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African Scholarship and Visa Challenges for Nigerian Academics

Abstract: Twenty-first-century societies are driven by knowledge. But knowledge regimes in the world today are not balanced, which leads to dubious knowledge, poor recommendations, and vacuous conclusions in the areas of policy and practice. This is manifested in and closely related to the compromised academic mobility of African scholars, which has become topical and in need of attention across the global knowledge domains. African scholarship and scholars do not easily move across space and time to cross fertilize ideas and knowledge. African academic talents are thus at the margins of global scholarship and are poorly rated. Many find it difficult to participate in international academic activities due to difficulty in obtaining a visa to travel to the West, which is regarded as the locus of true knowledge production and dissemination. Unfortunately, primary research on dynamics, complexities, and contours of African academic mobility, particularly to the West, is scanty, fragmented, and largely anecdotal, which necessitates more robust and contemporary knowledge. This empirical article is

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set in Nigeria, Africa's most populous country, and the country with the greatest number of universities on the continent. Primary data were collected through qualitative in-depth interviews (IDIs). Three prominent universities were selected for the study: University of Ibadan, Ahmadu Bello University, and Lagos State University. Sources of secondary data were unclassified official documents and scholarly publications.

The world is a global village! This is a cliché commonly used by scholars, public policymakers, and analysts with positive attitudes toward globalization. Such orientations rest heavily on the premise that the world has shrunk with respect to commodities, entities, and forces including knowledge production and sharing. It is believed that the world and its drivers and forces have transformed and gained momentum, which has changed the very nature of the world such that boundaries can hardly be said to exist in real and practical terms. According to Appadurai's (2003) "imagined world landscapes," attempts to make sense of the new world in the era of globalization (globalized activities) occur in five dimensions: ethnoscapes (people who move internationally), technoscapes (technology often link to international corporations), financescapes (global capital, currency markets, stock exchanges), mediascapes (electronic and new media), and ideoscapes (official state ideologies and counterideologies). The essence of Appadurai's (2003) analysis of globalization is to transcend the simple and naïve border crossing and traversals that usually dominate globalization analysis and to offer critical analysis to incorporate specialized types of economic and social domination (Akanle 2011a).

Although Appadurai's framework has been found useful, it does not empirically and sufficiently explain the dynamics of African knowledge production and sharing in the twenty-first-century knowledge-driven socioeconomic system. These are dynamics that determine the nature and extent of knowledge production and sharing that occur and operate usually within countries, regions, and internationally across time and space. For example, while currency and capital move freely and boundlessly with the aid of technologies in the form of transfer as a resource, African knowledge as embodied by Africans may not move so freely, which may call into question African scholarship as a useful knowledge resource (see Akanle and Olutayo 2009). Sometimes the dynamics of African knowledge production and sharing in the twenty-first century are left to chance and personal judgment of individual scholars. Chance and personal judgment have huge implications for knowledge production, knowledge/information sharing, and global development generally. Although twenty-first-century development has been and will continue to be driven by knowledge, knowledge regimes in the world today are less than balanced and often lead to partial, incomplete, and poor recommendations and vacuous conclusions in the areas of policy and practice. This has extraordinary implications for national and international development.

African scholars usually have little access to the travel and research support

that they need to improve and communicate their knowledge. In general, this has negatively affected their ability and opportunities to produce and disseminate knowledge sufficiently for African and global development. The trajectories of African scholarship and international development explored in this article are manifested in the compromised academic mobility of African scholars and scholarship. If the world is hypothetically and practically a global village in some respects, it follows that the consequences of actions or inactions will be felt across the board. Therefore, neither knowledge nor scholars should be segmented because solutions to common problems should be readily available, and this is possible only when scholars interact in person at international conferences and workshops for practical and sustainable knowledge exchange.

This article aims to fill a major gap in African scholarship, educational functionality, and global development, especially because the small amount of primary empirical research on African academic mobility across continents, especially to the West, is inconclusive and largely anecdotal. The few materials available are actually peripheral. For example, Adebowale (2001) explored only some issues for the future of African scholarship based on the imbalance noted in scholarly publications. According to Adebowale (2001), African scholars are generally under-represented in journals from Europe, Canada, and the United States, even though the journals are obviously about Africa and the people who live there. Cavers (1997) also explored only some of the factors that led scholars away from Africa after the two world wars, particularly those in anthropology.

