

Research Article

# Foucault's Power/Knowledge Nexus and the Governance of Africa in a Globalized World

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## Abstract

Michel Foucault's theoretical framework, particularly the power/knowledge nexus, provides a critical lens for analyzing the complexities of global governance. In the context of Africa, globalization often operates through discourses that marginalize local knowledge systems and perpetuate power asymmetries. This article aims to critically examine Foucault's power/knowledge nexus and evaluate its analytical utility in understanding the contemporary governance of Africa within a globalized world. The study employs a qualitative analytical approach, utilizing Foucault's concepts of discourse, genealogy, archaeology of knowledge, governmentality, biopower, and the subject. The analysis proceeds across three intersecting registers: a theoretical reconstruction of Foucault's core ideas, a critical engagement with globalization as a regime of truth, and a focused examination of specific contemporary African issues such as structural adjustment conditionalities, educational colonization, and the politics of development. The findings reveal that international development discourses, colonial epistemologies, and neoliberal governance frameworks actively produce and sustain power asymmetries in Africa. Globalization functions as a regime of truth that positions African states as subjects of external governmentality. The article concludes that Foucault's theoretical tools retain substantial explanatory power for African realities. By drawing on his concept of resistance and counter-conduct, the study highlights pathways to recover space for African agency, advocating for decolonization and the restoration of epistemic sovereignty.

## Keywords

Foucault, Power/Knowledge, Governmentality, Africa, Globalization, Neoliberalism, Epistemic Sovereignty, Decolonization

## 1. Introduction

Few thinkers have reshaped the intellectual landscape of the social sciences as decisively as Michel Foucault. Born in Poitiers, France, in 1926, and writing across a career that extended until his death in 1984, Foucault produced a body of work that persistently refused the comfortable assumptions of liberal modernity: that reason is progressive, that knowledge is neutral, and that power is simply something wielded by states or rulers from above. His philosophical project was, in

essence, a sustained interrogation of how human beings come to be governed, classified, and made into subjects, and of the role that knowledge itself plays in that process [5, 6].

The concept for which Foucault is perhaps most widely cited in the social sciences is what he termed the power/knowledge nexus. This formulation captures a deceptively simple but far-reaching insight: that power and knowledge are not external to one another, with power merely

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making use of knowledge that exists independently of it. Rather, every exercise of power requires the production of knowledge, and every claim to knowledge enacts a form of power. To speak of 'the economy' as something that can be managed, 'the population' as something that must be optimized, or 'the underdeveloped nation' as a problem awaiting a solution is already to situate those objects within regimes of truth that carry specific political effects [7].

It is precisely this dimension of Foucault's thought that makes it so productive for thinking about Africa in the age of globalization. Africa is not simply a geographic region whose challenges can be addressed by better policies or more aid. It is, in a Foucauldian sense, a discursive production, a category that has been constituted through colonial archives, development reports, humanitarian narratives, and international financial frameworks in ways that systematically normalize external intervention and marginalize African agency and knowledge [3, 18]. The question is not merely what Africa's problems are, but how those problems have been made thinkable in certain ways, who has the authority to name them, and what forms of power that naming authorizes.

This article aims to take that question seriously. It proceeds by first reconstructing Foucault's theoretical framework with sufficient care to show what his concepts actually mean and how they relate to one another. It then traces the ways in which globalization functions as a regime of power/knowledge that positions Africa as an object of governance rather than a subject of its own history. It examines specific manifestations of this dynamic, in international financial institutions, in educational policy, and in the discourse of development. Finally, it considers the possibilities that Foucault's own framework opens up for thinking about resistance and the recovery of epistemic sovereignty. The article draws on Foucault's primary texts, secondary scholarship in Foucauldian theory, and applied research on African political economy and education to build an argument that is both theoretically grounded and empirically attentive [1, 12].

