which could never be calculated in the Western scientific paradigm, and that would include, amongst others, social relationships, community, and cultural traditions.¹⁵

Bonaccorso et al. bring to the debate the contributing circumstances that fueled this colonizing process; namely, the exclusion of Global South researchers from the supply side of the academic publishing and communication process.¹⁶ Building on this, we argue that there are two fundamental processes that propagate this exclusion: first, Global South researchers, in the main, do not have access to research already published (and that would include research produced in the Global South) for them to contribute adequately to the world's knowledge production. The second is the delegitimization of research emanating from the Global South. Roh presents a scenario that demonstrates how this delegitimization contributes to the colonization of the publishing landscape.¹⁷ She highlights that economics papers written

about the United States were more likely to be published in the top five economics journals and only 1.5 percent were about countries other than the United States. Hence, there has been a shift in contributions from researchers from Global South countries who have refocused their research and were reporting on the United States in order to get published. Thus, the publishing markets and impact factors are driving the global research agenda.

These unintended, but profit-driven processes have triggered, in the view of the authors, the colonization of the publishing landscape resulting in the marginalization of research voices from the Global South. The abovementioned inequalities in publishing for and by marginalized voices are compounded by economic circumstances—specifically, the inability of authors from the Global South to pay exorbitant article processing charges (APCs) in an environment where there is a push via the openness movement for the free sharing of research output.

Library publishing is meant to create fertile ground for new voices that can find their way into disciplinary conversations, reach new audiences, both academic and public, and positively alter the existing publishing landscape. There is a desperate need for the democratization and decolonization of the publishing landscape—and library publishing is one such service that can deliver on this need. This publishing service promotes social justice and the inclusion of African researchers and research output into mainstream research processes.

Unhindered Access versus Unhindered Participation

One of the primary purposes for the production of research is to find solutions to challenges that beset society. Therefore, it is important for research output to have the widest accessibility for the greatest consumption. However, consumption is a double-sided coin; on the one side there is consumption for action to resolve problems and on the other, there is consumption necessary for the construction of new knowledge—researcher consumption. In terms of researcher consumption, the uneven research landscape brings to the debate the whole issue of equitable access and discoverability. In terms of equitable access, what must be brought to the fore is equitable participation in the creation and sharing of new knowledge.

The fundamental principles of open access point to equitable access culminating in equitable participation. These social justice principles have

been hijacked by the publishers who feed aspirations for improved citation (which is understandable given its association with tenure), promotion, greater possibilities of funding and such. However, it detracts from the fundamental principles of the openness movement, which are sharing and inclusivity.

In a highly uneven global research landscape, there is no equality—there are those researchers that are marginalized, those that are on the periphery, and then those that are at the epicenter. The “participation access” is extremely divergent, with researchers from the Global North being “more equal” than those from the Global South. As stated by Bonaccorso et al., “everyone may be free to read papers, but it may still be prohibitively expensive to publish them.”¹⁸ Prohibitive APCs are one of a myriad of challenges that contribute to this inequality. Authors from the Global South have to compete for space in a limited number of journals carrying a range of challenges, from lack of content to support the creation of new knowledge, to the inability to pay exorbitant APCs courtesy of legacy publishing processes. This absurd and unrealistic competition significantly contributes to the exclusion of the marginalized research voices of the Global South. Library publishing is envisaged to be that social justice service that can give voice to the marginalized: to give space for active and equitable participation of researchers from the Global South in knowledge production and dissemination.

Library Publishing in South Africa

South Africa is a fledgling democracy that has endured decades of colonized and apartheid governance. The system of apartheid compartmentalized higher education with the historically disadvantaged black institutions being dramatically under resourced. We would argue that, in order to counteract the negative effects of this history, advantaged institutions in the present have a moral obligation to share scholarly content for the advancement of research in the country as a whole and for the greater good of the public. McKiernan shares this view when she writes that “open scholarship can help universities fulfil their missions by sharing research outputs, so they have the quickest and broadest societal impact.”¹⁹ Raju, Raju, and Claassen hold the view that the sharing of scholarly output will have a domino effect of growing the culture of research, ultimately culminating in Africa moving away from the periphery of the world’s knowledge

production to the epicenter—moving away from being a net consumer to becoming a contributor to knowledge production.²⁰

A significant contributor to this transformation from consumer to participant is the offer of a “library as a publisher” service. The rationale underpinning this service is one of the core principles of open access, namely philanthropy. The offer of a diamond open-access publishing service to promote social justice and Ubuntu, must be embraced by historically advantaged African institutions. There must be concerted collective efforts to mainstream the “library as a publisher” service to support equity first and then equality in the creation and dissemination of African research. This nonprofit publishing model is a seismic shift in thinking around benefits for the production and dissemination of research:

- for the author, who wants their research reviewed and circulated,²¹ the shift is from “what is in it for me” to “I must share my research”;
- for the reader, the shift is from, “I cannot access all research, therefore I cannot create knowledge” to “all research is discoverable and can be reused for knowledge production”; and
- for the publisher (the library), a contribution to shifting profit-driven motivation to making a meaningful social impact to grow the knowledge economy.

