



South-North Differences in Academia and Publishing – Peace Medie and Alice Kang

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The Nokoko journal is committed to a world where people are free from all forms of oppression and exploitation, where respect for individuals' varied differences is maintained, and where everyone can realise their full potentials. NokokoPod is a companion to the journal, covering current African issues. It aims to bring forth new perspectives that broaden, trouble, complicate and enrich current discourses. Edited and annotated versions of the conversations will be made available on the journal website.

This issue of NokokoPod is all about reflections on academia, publishing, open access and South-North differences. The podcast for this discussion is available on the Nokoko journal website. This conversation took place on October 30th, with Logan Cochrane in Canada, Peace Medie in the United Kingdom and Alice Kang in the United States. This version of the PDF has been reviewed by Logan Cochrane, Peace Medie and Alice Kang. In addition to the conversation, a set of annotations have been added as footnotes so as to strengthen the value of these publications and enable them to act as a resource for listeners and readers who want to have

additional context and/or find additional resources on the topics discussed.

Logan: Welcome to NokokoPod episode #12 of 2019. Today I am joined by two guests, Dr. Alice Kang,¹ professor of Political Science and Ethnic Studies at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, and Dr. Peace Medie,² a professor of Gender and International Relations at the University of Bristol. They are going to speak with us about power, knowledge, publishing, and broader questions about participation in academia. I would like to thank you both for joining us.

Peace: Thank you for the invitation to be on your podcast.

Alice: It is great to be here. Thank you.

Logan: You have written about the gendered and South-North differences in terms of representation in academic publications, specifically journals.³ Could you start by summarizing the findings of what you discovered?

Peace: Our article was on women, gender and politics, and the focus was on the representation of scholars in the Global South⁴ in women, gender and politics journals. We wanted to understand whether or not they were publishing scholars based in the Global South, and whether or not those ideas were being engaged with. We did this in two parts. In

¹ For additional information about the work of Dr. Alice Kang, see:
<https://polisci.unl.edu/alice-kang>

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<https://www.peacemedie.com/>

³ Medie, P. A. & Kang, A. J. (2018). Power, knowledge and the politics of gender in the Global South. *European Journal of Politics and Gender*, 1(1-2), 37-53.

⁴ This article uses Global South as a proper noun with reference to the non-aligned movement, with origins dating back to 1955.

one part, we looked at how the woman, gender and politics scholarship engages with ideas from scholars based in the Global South. One argument that we make is that the gender and politics scholarship does not adequately take into consideration global economic and political structures that affect women's lives and that affect gender and politics. The second part of the article looked at who gets published in gender and politics journals, actually gender journals more broadly because we looked at journals such as *Gender and Society* as well. So, who gets published? We looked at six journals and what we found was that less than 3% of the articles published by the journals in the Global North were by scholars based in the Global South. We found a massive underrepresentation of scholars based in the Global South.

Logan: Based on this finding, Professor Alice, can you elaborate on what the reasons are why this may happen, in terms of barriers for greater participation?

Alice: There are a number of barriers. It could possibly be that scholars based in the Global South are simply not submitting articles to journals such as *Gender and Society* and *Politics and Gender*. That is one comment we have heard from editors, that they would like to see more submissions. But, we also think that there are problems in terms of post-submission processing of articles, whether it passes the review process and meets the standards that are set by editors and reviewers. There are also barriers that are rooted in changes in global economies and domestic economies, where there is a lot of pressure put on professors based in African universities to teach, meaning having more classes or more students. As a result, they have relatively less time to dedicate to doing research.

Logan: Professor Peace, in your experience with the University of Ghana, there are many scholars and many universities throughout the

Global South. If they are not submitting to these journals, are they contributing to different types of journals or to different places? Participating in different circles of knowledge, if you like?

