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International Business Research Challenges in Africa:
Knowledge Creation and Institutional Perspectives

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INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS RESEARCH CHALLENGES IN AFRICA: KNOWLEDGE CREATION AND INSTITUTIONAL PERSPECTIVES

ABSTRACT

Purpose: This study explores the challenges researchers in/on Africa face when conducting research on the continent. It examines the reasons behind Africans' relatively limited contribution to the business literature in the global sphere and why not culturally sensitive and nuanced research on Africa is spreading unchallenged.

Methodology: The study combines knowledge creation and institutional theories to explain why African business scholars struggle in researching the continent and in contributing significantly to global knowledge creation. It also explores the debate about why Africa's narratives in business seem dominated by not culturally sensitive and nuanced voices and approaches. It uses a participant observation method.

Findings: The study found that African scholars have not yet contributed significantly to global knowledge creation because of Africa's institutional weaknesses and lack of government support for research, coupled with challenges at the interviewing, organizational, and scholars' levels. The study points to the specificities of the continent as well as to African interviewees' particularities and the type of interactions with the researchers. The paper proposes new avenues to address those multilevel challenges and offers key lessons for future studies.

Originality: To the best of our knowledge, this study is the first to systematically investigate the fundamental reasons behind business research challenges in/on Africa from knowledge creation and institutional standpoints. This study also contributes to the growing debate on Africans' meager contribution to business literature as well as the controversy regarding culturally-sensitive vs. not culturally-sensitive knowledge creation on Africa. Finally, it proposes avenues to understanding and overcoming those challenges.

KEYWORDS: Africa, research, international business, challenge, institution, knowledge creation.

1. INTRODUCTION

Conducting research in developing countries is challenging (Amerson and Strang, 2015; Creed-Kanashiro et al., 2005) especially when it comes to African countries (Berndt and Svensson, 2011; Kiggundu, 1989). The continent is increasingly becoming an interesting place not only to visit (Walsh, 2015) but also to invest in, and an appealing destination for international business (IB) particularly for corporations aiming to internationalize to vibrant developing markets. As indicated in Roberts and Dorrenbacher (2016), there is much to be investigated within Africa as a location for inward FDI and in the intra-African expansion of businesses. Yet, the quality of investment decisions often depends on the quality of available information on the targeted region. One way to access that reliable information is by consulting reports from both private, government, and non-government sources. Additionally, investors, especially giant corporations and even government policy makers are increasingly looking at scientific sources that include academic research and publications (Ibeh, Wilson & Chizema, 2012; Jedlowski & Röschenthaler, 2017; Kiggundu & Lamont, 2015). However, the reality is that, conducting large scale studies is generally challenging in research and more so in/on Africa (Berndt and Svensson, 2011; Kiggundu, 1989). Despite the challenging nature of the African context, in recent years, several academic journals have published special issues on Africa

including the Journal of World Business: 46(1), 2011 with 5 articles; Thunderbird International Business Review: 51(4), 2009 with 8 articles; Thunderbird International Business Review (2017 ongoing call for papers – special issue on "Market Entry into Africa: Acquisitions and International Joint Ventures. Studies of foreign firm's market entry strategies, challenges, and performance in Africa"); Global Strategy Journal: 7(1), 2017 with 7 articles; and most recently Critical Perspectives on International Business (this article's special issue). Also, the inauguration of new Africa-focused outlets such as the Africa Journal of Management in 2014 (Kiggundu & Lamont, 2015) are adding more support to this new knowledge creation dynamic. Despite the progress with new journals and special issues publishing articles informed by both quantitative and qualitative approaches as well as single and multiple case study methods, the potential of Africa-based research remains unfulfilled (Kolk & Rivera-Santos, 2016). There are several reasons for this shortage of significant research publications on Africa in leading journals. Indeed, collecting data in Africa is challenging because sources of information are not easily accessible especially for researchers who conduct interviews and fieldwork in multiple countries, and from several interviewees with different backgrounds (Ado, 2015; Ado, Chrysostome & Su, 2016; Ado, Su & Wanjiru, 2016).

At the same time, studies on Africa or utilizing data collected in Africa are severely lacking within leading IB journals (Ado and Su, 2016) due to several key challenges. Various factors influence the conceptualization and practice of IB within Africa. The challenges of completing IB research projects in Africa are significant yet the success or failure factors are not well understood (Kolk & Rivera-Santos, 2016). The meager presence of culturally-grounded African knowledge models and the limitations of existing classical models to explain African situations have become more apparent, and clearly highlight the lack of publications on Africa within IB research. This limited visibility of culturally-aware and African-informed studies within IB academic outputs in/on Africa is of concern in an increasingly interconnected world (Lages et al, 2015).