Although the European University Association (2010) explored the relationship between African and European cooperation in higher education, the diplomatic challenges faced by African scholars are not explored in detail. Mkandawire (1995) presented a historical context for assessing the condition of African scholarship in the twenty-first century. The concerns were the changes that took place from the postindependence era through the economic crises of the 1970s into the late 1990s, and the framework was brain drain and political circumstances. The brain drain concern was also the topic of Tetey's work in 2006. Olsson (2000) discussed only the implications of the context of knowledge production. In 2009, the United Nations Educational, Social, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) organized an international conference on globalization and the place of Africa, which focused on the interface of the globalization of African scholars and their scholarship within the framework of visas and international development.

Groundbreaking work tracing the nexus of African scholarship and globalization was carried out by Zeleza in 2002. The first study (Zeleza 2002a) had a primarily feminist orientation while the other (Zeleza 2002b) focused on the linkages between the Africanist scholarship community and the United States without incorporating the European component. In general, in both of Zeleza's articles, the implications of globalization for Africa were critically explored and point to some issues relating to imbalanced knowledge exchange between Africa and countries of the North.

Such imbalance and the dependency syndrome it breeds in scholarship, especially Africa's, were captured by Omobowale (2010a, 2010b). As interesting as this literature is, none of it captured the visa dynamics of academics and scholars of African origin still on the continent, as they attempt to cross fertilize knowledge and build needed capacities in Europe and America. Furthermore, none focused on issues relevant to Nigeria and the implications for African scholarship.

This article thus intends to engage the following indicative research questions. As African scholars struggle to travel to Europe and the United States for scholarship and academic purposes, what are the attractions of African scholars to conferences, workshops, and training there? What are the implications of visas for African scholars' attendance of foreign scholarly activities, and what how does this affect African scholarship? Are there solutions going forward?

Methodology

The research design for this study was nonexperimental. The study was also purely qualitative, in order to be able to sufficiently capture the social relations and global trajectories that determine and moderate the issues at stake. To capture the research issues and questions raised, in-depth interviews (IDIs) were conducted at three Nigerian universities: the University of Ibadan (Ibadan, Oyo State), Ahmadu Bello University (Zaria, Kaduna State), and Lagos State University (Lagos, Lagos State). These universities were selected based on regional spread and academic reputation as the foremost universities in the country and the federal–state dichotomy. The University of Ibadan, located in southwestern Nigeria and a federal (public) university, is the premier university in the country. Ahmadu Bello University, located in the northern part of the country, is also among the best in the country and is a federal university as well. Lagos State University, located in southwestern Nigeria, is among the best state universities in the country and was selected to represent state universities. Lecturers interviewed were purposefully selected based on willingness to be interviewed and relevance. The relevance criterion was considered crucial to ensure that we interviewed the right people and obtained the right data. The measure of relevance was academic productivity in terms of attendance at foreign academic activities, such as conferences and workshops, and publication in reputable mainstream journals.¹

Academics who lacked international experience were not included in the study. Lecturers were interviewed primarily in social sciences and the arts. Twenty-three in-depth interviews were conducted at the three universities selected for study. Eight IDIs were conducted at Ahmadu Bello University, five at Lagos State University, and ten at the University of Ibadan. It is important to note that respondents/discussants spoken to in the course of fieldwork were not the same as those interviewed for other articles in this issue of the *International Journal of Sociology*. This was important for preventing redundant data generation. Data were collected in 2012, and the authors

facilitated the sessions. For detailed data collection, the authors prompted and probed respondents. Interview guides designed for data collection were semistructured to accommodate flexible and adaptable sessions during data collection.