Peace: First of all, I do not think it is that scholars in the Global South, or in Africa which is where I know best, are not submitting. There is an article by Weather and Briggs,⁵ I believe in African Affairs, and they look at two journals, African Affairs and The Journal of Modern African Studies, and what they find is that it is not that submission rates have gone down but that fewer articles are being accepted and published. I do think that scholars based in the Global South are submitting, but fewer articles are being published. At the same time, it is true that there are many journals that are published on the continent to which scholars are submitting papers and their rates of acceptance might be higher. I think that this is partly a conversation about journals based in the Global North, but also journals based in Africa and in Asia and how we can encourage people to engage with these journals and to ensure that the works that are published in these journals are more widely available and are being cited globally.

Logan: I recently spoke with a scholar from Ethiopia about the barriers they face.⁶ An interesting part of that conversation was that within Ethiopia, at the public universities, there are over 30 journals that are run and managed by those Ethiopian public universities. The readership of those journals is largely a domestic one. A significant number of articles are being published, it is just in a different sphere of readership and of publications. Are you seeing that as a trend or maybe something specific to Ethiopia?

⁵ Briggs, R. C. & Weathers, S. (2016). Gender and location in African politics scholarship: The other white man's burden? *African Affairs*, 115(460), 466-489.

⁶ Cochrane, L. & Lemma, M. D. (2019) Reflections on Open Access from the Global South: Melisew Dejene Lemma. *NokokoPod* 2019(7): 1-22.

Peace: From what I have seen in Ghana, there are quite a few journals. I know that the University of Ghana, for example, has started, last year I believe, a program to put these journals online. Another barrier is that a lot of these journals are only published in hard copies. As a result, if you are not physically in that country, you are unlikely to access it. One of the things that is being done is to put these journals online. However, I do know that in Ghana and in Nigeria, there are a lot of journals that are being published domestically. The issue is to what extent are they being read by people outside of the institution or outside of the country?

Alice: To add on to that, if you are based in Canada or the UK or US, researchers rely on things like the Web of Knowledge⁷ that collects articles and you can do a keyword search to find literature. I was surprised when looking at the Web of Knowledge how imbalanced the coverage is of journals based in the Global South. Even if you wanted to find these other journals and articles, and you rely on these so-called global storehouses, they are completely missing journals based in Ghana, Nigeria, Ethiopia and so on.

Logan: It may also be a question of language.⁸ If you are working in North Africa, French may be more common and Arabic may be more common. The ways in which people are producing and sharing information might not fit into the requirements of particular journals, or that might not be a language that they are trained to publish academic works in.

⁷ Web of Knowledge is now the Web of Science. It is managed by Clarivate Analytics, which is owned by Thomson Reuters, a for-profit multinational publishing company.

⁸ Cochrane, L. & Thornton, A. (2018). The geography of development studies: Leaving no one behind. In *Forum for Development Studies* 45, 167-175.

Peace: Most publications are in English. From Francophone Africa, you find that there are fewer articles being submitted, partly because we are publishing mainly in English. It is a lot to ask someone to be fluent in French and to be fluent in English enough to write academic articles. I just co-organized a workshop with Nana Akua Anyidoho at the University of Ghana and Gordon Crawford and we had a call for early career scholars based in West Africa. There were very few submissions from French-speaking countries, and it is partly because most of the academic work that we do is being done in English. For French speakers and Portuguese speakers, and in other parts of the world, Spanish speakers, it will be more difficult to be a part of the global conversation.

Alice: One thing that I was curious about is whether the representation of scholars based in Africa is better or worse in French language journals such as *Politique Africaine* or *Cahiers d'etudes africaines* or even the *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, as they publish in both French and English. The impression is that they do publish scholars based in Francophone West Africa. However, I think it is still quite imbalanced.

Logan: Your article and your research looks at a specific component of the academic submission and publication components in a set of journals. If we look at the barriers that scholars in the Global South encounter more broadly, to participate in academia, could you elaborate on some of those barriers for participation?