While Africa is becoming a focus for IB research particularly from a resource and emerging market perspective, to date, little is known about research success factors in Africa (Kolk & Rivera-Santos, 2016). It is often mentioned in the literature that conducting research in/on African countries, particularly at the data collection stage, is characterized by extreme challenges and that the African research context presents a high level of complexity (Lages, Pfajfar & Shoham, 2015; Rogerson & Rogerson, 2010) particularly when the study requires cross-country samples. This raises several questions on the narratives about Africa. Ongoing debates persist on whether the African reality is genuinely depicted based on accurate and rigorous data collection and analysis or whether interpretations are biased due to pre-existing misconceptions from those conducting the studies, or due to inadequate applicability of western research approaches to African contexts (Amankwah-Amoah, 2016; Kiggundu et al, 1983; Nzelibe, 1986; Zoogah, 2008; Zoogah et al., 2015).

The argument may be made that a researcher's background can affect the objective interpretation of data and representation of differing contexts (Ado and Su, 2016). Researchers' own experiences, their values or cultural backgrounds may lead them to interpret interactions or generate meanings in ways that are bounded by their own background. Not culturally-sensitive commentators' views on Africa's business environment and their experiences of researching the African context may sometimes overshadow culturally-nuanced views. Thus, academia as well as notable business practitioners increasingly call for a greater diversity of narratives and for African voices to speak for Africa. Elumelu (2017), one of the most eminent entrepreneurs in Africa, recently stated that Africans "must all be concerned about the narrative on Africa. We must actively decide to tell our stories ourselves. We must dictate what is said about our continent and define the things that are important to us as a people." Predominantly, western ways of "knowing" African markets or

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researching African business contexts are prioritized despite telling only part of the continent's reality (Kamoche, 1997); such views may shape wider perceptions of African contexts within the IB area.

To bridge this gap, this paper looks at the challenges of conducting business research in/on Africa from the standpoint of African researchers and following a qualitative perspective that mostly uses the contexts of Africa-China joint-ventures. The paper identifies the main issues facing Africans researching their "home" environments particularly during their fieldwork and data-collection stages. It proposes ways to improve researchers' experiences and to encourage a culturally-informed approach to the African business context in terms of the methodologies and models used, to evolve towards a more rigorous and culturally-aware creation of knowledge.

In this paper, we first present our theoretical approach with a glimpse of what the literature, if any, says about researching African contexts, knowledge creation challenges and institutional barriers in Africa. Then, we present the research method with justifications of our choice of participant observation methodology and data analysis. Results are then presented in categories and levels of challenges. We outline the theoretical implications as well as the study's limitations and directions for future research. The results indicate that researchers indeed face multiple challenges ranging from ethical and financial constraints to conformism and bias risks in researching Africa. Certain challenges are quite specific to the African context while some appear more relevant to individual country settings. Following those findings, we call for more awareness in research standards and its contextualization towards the highest scientific standards when researching African business contexts.

2. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES
2.1 State of African knowledge creation
The challenge of conducting research in Africa can be located within the wider context of knowledge creation. The attendant conditions influence the effectiveness of knowledge conversion and transfer within and beyond African contexts and societies. Reviews of multiple studies conducted in Africa or utilizing data collected in African contexts reveal deep-rooted constraints affecting the ability to develop a knowledge base on African business literature. Concerns over the dearth of distinctive African thought-systems that inform IB research have exercised scholars of African business over the years. Studies on Africa often adopt or replicate models applied in different contexts (Kamoche, 1997) and either miss out or fail to capture the complexities of African interactions in the way western models have been so effective in explaining western business contexts.

A study by Kiggundu et al (1983) highlighted the limits of organizational theories in terms of their inadequate applicability to developing country contexts generally and even more so in the African context (Rivera-Santos et al., 2015; Thorgren & Omorede, 2015; Zoogah & Nkomo, 2013). This review stressed the very limited cases within which such theories might be applicable for African contexts. Similar assessments are later echoed by Nzelibe (1986) decrying the absence of African thoughts, specifically the lack of research activity and conceptualization led by African scholars. Because of this absence, the status quo has developed to a situation where African thought is dominated by external theoretical models and questionable or outdated ideas that failed to fit the context within which they are applied. Constructing a theory for African business thought cannot be advanced by copying western ideas or practices which prevail elsewhere as they were not always appropriate for the African context. This line of criticism has been echoed over the following decades, as reviewed in a recent article on African thought (Amankwah-Amoah, 2016). This review

spanning 1960-2012 examined the historical trajectory of African business knowledge and classified shifting perspectives.

The dominance of western models of "knowing" has had the subsequent effect of prioritizing western interpretations of non-western contexts to the exclusion of a more culturally-nuanced African "knowing" or analyses. It is not surprising to find that leading 'experts' and commentators on Africa are not culturally-nuanced (e.g. biased from cultural distance paradox, misunderstanding of Africans' religious parameters, colonial heritage, etc.), yet, their views are increasingly receiving echoes in interpreting African contexts. While this may not necessarily invalidate their knowledge of theoretical models, their application to local contexts and interpretations of findings reveal the limits to this approach. The reverse situation, where not culturally-sensitive individuals are routinely presented as the leading commentators or 'experts' on, for example, uniquely British concerns or Russian or Asian business situations may not be as prevalent. The rise of not culturally-sensitive views on Africa becoming the accepted version of the reality makes the challenge of African knowledge creation even more apparent.