Data Presentation and Findings

Attraction of African Scholars to Conferences, Workshops, and Training in Europe and the United States

Many Nigerian scholars are strongly attracted to traveling to Europe and the United States. Although many scholars interviewed maintained that they also travel across Africa and Asia for conferences and workshops, the main attraction is travel to Europe and the United States. When probes and prompts were directed at the specific attractions to the United States and Europe, four major factors were isolated based on analysis of the data gathered. The attractions and pull factors were exposure seeking, networking, career advancement, and the prestige that goes with traveling to the United States and Europe. The ethnographic summaries below are insightful:

The desire to be able to interact with other scholars from other parts of the globe, to share knowledge and ideas. It is believed that Europe and America are the centers of academic knowledge. They are believed to be advanced and in order to be reckoned with in the academic world, someone needs to attend conferences, workshops, training, and scholarship there. [The desire for] personal promotion and advancement. (Professor, Ahmadu Bello University, 2012)

Another African scholar with substantial international conference attendance said:

The attractions of African scholars: I believe when they are exposed to international conferences and training abroad they connect to international colleagues who can also advance their career. Also it gives some prestige in the local spheres. That's one of the major reasons because the scholar who travels abroad often seems to be the successful one, even when he's not publishing. If we're talking about conferences abroad, yes for international networking and connection and prestige. People are under pressure to go because of the need to be connected beyond the shores of the homeland. That's why people will say they are under pressure to go because they assume that those who are able to go will be able to publish internationally. (Lecturer, University of Ibadan, 2012)

As another scholar described the situation:

The need for academic promotion in one's profession: individuals need to attend international conferences and present papers at foreign universities located in Europe and America. The fact that Europe and America have advanced educationally, hence, the need to be familiar with the environment as an avenue to acquire new skills and knowledge capable of preparing individuals for future challenges. Im-

portantly, the need to meet and interact with key scholars from different countries in related discipline attracts African scholars to attend conferences in Europe and America. (Senior lecturer, Ahmadu Bello University, 2012)

For another scholar from a different university:

It broadens horizons in knowledge especially in one's area of specialization. It is an attraction for scholars for it enhances your curriculum vitae (CV). Furthermore, linkages and social networking are made possible. It is for knowledge dissemination. If you are able to publish in some of the reputable journals . . . you get quick exposure internationally. The dividends of traveling abroad, especially to Europe, are often nonmaterial, often aimed to live up to the expectations of significant others within the Nigerian social structure. There is a lack of confidence on the part of African scholars. (Senior lecturer, Lagos State University, 2012)

Another said:

The quest to go abroad, especially to Europe and America, by African scholars is premised on the fact that a average African scholar desires more knowledge to add to his or her existing stock of knowledge in order to have an edge over others. To achieve that, one needs to go out especially to the West because it is believed that the West is the cradle of knowledge and epitome of academic success. Going abroad for scholarship, for training, to attend and present papers at conferences, seminars, and so on boost the chances of getting a promotion in the academic world. For example, in Nigeria, to get a promotion from the cadre of senior lecturer upward heavily depends on how many papers you have presented at international conferences, how many you have attended, and so on. (Senior lecturer, Ahmadu Bello University, 2012)

People who successfully travel to Europe and the United States are seen by colleagues in academia, and even outside academia, as successful, especially if such travel is regular and frequent. However, there is a difference between attendance at conferences and academic publishing. In Nigeria and elsewhere, scholarly publishing is the most acceptable measure of academic productivity. In fact, at some universities, attendance at conferences is not well rated and seldom used for promotion. At others, they are not even used for promotion. Books of abstracts and conference proceedings are usually low rated unless they are later published in scholarly journals or books.² Yet many scholars still work hard to travel abroad for such conferences, even at their own expense. Prestige seeking is a huge factor, even when many do not eventually publish papers presented at such conferences and many are actually never published.

Many academics find it difficult to publish their conference papers because they place more value on the prestige that comes with travel abroad, even in comparison with the rigorous reviews needed to improve the quality of the papers for publication.³ This prestige factor can be best appreciated against the backdrop of Nigerian social systems and colonial history, which attach greater value to foreign products, experience, and exposure, especially involving the United States and Europe. The

social relations and social structural systems that sustain the forces witnessed among the academics are thus deep-seated and have sociocultural resonance in Nigerian and many sub-Saharan African societies. People who have traveled to Europe and the United States are seen as successful, respected, and as belonging to an enviable class to which many aspire through travel outside the country.⁴ Such travelers thus become role models and icons of progress (see Togunde and Osagie 2009). Travel abroad thus generally become a status symbol and sign of achievement among Nigerians, and this is also expressed among academics (see also Akanle 2009, 2011b, 2012; Akanle and Olutayo 2009, 2011, 2012).