Peace: I would like to, first of all, begin with what is happening in institutions, as I think it is important to speak about the institutions as well. Some recent work on teaching requirements, for example, talks about the conditions in which scholars work. People need time to sit and think about ideas and develop ideas. I think there is a conversation to be had about the extent to which scholars based in the Global South are able to do this. But I also like to point out that there is a great deal of

variation across institutions, whether within Africa or in Asia or in Latin America. There is a great deal of variation. I have spoken to people where the institutions are very supportive and they are able to access journals and they are able to get grant funding to go to conferences. On the other hand, you have the other extreme where people do not even have access to journal articles. The first thing is about knowing what is happening within the institutions within which we work. The other part about it is the barriers that people face in trying to access these journals internationally. That is about what value is placed on certain kinds of knowledge and on certain methodologies, because certain methods are more valued than others, which would mean that people who do not adopt a certain method are less likely to be published in certain journals. It is also about whose ideas we engage with. If we are writing about a country, are we citing people who are based in that country, who have worked on that issue? That is also something to think about. This means getting past reviewers; not just that it meets certain standards, but understanding who gets to set those standards. One of the criticisms that you hear a lot is that people based in the Global South are not the ones deciding on what "good" scholarship is supposed to be. Who is a part of this conversation? Who decides what is good scholarship? There are other issues as well. For example: who do we put in our syllabi and who do we invite to be part of special issues or edited books, and who do we invite to be on editorial boards? There are a lot of barriers to publication, but also beyond publication, in engagement more broadly within the academic sphere.

Logan: A few years ago, a colleague and I did a study of development studies journals to look at a question of where do we do research?⁹ "We" as the collective community of development studies researchers. It was quite interesting because this question that you raised overlaps here

⁹ Cochrane, L. & Thornton, A. (2018). The geography of development studies: Leaving no one behind. In *Forum for Development Studies* 45, 167-175.

in the sense that there are very distinct trends about where research was being done and where research was not being done. We found that certain places are significantly under researched. You have a country like the Republic of Congo or Djibouti or some of the post-Soviet countries where very little research has been done. It is interesting as a reflection on us, as a collective, about the decision making and the reasons why we do research in certain places or how funding goes to certain parts of the world. More importantly, however, for the people in those countries themselves, it also results in a certain set of evidence base. If they want to have evidence-based decision making or policy making or services that are based on evidence; the evidence base they have is quite limited. Alice, you have worked in West Africa in some of these countries where not a lot of research has been done. Do you have any reflections on how these processes take place, about where knowledge is produced and about what and where it is not produced and about what?

Alice: One point, just to push back, sometimes we think there is no research being done, but there actually is a lot of work. It is just in a different field or in a different language. My first book was on the Republic of Niger.¹⁰ Whenever I tell people in the US that I study Niger, they joke about how nobody must study that. However, if you actually go, and go to the university in Niamey or some of the new universities, there are many scholars producing. However, they are producing in national or country-based journals or they are writing working papers. A lot of them are writing consultancy reports for NGOs or for the World Bank. There is knowledge being produced. As Peace said, it is a question of whose voice or whose knowledge do we value? Having said that, there are definitely trends. Many scholars are studying Ghana, Senegal and Malawi. My hunch is that it is partly political, whether the government makes it easier for people to conduct research on questions related to politics or

¹⁰ Kang, A. (2015). *Bargaining for Women's Rights: Activism in an Aspiring Muslim Democracy*. Minneapolis and St. Paul: University of Minnesota Press.

whatever topic. It would be important for scholars to know about more countries then, for example not just Rwanda or Uganda, and to look at the Republic of Congo or the Central African Republic or Cameroon.

Peace: To add to that, I think your point about how this scholarship informs policy making, for example, goes back to underline the importance of having a diversity of voices within our scholarship. If you think about it, and this is something that I think about a lot, if the World Bank is going to implement projects in Ghana and Ghanaian scholars have written on that issue but their work has not been published in certain journals or used certain methods, this means that the World Bank is less likely to consult these works. What you will have then is that policy is being developed and being implemented and the people who are impacted by the policy have not had a voice in shaping it. To me, that is something that is very important, which is another reason why we need to have representation of scholars from the Global South within journals that are published in North America and in Europe.