## 2. Foucault's Theoretical Architecture: Key Concepts

### 2.1. Discourse and the Production of Truth

The concept of discourse occupies a foundational position in Foucault's thought, though it is frequently misunderstood. Discourse, for Foucault, does not simply mean language or conversation. It refers to historically specific systems of statements that organize what can be said, by whom, in what institutional contexts, and with what effects. A discourse is a practice; it does not merely describe reality but actively constitutes it by establishing the categories through which reality becomes knowable and governable. In *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault [4] argued that discourses are governed by rules of formation that operate largely below the level of

individual consciousness, determining which objects of knowledge are possible, which subjects are authorized to produce knowledge, and which concepts and strategies are legitimate within a given field.

What makes discourse a political concept is Foucault's insistence that discursive formations are always tied to what he called regimes of truth, that is, historically specific configurations of power that determine what counts as true, what counts as valid knowledge, and who has the authority to speak it. 'Truth is not outside power,' he wrote, 'or lacking in power... Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint' [7]. This means that the production of truth is not a process of gradually uncovering a reality that was always already there, but a process of active construction in which power plays an indispensable role.

The implications of this argument for thinking about Africa are immediate and significant. When international institutions describe African states as suffering from 'governance deficits' or 'institutional weaknesses,' they are not simply reporting empirical facts. They are producing truth within a specific discursive regime, one that positions Western institutional models as the norm against which African states are measured and found wanting. The language of governance, reform, transparency, and accountability is not neutral. It carries within it a particular conception of what the state is for, what rationality looks like, and what progress means, a conception developed in specific Euro-American contexts and exported as universal [10, 19].

### 2.2. Archaeology and Genealogy as Methods

Foucault developed two distinct but related methodological approaches across his career. The earlier, archaeological method, exemplified in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* [4], examined the deep epistemic structures, the episteme, that govern knowledge production in a given era. Rather than tracing the progressive development of ideas toward truth, archaeology describes the historically specific conditions under which certain kinds of statements become possible. It denaturalizes what seems obvious and asks how it came to seem that way.

Genealogy, the method he developed in the 1970s under the influence of Nietzsche, is more explicitly concerned with power. Where archaeology maps the structures of discourse, genealogy traces the historical processes through which those structures were produced, the struggles, contingencies, and power relations that shaped what we now take to be natural or rational. *Discipline and Punish* [5] and the first volume of *The History of Sexuality* [6] are the central works of the genealogical phase, and they demonstrate in vivid detail how institutions, including the prison, the hospital, and the school, do not emerge from humanitarian progress but from the optimization of power over bodies and populations. As Koopman [12] notes, whereas archaeology focused narrowly on knowledge, genealogy expanded the lens to include power/knowledge relations,

studying the emergence of forms of knowledge rather than merely their existence.

Applied to Africa, genealogical analysis would ask not simply what Africa's development challenges are, but how the category of underdevelopment came to exist and what power relations produced it as a self-evident truth. The genealogist would trace the emergence of development discourse in the post-World War II period, its entanglement with Cold War geopolitics, its institutionalization in the Bretton Woods organizations, and its effects on how African governments and populations came to understand themselves and their futures. This is not a merely academic exercise; it has direct implications for how resistance to these frameworks might be articulated [3, 17].

### 2.3. Power/Knowledge: The Central Nexus

Foucault's most influential theoretical contribution, and the focus of this article, is his analysis of the relationship between power and knowledge. In his lectures at the Collège de France and in the interviews collected in *Power/Knowledge*, Foucault [7] argued that power and knowledge directly imply one another. Every relationship of power produces a field of knowledge, and every field of knowledge presupposes and reinforces power relations. The hyphen between 'power' and 'knowledge' in the formulation *pouvoir/savoir* is not accidental. It signals that the two are analytically inseparable, not because power distorts knowledge from the outside, but because they are constitutively intertwined.

This has two important consequences. The first is that knowledge claims cannot be evaluated in isolation from the power relations that produce them. To claim to know what Africa needs, in terms of governance, economic policy, public health, or education, is also to position oneself as the expert whose knowledge authorizes intervention, and to position Africa as the object of that knowledge who lacks the capacity to diagnose its own condition. The second consequence is that power is not merely repressive. Foucault departed sharply from what he called the 'juridico-discursive' model of power, which imagines power as essentially a force that prohibits and punishes. Power, for Foucault, is primarily productive. It produces subjects, produces truths, and produces normative frameworks within which individuals and communities come to understand themselves [7].