Trajectories that sometimes define the attraction to travel abroad to Europe and the United States are also expressed in traditional belief systems. For example, Omobowale and Olutayo (2009) clearly demonstrated how albinos (Afin among the Yorubas) were deified due to their white complexion and sanctification in the Yoruba belief system. For Omobowale and Olutayo (2009), therefore, the sanctity of “white skin” was transferred to European colonialists who had the identical white skin and were deified as superior to Africans. This superiority of “anything white” was later transferred to the cultural, material, and nonmaterial relations that exist between Africans and Euro-Americans. Hence, even in contemporary terms, among the Ibos of southeastern Nigeria, for instance, products and experience from Euro-American societies are seen as *ebe ano* (original), and among the Yorubas of Southwestern Nigeria *tokunbo* (things from abroad including knowledge) are seen as authentic and the best (see Omobowale 2008). Omobowale’s (2008) analysis gives the background of a historical, deep-rooted belief system. The current high propensity of academics to travel abroad for conferences, seminars, and workshops is largely dependent upon and moderated by globalization and the West. Against this backdrop, any academic/scholar who successfully travels abroad to the mainstream (Europe and the United States)⁵ is considered an elitist academic and revered both on and off campus. This point is vividly captured in the following ethnographic account.

If you tell someone you have traveled or want to travel, he/she is interested more in where you traveled or want to travel to, whether local or international. If international, people are interested in whether it is Africa, Europe, or Asia. If America or Europe, the look on their faces will even tell you that you are envied or respected. If you tell them local, they will not even bother to ask where precisely because that does not carry much weight. It is seen as normal most times. But once it is international, they are interested. Even by the time you are filing your casual leave form to attend conferences, the main question will be: Where? Not for any reason but to place you in the appropriate class. That is the truth. (Lecturer, University of Ibadan, 2012)

For this purpose, many academics in Nigeria and other parts of Africa save money to attend conferences, mostly in Europe and the United States, because funding and support for such conferences and workshops are scarce on the continent and for African scholars. Many African academics join cooperative societies (to contribute

money) and obtain loans to finance foreign trips for the purpose of prestige and sometimes so as not to be seen as a local hero and sedentary scholar. In many of these cases are academics, even professors, who boast that the cooperative they join is for conferences. This can be better understood even among academics in cases in which those who are widely traveled are accorded respect and those lecturers who do not travel are often regarded merely as local heroes, and thus academically inferior.

Many also travel abroad to improve their knowledge since the world is now knowledge driven and such skills are believed to be more available in the West due to access to better facilities and materials. Furthermore, the political economy of knowledge production and dissemination places a high value on knowledge from the West, based on past and contemporary achievement and scholarship from the West. African scholars appreciate this and want to be better trained at such conferences and workshops. Hence, many Nigerian academics also travel abroad for opportunities to publish. Many believe that after the conference papers are presented, they are revised based on comments at the conferences and resubmitted. Many conference organizers also recognize this as they include publishing opportunities in the call for papers for their conferences. This is an important factor because papers published in the United States and Europe are regarded as international and are rated highly in consideration for promotion.

Another important factor is networking. Many Nigerian and sub-Saharan scholars believe that attendance at such conferences will give them the opportunity to meet new people, see new places, and make new friends who can further connect them with opportunities in the future. This advantage is not attainable without attending such conferences. It is also an important factor in motivating many Nigerian academics to attend international conferences in Euro-American societies. A few African scholars are motivated by the desire to contribute to global scholarship by presenting African scholarship and a knowledge of Africa to the world in a more authentic manner. Many believe that although this is the era of globalization, with the rise in complexity of information and misinformation, driven and enabled by information technology and the popular CNN effect (see also Akanle 2011a), African stories are best told by Africans who have experienced the stories and are socialized within African political realities and sociocultural specificities. An academic from a Nigerian university captured the orientation as follows:

The need to present African realities by Africans to the whole world is a key reason why African scholars cannot be excluded from global academic discourse. Also, the fact that Africa represents the largest black race in the world makes it the continent to be reckoned with in global affairs. (Senior lecturer, Ahmadu Bello University, 2012)

African Scholars, African Scholarship, and Visa Problems

While African scholars desire to travel abroad especially to Europe and the United States for conferences to share knowledge, cross fertilize ideas, network, build

careers, and improve their images and status, contemporary international migration policies necessitate procuring a visa. Countries today require nationals from other countries to procure visas before they are allowed entry. for many reasons, including security, public health, and the need to protect their economy, labor market, and infrastructure from excessive inflows of foreign nationals (see Akanle 2009; and Akanle and Olutayo 2009). While this allows capital to move more freely, skills, labor, and competitive factors of production are not readily allowed to move across boundaries without strict control (Akanle and Olutayo 2009) in the form of immigration rules and controls.