Logan: Where this occurs is through the indexing of certain platforms, whether it is an indexing platform like the Web of Science or others, they only index certain journals. As a result, those local scholars working and publishing in national journals or in working papers or in other forms or in evaluation reports and so on, there is rich knowledge there, but it is not being indexed on those platforms. It is, therefore, not considered in the same way the platforms say they offer the best of the "rigorous peer reviewed" literature. That does, in a sense, prioritize some forms of knowledge production over others. That is a transition into the next question that I have, which is that there are many new shifts in publishing and there is a greater recognition that in certain places in the Global South access to knowledge is quite difficult. The subscriptions to the journals are quite expensive. Recognizing that this is not always the case, at the University of Ghana there tends to be better

access to subscriptions for journals, while in other countries like Malawi or Ethiopia, not as much. For those countries, access to knowledge is particularly a challenge. In response to this, I think a justice question about who has access to knowledge, there have been a range of responses. Some of the corporate owned journals are offering an open access model for a fee. There are new journals that are emerging that are fully open access, but there is also a fee to publish there. There are other types of journals that are fully free from beginning to end and open access. Some institutional donors are making shifts toward requiring publicly funded research be open access. Reflecting on your research and representations in the academic space and in journals, could you both reflect on what you see in those trends? Do you view them as transformative, or not, and why?

Peace: I think they have the potential to be. A lot of these new initiatives are in the very early stages and we are all trying to figure them out and to consider how they might work out in the long term. I think open access, in an ideal world, would be exactly what we need. However, something that I think about a lot is the quality of open access journals. I know that a lot of time and labor goes in to publishing journals, which is why even with some open access journals, there are publishing fees. Therefore, something that I think about a lot is how can we have open access journals without charging publishing fees. Not only in the Global South, also in the North, a lot of people might not be able to afford these fees. I think that there is a lot of potential there. But I do think there is a lot of work to be done to ensure that, first of all, we have the quality that we want to see. And of course, that goes back to who determines what good quality is. It is also to ensure that even with open access journals, publication fees do not become prohibitive.

Alice: Our article was made open access following an award. The whole journal is not open access. There are ways you can get around

that. For instance, at my university, they will somehow acquire the copyright for my articles, and then I am able to post the entire content. In an ideal world, the journal itself should be open access. Journals like *African Studies Quarterly* have been steadily free and available to everybody. I do not know of other journals following that model. I think it is important to do.

Logan: Being based in the UK and the US respectively, are you seeing any institutional shifts on thinking about open access within the institution?

Peace: Within Europe there is a lot of attention being paid to assisting authors in publishing in journals that have article processing costs, or the publishing fees. There is a conversation around that. People who are able to successfully get grants are able to write in these costs into their grants. But of course, people who do not get grants and do not have institutional support find it difficult to pay these fees and therefore to publish in these journals.

Alice: At my institution, we have talked about but have not implemented a policy encouraging and rewarding authors who publish in open access journals. We are all incentive driven. People want to get promoted. If it was written in policy that people would be rewarded or commended from publishing in a journal that might be lower "ranked", however you want to define ranked, but that is available to the public, that might change how people decide where to publish.

Peace: I agree. I think there needs to be an attitudinal shift in how we see journals and for lack of a better word "rank", or what we value. This means re-thinking what outlets we value and encouraging people to publish in open access journals. Once we begin to see that shift, then it will become more of a norm. In the same way, I had this conversation

also about publishing in journals based in the Global South. Not necessarily open access journals, but just journals published in the Global South, where there is a concern that even within institutions in the Global South, you do not necessarily get rewarded for publishing in journals that are not being published in North America and Europe. There is a need for us to submit to these journals and to cite the work that is published in these journals so that people begin to see them as suitable outlets for scholarship.