This productive dimension of power is visible in the ways that development discourse produces African subjectivities. The African recipient of aid, the African country submitting to structural adjustment conditionalities, and the African student educated in a curriculum designed elsewhere are not simply people who have had something done to them by external power. They are subjects who have been constituted, in part, by the power/knowledge regimes within which they are embedded, and who often come to understand their own situations through the categories those regimes supply [3].

## 2.4. Governmentality and the Subject

In his later lectures, collected in *Security, Territory, Population* and *The Birth of Biopolitics*, Foucault [8, 9] developed the concept of governmentality to describe a distinctively modern form of power whose object is not the territory of the sovereign but the conduct of populations and individuals. Governmentality refers to the techniques, rationalities, and institutions through which populations are made manageable, not primarily through coercion but through the shaping of environments, incentives, and norms in ways that lead individuals to govern themselves in accordance with the objectives of external power.

Biopower, Foucault's term for the form of power that takes life itself as its object, operates at two levels: the disciplinary power that works on individual bodies, and biopolitics that manages populations at the aggregate level through statistics, public health measures, demographic calculations, and the like [6]. Both dimensions are visible in the encounters between African states and international governance institutions. The conditionalities attached to World Bank and IMF loans function as technologies of governmentality; they do not simply transfer money but reshape the institutional and economic environments within which African governments operate, effectively governing African conduct at a distance and producing specific forms of economic subjectivity [1].

Foucault also introduced the concept of the 'subject' in a double sense: the human being who is both a subject of knowledge, an object of study, and a subject in the sense of being subjected to power. African states and populations have been made subjects in both senses, objects of the knowledge produced by development economics, political science, and humanitarian medicine, and simultaneously subjected to the power exercised through the institutions those disciplines legitimate [11]. The concept of the subject opens the question of subjectification, that is, how individuals and collectives come to take up particular identities and ways of understanding themselves, which is central to understanding both the effects of colonial and neoliberal power in Africa and the possibilities of resistance.

## 3. Globalization as a Regime of Power/Knowledge

### 3.1. The Discourse of Globalization

Globalization is ordinarily described as an economic and technological process: the intensification of cross-border flows of capital, goods, information, and people driven by technological change and the liberalization of trade. This description is not entirely wrong, but it is incomplete in a way that a Foucauldian analysis can clarify. Globalization is also a discourse, a regime of truth that makes certain ways of organizing economic and political life appear natural, inevitable,

and universally desirable, while rendering alternatives unintelligible or irrational [7, 19].

The discourse of globalization draws on and reinforces a particular conception of modernity in which market logic is the rational form of social organization, in which individual economic freedom is the highest political value, and in which the integration of national economies into global markets is the path to prosperity. This is not simply an economic theory. It is a regime of truth in Foucault's sense: a set of propositions backed by specific institutions, including the World Trade Organization, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank, legitimated by specific epistemological norms such as mathematical modeling, quantitative measurement, and GDP growth, and enforced through specific mechanisms including conditionality, credit ratings, and trade agreements [1, 10].

For Africa, this regime of truth has had concrete and often devastating consequences. When the World Bank [21] published its *Accelerated Development in Sub-Saharan Africa* report, the so-called Berg Report, it established a diagnostic framework that attributed Africa's economic difficulties primarily to internal factors: overvalued exchange rates, state interference in markets, poor governance, and inadequate investment in human capital. This framing displaced a different and arguably more compelling account, which emphasized the structural legacies of colonialism, the deteriorating terms of trade for primary commodity exporters, and the role of Western economic policies in capital flight and debt accumulation [15, 17]. The Berg Report was not simply an economic analysis. It was a political act that authorized specific interventions and produced Africa as a particular kind of problem requiring specific kinds of external expertise to solve.