Euro-American societies usually subject nationals from developing countries in Africa and Asia to more stringent visa scrutiny because they are often suspected of visa fraud and seen as potential economic migrants who ultimately intend to enter the labor market and even become illegal immigrants (see Akanle 2009). Against this background, for example, the British embassy in Nigeria imposed a blanket visa ban on all Nigerian visa applicants ages thirty and younger without exception, regardless of class, occupation, profession, education, political leanings and other socioeconomic considerations in 2005 after discovering that most visa frauds are committed by this cohort (Akanle 2009). This action generated a huge diplomatic dispute between Nigeria and the British government and had a significant diplomatic ripple effect across the world, and the policy had to be canceled shortly afterward. Generally, Nigerians confront enormous visa challenges when they try to travel abroad. They are treated with suspicion, as every Nigerian is suspected of illegal migration *prima facie* when applying for American, British, Canadian, and European visas. Nigerians are often believed to use fake documents when they apply for visas because they use fake documents for other purposes.

Even though the 2005 visa ban was rescinded, in response, the British High Commission in Nigeria instituted a policy that anyone caught using fake documentation for visa applications would be turned over to the police for prosecution and banned from obtaining a United Kingdom (UK) visa for ten years. Thus, even when Nigerian academics apply for visas, they are usually treated with the same disrespect and suspicion as other Nigerians, in part because it is difficult to ascertain their true status and because lecturers are not seen as immune to fraudulent visa applications. Different reasons are used to deny many academics visas, including insufficient documentation, the nonnecessity of physical attendance at conferences because information and communication technology (ICT) can be used to participate virtually, insufficient funds in the lecturers' bank accounts, and insufficient time before the date of conference for application to be processed.

Sometimes, special documentation that is not required for other nationals for international travel is requested from Nigerian academics. When the Nigerian scholars request these documents from conference organizers, they are unable to obtain them, thus making it impossible for Nigerian academics to secure visas to attend regardless of the importance of the conference to the scholars, in particular, and to African scholarship, in general. Examples of such scenarios are numerous,

but one gathered during data collection is worth sharing. Many Nigerian scholars could not attend the recent 2012 International Sociological Association (ISA) Conference at Buenos Aires, Argentina, because they were not granted Argentine visas even though their papers were expressly accepted for presentation at the conference, they were given partial funding of as much as \$600 each, were ready to finance their participation, and then return to their country.

The denials were based on flimsy reasons, and when further documentation was requested from the ISA to support their visa applications (i.e., direct letter of invitation and introduction, delivered by courier directly to the embassy on behalf of the Nigerian attendees), it could not be provided even when the scholars offered to bear the cost of couriers. Therefore, many scholars from Nigeria missed out on this important annual international conference of sociologists because of visa problems. It is then possible to ask some crucial rhetorical questions: (1) What becomes of the knowledge that they would have shared at the conference? (2) What becomes of the knowledge that they would have gained from the conference? (3) What becomes of African scholarship? (4) What are the implications for global development, which are heavily based on knowledge? and (5) What about their socio-academic networks and capacity building in general?

Visa denials for African scholars sometimes occur after conference and workshop fees, plus exorbitant nonrefundable visa fees, have already been paid. Many are thus discouraged from even applying for conferences in the United States and Europe for the following reasons: (1) fear of being denied a visa;⁶ (2) the stress and difficulty of the visa process; and (3) the financial waste that comes with visa denials. Visa fees are not cheap by Nigerian standards. A visa to visit the United States, for instance, is about \$150 in a country where more than 70 percent of the population lives in poverty and where the salaries of academics are still very meager by international standards. Furthermore, the visa process in Nigeria is usually very cumbersome. Much documentation is needed and travel is usually undertaken to other states as embassies and high commissions are usually located either in Abuja (federal capital territory) or Lagos. Most of the time, flights must be taken and hotels booked. In addition to the visa fees, time invested, and money spent, the academic may still be denied. In fact, the chances of denial are higher. The combination of these background requirements and factors thus discourage many from participating in international conferences. This is also why the few African scholars who have successfully traveled to Europe and the United States for conferences and workshops are respected and envied because they have succeeded where many have failed; they have achieved what many could not but would like to; they have been where many have not been but would like to be; and they have secured privileged and valued knowledge many have not but would like to. The ethnographic summaries below are insightful:

A scholar from Africa gave a comprehensive and dynamic account of the issues at stake:

African scholars might have canceled their academic travels because of visa problems. In the past, you hardly experienced any problem relating to visas especially when you had genuine documents to back up your travel. However, with the problems of terrorism and security across the globe, people began to experience difficulties about obtaining visas, which influenced some scholars to cancel their intention to travel abroad for academic activities. Most African scholars believe that travel to Europe and America will better expose them to many academic opportunities, especially for those who are very sound in knowledge. However, looking at the rigorous processes in obtaining visas, there is no way one would not be discouraged from attending international conferences. As a result, some colleagues are not respected or known in their fields due to little exposure or lack of exposure to international conferences. Getting a visa involves spending a huge amount of money, especially if one is not being sponsored either by the university or another donor agency. Also, the logistic problems such as interview, screening, and proper examination of individuals to authenticate the validity of the travel have caused some African scholars to feel frustrated and thereby to feel discouraged from attending any conference being held in Europe and America. (Senior lecturer, Ahmadu Bello University, 2012)

According to another scholar:

In regard to personal experience of visa problems, I applied to the United Kingdom, and after I had paid for the visa, I was denied. The argument was that I did not report the money in my account. It was a waste, because the visa money was not refunded back to me. This made me not apply for a visa to Turkey for fear of another denial. For other scholars, it was a similar experience. When I applied to travel to Austria, I was given a visa for that day. It was stressful and I had to leave immediately when the conference ended or the visa would expire. They deny African scholars visas, especially Nigerians. They waste scholars' time. They do not have trust in African scholars, and think it is an avenue for them to abscond to another country. If you are denied a visa to travel for a conference, it means your paper will not be read, and then you will need to send your paper somewhere else. This can also demoralize you. At times, the embassy might not be near where you stay, you have to dip into your savings. It may be too costly. When you are given the visa, the same day the conference starts, you cannot interact, neither can you visit the institute to exchange ideas. All these factors can demoralize you. One's confidence may be eroded because of visa issues. People may limit conference attendance to their localities, where there is no need to obtain a visa. This translates into no international exposure. (Associate professor, Lagos State University, 2012)

A scholar from the University of Ibadan, Nigeria, put the visa problems of African academics in perspective when he traced its implications for African scholarship in the context of problems and sharing of global knowledge:

The visa problem is a huge discouragement. It's a huge discouragement to even apply for such conferences, especially if I have consistently been denied a visa. Other times, one would apply with the hope of being granted a visa. But it is also so bad that even East European countries, Turkey, and Poland deny Nigerians'

visas.⁷ In fact their own is even more stringent than West European countries. I have seen colleagues who were to attend conferences in Turkey who were denied. The negative impact has to do with the fact that it is difficult to move around as a scholar even when you are able to contribute to knowledge. The fact that one is denied a visa or may be denied curtails one's ability to contribute to knowledge by attending conferences and presenting papers. Consequently, African scholars remain dependent. African scholars, including Nigerian scholars, will remain dependent. The extent of their contributions will remain dependent on how much the West wants to receive from African scholars. Also, the truth is that a lot of Africans look to the First World for training: two weeks' training, three weeks' training, and collaboration. Once they are curtailed because visas are not granted they won't be able to get this training. When they are invited for workshop training that lasts for two to three weeks, and will build and enhance their capacities, they lose out when they are not granted. (Scholar, University of Ibadan, 2012)

Is the problem African academics face to obtain visas for conferences and workshops in Europe and the United States related to academic pedigree and seniority? We hypothesize that among African social scientists, the higher the academic rank and scholarship prestige, the lower the possibility of visa denial. Interestingly, rank does not ensure that fewer visa problems will be faced. Professors and even renowned Nobel laureates from Africa are frequently denied visas for conferences and workshops in Europe and the United States. The situation is well captured in the following.