In this model, all three stakeholders move toward the same goal of driving the dissemination of African scholarship and thereby participating in creating new African knowledge, which must form part of the global knowledge economy.

The “library as a publisher” service is offered at some South African academic libraries that collectively produce more than 55 journal titles. The UCT Libraries have extended their service and are now publishing open monographs/textbooks.²² It is acknowledged that there is no systematic publishing agenda, with each institution engaging in self-learning and independently experimenting with the software, given that all of the institutions are using the Public Knowledge Project’s software products (Open Journal Systems or Open Monograph Press)—all institutions are proverbially reinventing the wheel. Indeed, there is very little sharing of skills and resources. Such a lack of skills and poor infrastructure are deterrents to those institutions that are not offering such a service.

African Continental Platform

In acknowledging the skills shortage and poor information technology infrastructure, there is a process afoot to develop a continental platform for the publication of open journals and books. There is proof of concept for the functioning of an aggregated institutional platform, which in due course will be extended into a national platform, a South African platform. This South African platform will be made available to any of the academic institutions in the country to use for the publication of their local journals and/or monographs. The intention is to expand this national platform with the collaboration of a number of African partners, toward the creation of the continental platform. In the current UCT publishing platform, there are monographs that have audio and visual clips to simulate laboratory situations to overcome the lack of such facilities. The capacity to magnify images in a dermatology textbook allows for doctors to probe skin conditions; the capacity for books to be read to users improves accessibility for the visually impaired and supports different learning styles, especially those readers coming from backgrounds where English is not their first language. These capacities address the issues of social justice and inclusion.

Conclusion

The current commercial research publishing landscape is dictated to by the profit motive; the dictate for the researchers is the need for improved citation count and the prestige of being published in high-impact journals. These criteria, among other issues, have skewed the publishing landscape, benefiting primarily the Global North at the expense of the Global South. There is a need for a disruptor to this publishing landscape and the library publishing service, driven by its social justice and inclusivity imperatives, will facilitate the dissemination of African scholarship and the equitable and equal participation by African researchers in knowledge production. This disruptor will advance the principles of Ubuntu as it will contribute to the eradication of information poverty and information unfairness.

The library publishing service will aid in redrawing the map of global knowledge production and bring parity to the global power dynamics of global knowledge production. The Open Access Movement, through the library publishing service, needs to broaden its focus from access to knowledge

to full participation in knowledge creation in scholarly communication. Further, the movement must recapture its social justice and inclusivity imperatives in support of the equitable dissemination of Global South scholarship, including African scholarship. The inclusion of content for and by marginalized researchers is driven by the Ubuntu desire for an egalitarian society. The development of alternative scholarly communication platforms, such as the one being developed by UCT Libraries, provides opportunities for libraries and library partners to push back against a biased publishing system and support publications that might not otherwise have a voice: inclusivity and social justice must be at the epicenter of the dissemination of African scholarship.

Notes

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3. Africa is divided into fifty-four culturally heterogeneous and politically differentiated countries which are distinct in terms of their pattern of capital accumulation, their degree of industrialization and commercialization, and their rates of literacy and urbanization. Fifty percent of the continent's gross national product is generated by only three countries; namely South Africa, Egypt, and Nigeria. These uneven patterns of growth are also evident within countries. The average literacy rate is 61 percent, one of the lowest in the world. This low literacy rate contributes to the continent's slow development and the high rate of poverty. See Fouad Makki, "Post-Colonial Africa and the World Economy: The Long Waves of Uneven Development," *Journal of World-Systems Research* 21, no. 1 (2015): 124–146, <https://doi.org/10.5195/JWSR.2015.546>; UNESCO, "Fact Sheet Sub-Saharan Africa Strong Foundations: Early Childhood Care and Education," accessed May 13, 2019, https://en.unesco.org/gem-report/sites/gem-report/files/fact_sheet_ssa.pdf.
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