### 3.2. The World Bank, the IMF, and Neoliberal Governmentality in Africa

The structural adjustment programs imposed on African countries by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund from the late 1970s onward are a paradigmatic case of what Foucault's concept of governmentality illuminates. These programs required recipient countries to implement a package of policy reforms including privatization of state enterprises, liberalization of trade, reduction of public expenditure particularly in social services, currency devaluation, and removal of price subsidies. These were presented as technical economic prescriptions derived from neutral expertise. In Foucauldian terms, however, they constitute a technology of governmentality through which the conduct of African states and their populations was reshaped at a distance [1, 8].

Amo-Agyemang [1] has shown, in detailed case studies of Ghana's structural adjustment experience, that the IMF and World Bank conditionalities sought not merely to adjust specific policies but to remake the institutional and normative environment within which Ghanaian governance operated. The effect was to establish particular forms of economic rationality, including market competitiveness, fiscal discipline, and

export orientation, as the legitimate objectives of statecraft, while delegitimizing alternatives rooted in developmental nationalism, social solidarity, or indigenous economic philosophy. The knowledge produced by development economics became not only descriptive but normative, defining what counts as rational policy and what counts as failure or irrationality [10, 15].

The discourse of 'good governance' that emerged in the 1990s as a supplement to structural adjustment is a further example of this process. As the World Bank's [22] Sub-Saharan Africa report makes clear, the concept of good governance gained prominence in global discourse through specific institutional framings rather than as a discovered universal value. Good governance discourse established a set of institutional benchmarks, including rule of law, transparency, accountability, and democratic elections, that African states were required to meet to access development financing. These benchmarks were not politically neutral. They embodied specific traditions of liberal governance and depoliticized the question of who benefits from economic arrangements by framing governance as a technical problem of institutional design [10, 11].

### 3.3. Development as Discourse: Escobar and the Foucauldian Legacy

The Colombian-American anthropologist Arturo Escobar extended Foucault's framework into a direct critique of development discourse in his influential work *Encountering Development* (1995) [3]. Drawing explicitly on Foucault, Escobar [3] argued that development, the Third World, and poverty are not simply descriptions of pre-existing realities that appeared in the post-World War II period. They are discursive productions that emerged through specific historical processes and that have had enormous effects on the peoples and places they purport to describe. Development, on this account, is not a neutral process of improvement but a discourse of power that positions Western institutions as the bearers of knowledge and progress and positions non-Western societies as deficient, backward, and in need of guidance [3, 18].

Escobar [3] identified three axes through which the development apparatus operates: the forms of knowledge that refer to the Third World; the systems of power that regulate the practice of development; and the forms of subjectivity fostered by development discourse. Each of these axes has clear African resonances. The forms of knowledge include the econometric models and statistical databases through which African economies are measured and diagnosed. The systems of power include the institutional architecture of development finance and technical assistance. The forms of subjectivity include the ways that African governments, intellectuals, and ordinary people have come to understand themselves through the categories of development discourse, as underdeveloped, emerging, reforming, or failing.

The Foucauldian critique of development discourse does not imply that poverty and inequality in Africa are not real, or

that international assistance is always harmful. What it insists on is that the way these realities are framed, the concepts through which they are made thinkable, the experts who are authorized to speak about them, and the solutions that are rendered possible within the dominant discourse, is not given by the nature of things but produced by specific power/knowledge regimes [7]. Changing those realities requires, among other things, changing the discourse by questioning the categories, recovering marginalized knowledges, and opening space for alternative framings of African development [2, 3].

## 4. Current Issues in Africa Through a Foucauldian Lens

### 4.1. Education, Knowledge, and Colonial Epistemology

One of the most lasting and least examined legacies of colonialism in Africa is epistemological. Colonial education systems were not designed to transmit knowledge in any neutral sense; they were designed to produce specific subjects, including obedient workers, compliant administrators, and Africans who understood themselves through European categories of civilization, progress, and inferiority. The content of colonial curricula, the languages of instruction, the organizational forms of schools, and the credentials systems that attached to them were all instruments of what Ngugi wa Thiong'o [16] famously described as the colonization of the mind.