Logan: Based on your research, and maybe things you are already working on, are there research questions that you would like to see more research done on?

Peace: Not necessarily around publishing trends per se, but one of the things that we point out in our article, in the concluding section, is what our various fields would look like if we were engaging with ideas from scholars in the Global South. In our article, we talk about what would gender and politics scholarship look like if we engaged with, for example, African feminists? Would we be asking different questions? Would we be adopting different methods? What interests me at this stage is moving scholarship to a place where we are very much recognizing the work that is being done within the Global South and incorporating this into our own work.

Alice: One of the specific issues areas where I think people studying the Global South are 'behind the times' is looking at the impact, for instance, of land grabs across Africa or the impacts of globalization on the provision of public goods. Particularly in the US, we do not look at those issues as much as we should. There are already, as Peace mentioned, feminists and other scholars, writing about these topics.

Logan: Methodologically, I have looked at this myself a little bit where if you compare the results that emerge from a literature review or a systematic review using a platform like Web of Science, which tends to be more northern based corporate owned journals, versus the results you get from a Google Scholar search, which would include master's theses, those national journals that we spoke about earlier, and so on.¹¹ The results look significantly different. That is interesting for me, to look at how the results of our findings differ based on the methods that we use to find evidence.

Peace: That requires us to think about actually changing these platforms that we use. I do think scholars can basically raise these issues. In such a work, they can point to how the platform that you use determines the information you generate and then determines what you engage with in your work. If we are able to show that, it is very interesting. But then, what do we do with that information? Do we take it to Web of Science and then ask for them to change how they make information available to us?

Logan: As you said, the first step is looking at if the difference exists and how, with my look at food security research, it does seem to differ significantly because the Google Scholar pulls up all of those reports that Alice was mentioning: the NGO work, different types of consultancy work, PhD theses, and that sort of thing. The results are quite a bit different. What I am interested in personally is how do we bridge some of those gaps? Web of Science may not add new journals or change its metrics of how it decides what gets indexed or not, but what could potentially be done are systematic reviews of material that is not included on its indexed platform, and then bringing that knowledge together and

¹¹ Cochrane, L. & Nigussie, Z. (2018). The state of knowledge on food security in Ethiopia: Knowledge production trends and publication accessibility. *Journal of Rural and Community Development*, 13(3).

publishing it within those spaces. As a result, there is a sort of knowledge exchange across these knowledge circles. For any of the emerging scholars or graduate students looking for ideas, that is something that we hope more people will take up.

Alice: Editors themselves need to be committed to this. Somebody could write a great review and send it to an editor and they may say 'this does not count' as part of what our mission is, or what our journal does. Trying to diversify who holds the editorial position is extremely important. Doing more transformative work.

Peace: That returns us to: Who gets to be on editorial boards? Who do we send papers to, for review?

Logan: Right. You have talked about that institutional change; these gatekeepers of journals, who do that initial assessment to see if the paper fits with the mission and vision of the journal and the quality standards? They do a quick yes or no, and send it off for peer review, or not. At that level, there is some critical reflection that needs to take place about whose voices are there and in what is being prioritized. On the other side, on the individual level, there are also questions about where we, as this big group of scholars out there submitting material to these journals, where we submit our work to. With time, the journals that we submit to gain in prominence, recognition and ranking because of our contribution to them.

Alice: In my own experience, in one of my graduate seminars of comparative politics, the students were complaining to me that my syllabus had too many scholars based in North America and Europe. They asked, why are there not more scholars from or based in the Global South? Students asking these questions of their professors is also good.

Logan: That is a good note to end: an action point for every every-one who is out there listening. I would like to thank you both for joining us today, talking about your research and your reflections on the trends we see in academia, whose voices are represented and the changes that you would like to see. Thank you for your time today.

Peace: Thank you for having us. Thank you.