There were no visa problems until recently due to criminal-minded behavior of some Africans and Africa's underdevelopment, the unseriousness of African leaders, Africa's not having anything to offer, brain drain, terrorism, and so on. The pains of going through the rigors of getting a visa are too much. Even Nobel laureate Wole Soyinka⁸ was denied a visa some years back. (Senior lecturer, Fulbright scholar, Ahmadu Bello University, 2012)

Another lecturer, from the University of Ibadan, gave a detailed account.

The senior academics face the same challenges; we have heard stories of professors who were not granted visas. We've heard of professors who went to be interviewed for visas to travel to Canada and the United States and they were declined. And we should understand one thing: a professor earns just about N500,000 which is barely \$3,000. That's entry pay for oil workers. A new graduate who works in an oil company or who is fortunate to work in a telecommunication company earns about that, could be hired at N300,000 [\$2,500] per month and after working for two or three years and becomes experienced he will have career mobility and he may be earning something in the region of N700,000 to N800,000 [about \$6,000]. So, in terms of salary, you cannot place a manager with MTN or Globacom⁹ on the same level with a professor who earns just N500,000. (Lecturer, University of Ibadan, 2012)

Another respondent, however, gave a more nuanced view of the relationship between academic seniority and the ease of visa procurement. His general view was that

very senior academics such as professors do have a slight edge in their ease of visa procurement. Nevertheless, he also concurred with the more general and common opinion that academics generally face visa problems, irrespective of categories. The lecturer from the University of Ibadan¹⁰ gave a vivid and comprehensive account of the dynamics of academic status and the visa challenge:

The embassy also wants to hear that you have a permanent job and that you have reached a certain level in your career. That if you are traveling out, you want to come back and continue your work. . . . Number one, being a lecturer you could be at an advantage. You have an advantage being a senior person. You have more advantage than junior ones. I think it works that way. However, even if you are a professor and you don't submit the necessary documents, [the embassies] don't respect anybody. The maximum they could do is say, "Hey professor, I think this thing is faulty; go and reapply. It happens a lot too. I know of many people. See, [the embassies] don't respect anybody. (Lecturer, University of Ibadan, 2012)

Conclusion

This article addresses the problem of African scholarship with respect to the challenges that African scholars face as they attempt to globalize their knowledge. It is impossible today for knowledge and skill to be localized in the age of globalization. Scholars must interrelate in time and across space. Personal interaction is still essential as knowledge is globalized. Although ICT can compensate for some space and reduce the necessity of personal interactions and international travel, African scholars still have insufficient access to viable information technology (IT). Africa is still on the disadvantaged side of the global information divide. In Nigeria in particular, electricity problems make IT usage a challenge even when it is available. Nigerians, including scholars, spend much time without electricity and ICT is powered mostly by electricity. A random visit to most Nigerian universities and higher educational institutions will show that the supply of electricity is more often absent than present. Most of the time, campuses are without electricity. Physical travel is thus still necessary for handling communications. This is an important point because visa officers at embassies in Nigeria sometimes use IT as an excuse to deny Nigerian scholars visas to attend conferences and workshops and to insist that they participate virtually, even though many do not have the computers, Internet access, or electricity to do so.

As demonstrated above, denials of visas to African and Nigerian academics are also traceable to the poor economic systems of African countries, especially sub-Saharan countries. Most Nigerians live in poverty. At least 70 percent live on less than \$1 a day, and 90 percent live on less than \$2 a day. Many Nigerians thus intend to emigrate to escape the trap of poverty, that is, they are mostly economic migrants. To accomplish this, they commit visa fraud and many impersonate academics—which makes it difficult for embassies to distinguish real academics from impostors. However, this is not to say that some real academics in Nigeria do not abuse visa privileges after they are given visit or conference visas. Some

go to such conferences and never return, becoming economic migrants and even illegal immigrants. Many African scholars try to get jobs, which violates the terms of their visas. According to an African scholar from the University of Ibadan, Nigeria, during an interview:

There are academics that have gone to embassies to apply for visas who have defected¹¹ after they were granted visas. There are people who have gone to the extent of using a *note verbale* from the Ministry of External Affairs. A *note verbale* is akin to presenting no visa because the person is a government official. At the end of the day they ran away. (African scholar, University of Ibadan, 2012)

Such academics suffer the same economic desperation as an average Nigerian who wants to escape poverty. Thus all academics from the country who apply for visas to Europe and the United States are tarred with the same negative brush as other Nigerians seeking visas. Generally, the visa problems and the problem of curtailed international conference attendance limit the global exposure and interaction of many African scholars and continue to build the academic dependency of African scholars. When opportunities to interact globally and be trained abroad are reduced and threatened by visa problems, African scholarship is further threatened and African scholars will not be able to build a competitive edge. It also limits the amount of correct and original knowledge of Africa available in the world, particularly the West. Part of the reason that many African problems remained unsolved is that the real African experience and knowledge of it is poorly shared and consequently erroneously perceived by other scholars and policymakers in the world.

African scholars must rally to come up with appropriate measures by which to share their knowledge of Africa. Collective efforts should be made to develop and disseminate original African knowledge and scholarship. More African scholars should also improve their IT skills and capacities, so as to better interface with international conferences, seminars, and workshops virtually, especially when visas are problematic. African leaders and governments should be more concerned about the development of their countries. If poverty levels and unemployment rates are reduced, economic migration and visa fraud will decrease and the negative attitude toward Nigerians and scholars will decline. It is also important for visa officers to be well trained and to understand the need for African academics to participate in international academic activities, to give them more attention and positive visa responses.

This is not to say that the necessary diplomatic confirmations and background checks should not be carried out with regard to anyone claiming to be an African scholar wishing to attend an international conference. However, the process should be rapid and objective. International organizations and institutions, especially those in the West, hosting conferences and workshops should sufficiently partner with African scholars throughout their visa application process. Visa letters, invitation letters, letters of introduction, and other necessary supporting documentation should be made available to the African scholars in time to facilitate their visa applications. Independent letters of reference should also be sent to the embassy directly

on behalf of the scholars to support and authenticate the application. Moreover, organizations and institutions in the West could also host some of their conferences and workshops in Africa, in order for many African scholars to attend without being subjected to difficult, expensive, and stringent visa conditions that ultimately end in denial of a visa for most of them.

Notes

1. International journals usually referred to as mainstream journals are published in Europe and America. These journals have been published for many years as shown by their volume numbers. They are also influential. They are very reputable as against many of those published in Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean, and Africa, which have poor editorial/review processes and are based on pay to publish (which we call academic and publication capitalism). We are not implying that all journals in Europe and America are mainstream or that all are better than those published in the south. Mainstream journals have high rejection rates and longer review and publication processes, which is why many find it difficult to publish in these journals, and resort to publishing in rapid-publishing journals (sometimes monthly and usually only Internet or Web based) for promotion even if it means paying.

2. Publications in international journals are the most highly rated.

3. It must be noted that there is a difference between the quality of papers presented at conferences and those to be published in peer-reviewed journals or books. Many conference papers are actually not publishable due to low quality, and only later they are rigorously revised, peer-reviewed, edited, and published.

4. This is the way Nigerians most commonly view people who travel to America and Europe, either temporarily or permanently. Although the view also describes travel to less prestigious destinations, the real prestige lies in travel to Euro-American societies.

5. America and Europe are usually regarded as the main hub of scholarship, thus considered the mainstream of scholarship among African scholars.

6. A visa denial carries a huge sociopsychological cost, as it may negatively impact an academic's personal sense of worth and real career and professional value and dignity.

7. This can be seen in the case of South America as well, for example, relative to the ISA conference in Argentina mentioned above.

8. Nobel prize winner in literature from Nigeria. This caused a serious diplomatic dispute. Unfortunately, his own experience was with South Africa but this only showed the extent to which Nigerians are poorly treated across the world relative to visa procurement, even for academic engagements.

9. MTN and Globacom are well-rated telecommunications companies in Nigeria. Their staff members are usually well respected because they earn comparatively better salaries than those in other sectors of the Nigerian economy.

10. The university with the greatest number of professors in Nigeria. The number of professors at the University of Ibadan usually fluctuates between 100 and 150.

11. Disappeared into the open market in the West, most of the time illegally.

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