From a Foucauldian perspective, colonial education was a technology of subjectification, a practice through which African subjects were constituted in specific ways through the production of knowledge. The school produced an African who knew about European history but not African history; who could write in French, English, or Portuguese but was penalized for writing in Yoruba, Kiswahili, or Amharic; who was trained to value Western scientific knowledge and to regard indigenous knowledge systems as superstition or tradition [5, 16]. The effects of this process did not end with formal decolonization. African education systems inherited colonial structures and, in many cases, deepened them through the post-independence adoption of development frameworks that continued to position Western models of education as the norm [20].

The contemporary situation is characterized by what researchers describe as the marginalization of indigenous knowledge systems in formal education and the persistence of epistemological hierarchies that privilege globally credentialled knowledge over locally grounded understanding. In Ethiopia, as Abera [23] has documented, indigenous educational traditions, including informal systems of knowledge transmission, community-based learning, and locally produced curricula, have been systematically sidelined by formal education systems oriented toward international standards, Western academic frameworks, and the human capital models

of development economics. The result is an education system that produces graduates who are oriented toward global labor markets but often disconnected from the communities and the ecological and social contexts in which they live.

A Foucauldian analysis identifies this not as an unfortunate side effect but as a structural feature of the power/knowledge regime within which African education is embedded. The knowledge that counts, the knowledge that receives institutional recognition, that is tested and certified, and that opens doors to employment and status, is knowledge produced and validated within globally dominant frameworks. Indigenous knowledge, whether about agriculture, medicine, social organization, or governance, is positioned as the object of study for anthropologists and ethnobotanists rather than a legitimate form of expertise. This hierarchy of knowledge is inseparable from a hierarchy of power [20].

### 4.2. Political Power and the Production of African Subjects

African political systems have been analyzed through a range of theoretical lenses, from modernization theory to democratic transition theory to neopatrimonialism. Each of these frameworks carries its own power/knowledge implications. Neopatrimonialism, for instance, the framework that explains African political instability by reference to the blurring of public and private power and the personalization of authority, has become one of the dominant analytical categories in Africanist political science. Yet as critics have noted, this framework tends to treat African political practices as deviations from a Western norm of rational-legal authority, reproducing an Orientalist logic that positions African politics as inherently deficient [11, 18].

A Foucauldian approach does not deny that specific political practices in Africa can be destructive or unjust. What it questions is the framework through which those practices are named and explained. The genealogical question would ask how the category of neopatrimonialism emerged, whose interests it serves, and what effects its application has, not only analytically but politically. When donor institutions and conditionality frameworks use this category to diagnose African governance failures, they are not simply describing reality but producing specific objects of intervention and specific authorizations for external involvement in African political life [7, 10].

The concept of governmentality is particularly useful for understanding the political dynamics of African states in the post-Cold War period. The expansion of civil society organizations, the professionalization of NGO culture, and the growing role of international donors in shaping the policy agendas of African governments can all be analyzed as forms of governmentality operating at a distance [8, 11]. They do not govern through direct coercion but through the constitution of specific institutional environments, the production of specific forms of expertise and advocacy, and the normalization of

specific political rationalities. The result is a form of political life in which African governments are formally sovereign but substantially constrained by the requirements of donor legitimacy and international institutional membership [1, 10].

### 4.3. Health, Biopower, and the African Body

The management of health and disease in Africa provides a particularly revealing illustration of Foucauldian biopower. Colonial medicine was not simply a humanitarian project. It was a form of power that produced specific knowledges of the African body, categorized as pathological, deficient, and prone to specific diseases, and used those knowledges to justify specific forms of intervention, surveillance, and control [6, 13]. The colonial hospital and the colonial public health campaign were not external to the colonial project but integral to it, producing specific subject positions for colonized peoples and establishing specific hierarchies of expertise and authority.

This history is not simply past. Contemporary global health governance in Africa reproduces aspects of the colonial biopolitical order even while operating under entirely different ideological premises. The dominant frameworks of global health, including burden-of-disease statistics, disease control targets, and vertical health programs focused on specific pathogens, produce specific kinds of knowledge about African populations and specific kinds of subjects: patients who are managed rather than citizens who participate in the governance of their own health systems [9, 13]. The vast infrastructure of global health, including international foundations, bilateral donor agencies, and global health initiatives, constitutes a form of governmentality that operates on African populations through the production of health-related knowledges and the shaping of health systems in accordance with external priorities.

This is not to deny the value of global health interventions or the genuine reduction in mortality that some have achieved. It is to insist that the power/knowledge dimensions of global health governance deserve the same critical attention as its technical dimensions. Who defines what counts as a health priority? Whose knowledge about disease etiology and treatment is authoritative? How do health systems get shaped by the interests and assumptions of external funders? These are Foucauldian questions, and they have direct implications for the sustainability and equity of health systems in Africa [7, 14].

### 4.4. Neoliberalism, African Economies, and the Discourse of Underdevelopment

Africa's economic position within the global order cannot be separated from the discursive frameworks through which it has been constituted. The concept of underdevelopment, central to the development economics that has shaped African economic policy since independence, is not a neutral description of a pre-existing condition. It is a relational concept that

defines certain economies as lacking in relation to a norm of development implicitly identified with the industrialized West. The very language of underdevelopment naturalizes a teleological view of economic history in which all societies are either progressing toward or failing to reach a destination already achieved by others [3, 19].

Dependency theorists such as Rodney [17] argued in *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* that African poverty is not a natural condition or the result of internal deficiencies but the product of a specific historical process, namely colonialism and its aftermath, that systematically extracted African wealth and restructured African economies to serve European interests. While Rodney worked within a different theoretical tradition, his argument is deeply compatible with a Foucauldian critique: what looks like underdevelopment is a product of specific historical power relations, not a natural state. Mkandawire and Soludo [15] have similarly argued that African perspectives on structural adjustment reveal the extent to which externally imposed development prescriptions have served the interests of international creditors more than those of African populations.

The contemporary discourse of neoliberal development has not resolved these structural issues. On the contrary, the emphasis on market liberalization, export-led growth, and foreign direct investment as the primary mechanisms of development has in many cases deepened Africa's position as a supplier of primary commodities and a recipient of manufactured goods, reproducing at the level of the global economy the asymmetric relationships established by colonialism [10, 17]. The financial flows associated with globalization, including debt service payments, profit repatriation, illicit financial flows, and the declining terms of trade for primary commodities, continue to result in net outflows from Africa to wealthy countries, a structural dynamic that development discourse systematically obscures [15].

## 5. Foucault, Resistance, and African Epistemic Sovereignty

### 5.1. Counter-Conduct and the Possibilities of Resistance

A common criticism of Foucault is that his analysis of power is so pervasive and so productive that it leaves no room for genuine resistance. If power is not simply imposed from above but operates through the very forms of subjectivity and knowledge through which we understand ourselves, where does resistance come from, and how does it work? This criticism misreads Foucault. From the beginning of his mature work, Foucault insisted that where there is power, there is resistance, not as an external force that escapes power from the outside, but as an element produced within power relations and capable of turning them against themselves [6, 7].

In his later work, Foucault [8] developed the concept of

counter-conduct to describe practices that resist dominant modes of governmentality not by rejecting governance as such but by conducting oneself in relation to different norms and rationalities. Counter-conduct does not require a revolutionary overthrow of existing power structures. It operates at the level of everyday practice, of what Foucault called the 'care of the self,' and of the organization of communities around alternative values and knowledges. In the African context, counter-conduct can be seen in the grassroots movements that have resisted structural adjustment conditionalities, in the intellectual projects of decolonization, in the efforts to recover and institutionalize indigenous knowledge systems, and in the political mobilizations that challenge the legitimacy of externally imposed governance norms [20].

Amo-Agyemang [1] has identified non-compliance with IMF conditionalities as one form of counter-conduct in Ghana, a practice that, rather than engaging with the dominant discourse on its own terms, simply refuses its requirements. This form of resistance is often treated in development discourse as irrational or as evidence of weak institutional capacity. From a Foucauldian perspective, however, it can be understood as a practice through which subjects assert their own forms of rationality and refuse to be governed in the terms prescribed by external power [8, 12].

## 5.2. Decolonizing Knowledge and the African Episteme

The project of decolonizing knowledge in Africa, that is, recovering, validating, and institutionalizing forms of understanding that have been marginalized by colonial and neoliberal epistemologies, is a direct application of insights derived from, or deeply consonant with, Foucault's theoretical framework. If knowledge is always entangled with power, and if specific knowledge hierarchies have played a role in constituting Africa's subordinate position in the global order, then transforming that position requires, among other things, transforming the epistemic conditions under which African realities are understood and addressed [4, 7, 14].

African philosophers and social theorists have developed rich traditions of inquiry that engage with this project. Wiredu [20] calls for a critical examination of the ways that African philosophical and political thinking has been shaped by colonial categories, and a recovery of indigenous philosophical traditions as genuine sources of insight. Mbembe [14] seeks to develop frameworks for understanding African experience that do not reduce it to a response to colonialism or a deviation from Western norms. These projects converge on the demand for what Abera [23] terms epistemic sovereignty, the right and capacity of African thinkers and institutions to produce knowledge about African realities on their own terms.

What a Foucauldian perspective adds to these projects is methodological clarity about the mechanisms through which epistemic marginalization operates and, consequently, about the forms of practice required to challenge it. Decolonizing

knowledge is not simply a matter of adding African content to existing frameworks; it requires a genealogical interrogation of the frameworks themselves, asking how they were produced, in whose interests, and with what effects, and a willingness to develop genuinely different epistemological approaches where the existing frameworks are found to be inadequate or distorting [12, 20].

## 5.3. Pan-Africanism and Collective Agency

Foucault's framework, while primarily concerned with micro-level power relations, also has implications for thinking about collective political agency. The Pan-African tradition, from W.E.B. Du Bois and Marcus Garvey to Kwame Nkrumah and Julius Nyerere, can be understood as an attempt to produce a collective African subject capable of engaging with global power on different terms [14]. Pan-Africanism sought to constitute Africa not as an object of external knowledge and governance but as a self-determining subject, a political community capable of defining its own interests and pursuing them collectively [11].

A Foucauldian analysis would note both the political force of this project and its internal complexities. Pan-African discourse has sometimes reproduced its own exclusions, of women, of ethnic and regional minorities, of those who do not fit the dominant political vision, in ways that parallel the exclusions of the dominant power/knowledge regimes it contests [13]. The production of an African subject capable of epistemic and political sovereignty is not simply a matter of reversing existing hierarchies; it requires attending to the power relations within African societies as well as those between Africa and the wider world [7, 18].

Nevertheless, the project of collective African agency, pursued through institutions like the African Union, through regional economic communities, through intellectual networks and universities, and through the transnational solidarity movements that connect African diaspora communities, represents precisely the kind of counter-conduct that Foucault's framework identifies as the form that resistance to dominant governmentality takes. It is a practice of self-governance according to different norms, in pursuit of different objectives, on the basis of different knowledge [8, 20].

## 6. Critical Assessment of Foucault's Framework for African Contexts

Foucault's framework is a powerful analytical instrument, but it is not without its limitations when applied to African contexts, and intellectual honesty requires acknowledging these.

The most significant limitation is geographical: Foucault developed his concepts in direct engagement with European history and European institutions. His analyses of the prison, the hospital, the school, the clinic, and the asylum are all grounded in French and broadly European material. When

those concepts are transferred to African contexts, they require adaptation [2, 19]. Colonial power, for instance, operated differently from the disciplinary power Foucault analyzed in European institutions. As Mbembe [13] has argued, colonial power was not primarily concerned with producing productive and normalized subjects in the Foucauldian sense; it was concerned with establishing and maintaining racial hierarchies through violence, dispossession, and the denial of full humanity to the colonized. Mbembe's concept of 'neocolonialism,' the power to determine who shall live and who shall die, extends and partially corrects Foucault's biopower concept to account for the specificity of colonial and post-colonial power [13].

A second limitation concerns agency. Foucault's framework, particularly in its analysis of discourse and subjectification, has sometimes been read as leaving insufficient room for the genuine agency of colonized or subordinated peoples. If African subjects have been constituted through colonial and neoliberal power/knowledge regimes, what does that leave for authentic African agency or authentic African thought? This is a real tension, though it is one that Foucault's own concept of counter-conduct, developed in his later work, goes some way toward addressing [8, 12].

Third, Foucault's relative silence on questions of economic exploitation and class, his deliberate distance from Marxist political economy, leaves his framework incomplete as an account of Africa's position in the global order. The material dimensions of Africa's subordination, including debt, resource extraction, unfair trade, and illicit financial flows, require analysis at a level of structural economic determination that Foucault's discourse-centered approach does not fully supply. A complete account of power in Africa needs to integrate Foucauldian insights about discourse and subjectification with structural economic analysis of the kind developed by Rodney [17] and Mkandawire and Soludo [15].

These limitations do not invalidate the Foucauldian approach; they contextualize it. Used critically, in combination with other theoretical resources and in direct engagement with African historical and contemporary material, Foucault's power/knowledge framework remains one of the most productive analytical instruments available for understanding the ways in which Africa's contemporary challenges are shaped by, and can be addressed through, the politics of knowledge [12].

## 7. Conclusion

Michel Foucault's power/knowledge nexus provides a theoretical framework of enduring relevance for understanding Africa's engagement with globalization and the challenges that define the continent's contemporary condition. By insisting that knowledge is never politically innocent, that it is always produced within and productive of power relations, Foucault equips analysts and activists with tools for understanding why Africa's problems are framed the way they are, whose interests those framings serve, and what forms of practice might

challenge them.

The article has argued across three interconnected registers. At the theoretical level, it has shown that Foucault's concepts of discourse, genealogy, archaeology, governmentality, biopower, and the subject constitute a coherent and internally consistent framework for analyzing power in its modern, productive, and knowledge-entangled forms. At the level of globalization, it has shown that the dominant frameworks of international development, trade, and governance function as regimes of truth that produce Africa as a specific kind of object, deficient, underdeveloped, and in need of external guidance, and that authorize specific forms of external power over African states and populations. At the level of specific contemporary issues, it has traced the operation of these dynamics in education, political governance, health, and economic policy.

Against the determinism sometimes attributed to Foucauldian analysis, the article has also traced the possibilities of resistance. Counter-conduct, the decolonization of knowledge, the recovery of indigenous epistemologies, Pan-African solidarity, and the assertion of African agency within and against dominant power/knowledge regimes are all practices that a Foucauldian framework helps to understand and that Africa's contemporary intellectual and political movements are actively pursuing.

The project is urgent. Africa is the most youthful continent on earth, with a majority of its population under the age of thirty. The knowledge frameworks that will shape the education, economic opportunities, governance, and self-understanding of this generation are being actively contested. Foucault's insistence that the politics of knowledge is as important as the politics of institutions, that how we know is as political as what we decide, is not an academic nicety. It is a contribution to a struggle that is very much underway.

## 8. Recommendations

Future research should explore the specific mechanisms through which epistemic sovereignty can be institutionalized in African educational systems and policy-making bodies. Empirical case studies examining successful instances of counter-conduct and the integration of indigenous knowledge systems into contemporary governance frameworks would provide valuable practical insights. Furthermore, a deeper structural analysis combining Foucault's power/knowledge paradigm with critical political economy is recommended to fully understand the material dimensions of Africa's global standing.

## Abbreviations

GDP	Gross Domestic Product
IMF	International Monetary Fund
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization

## Author Contributions

**Mohammed Zeinu Hassen:** Conceptualization, Resources, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing

## Conflicts of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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