The reliance on not culturally-nuanced thought as a frame of reference to conceptualize or operationalize African thought-systems within African businesses fails to advance knowledge and results in pretentious structures without local foundation (Nzelibe 1983). There is an increasing recognition of the potential for more culturally-nuanced contributions to further enrich mainstream business literature (Jackson et al., 2008). Suggestions for alternative course for African contexts have been proposed in a range of fora (Kamoche et al., 2012; Newenham-Kahindi, 2009) in view of the apparent imbalance.

From an epistemological and ontological standpoint, research in Africa is meagre not only because of fieldwork challenges but also due to specific methodological issues. While many researchers simply try to copy western ways of creating knowledge and apply them to the African context, this approach has many philosophical shortcomings and methodological limitations (Kamoche, 1997) because theories are found upon a philosophy of science and an analysis of society that together define how one sees or conceptualizes the world (Burrell & Morgan, 2017). Scholars like Simon (1972, 1991), Gigerenzer and Goldstein (1996) indicated moderating approaches to acknowledge production by pointing out to notions of bounded rationality, influence of subjective, social, and informal aspects, ethnographic and interpretative studies and the central role of context and individual experiences.

Kamoche (1997) argued that to understand African thought-system and its implications, one must grasp how Africans make sense of the world through a combination of symbolism and mystical thinking. Therefore, understanding the main implications of adopting western models within the unique characteristics of the African contexts is a pivotal requirement to the reliability and validity of a study on Africa. Also, for western models to be mobilized in an African setting, one must validate the suitability of those models to a significantly new or even undocumented African context. Moving forward, Kamoche (1997) recommended an evolutionary approach to studying African contexts.

Some authors such as Hofmeyr, Templer, and Beaty (1994) also raised the need for researchers to understand the culture, the people, and other issues specific to the region before they even develop a methodology and that research methodologies should seek to interpret reality rather than desperately looking to establish "facts" (Kamoche, 1997). These critics converge to the idea that, to conduct a meaningful and reliable research in/on Africa, researchers must be culturally-sensitive and immersed in the studied context by inquiring profoundly into the particularities of the African context and by

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moderating their approaches to acknowledge and integrate local singularities in their protocols, models, analyses, and interpretations.

2.2 African knowledge creation through researching African contexts

The significance of knowledge within IB research is an important factor to the competitive advantages of companies and countries. Knowledge is often created through a research process and is shared at the individual, national, and global levels. New knowledge can also be combined with previous experiences to generate new insights (McKenzie and van Winkelen, 2006, Naicker, Govender and Naidoo, 2014). Research completed within African contexts faces the challenge of negotiating across key layers in terms of generating data and creating knowledge (Von Krogh, Nonaka and Rechsteiner, 2012). Two key premises are inherent within knowledge creation as identified in the literature (Nonaka & Von Krogh, 2009): Firstly, there is the assumption that tacit knowledge and explicit knowledge exist along a continuum and are not mutually exclusive. Secondly, the interaction between tacit knowledge and explicit knowledge results in knowledge conversion, a process through which new knowledge becomes available and accessible to wider audiences. Researchers iterate between those premises to create and disseminate knowledge across the academia and the society in general.

Mitchell and Boyle (2010) refer knowledge creation to those research initiatives or activities taken towards the generation of new ideas or new objects. Different contexts may however determine the activities performed and the kind of knowledge created. Within a research context, knowledge creation may have different processes or outputs from those occurring within a company setting. In terms of process, there is a need for a contextualized understanding of the knowledge creation process through academic research in Africa. The challenge of creating, sharing, and applying knowledge to generate results is of paramount importance for academic researchers, business, and policymakers in Africa.

Within this paper, the challenge of conducting IB research in African contexts is in part informed by existing perspectives on knowledge creation which integrate context, knowledge assets and knowledge creation processes. Specific insights are drawn from Nonaka & Takeuchi's 1995 theory on the creation and transfer of knowledge with a focus on academic research. In extension, we acknowledge Von Krogh, Nonaka and Rechsteiner's (2012) framework on knowledge creation that identified three key layers: (i) a core layer of local knowledge creation, (ii) a conditional layer that provides the resources such as financing and context such as ethical guidelines for knowledge creation and (iii) a structural layer which forms the overall frame and direction for the type of knowledge outcome prioritized.

As outlined earlier, existing work on knowledge creation within IB is dominated by conditions existing in western contexts. Insufficient attention is paid to the different contexts and knowledge assets extant in non-western contexts such as those in sub-Saharan Africa, an environment with its unique characteristics (Amankwah-Amoah, Ifere & Nyuur, 2016). Academic research in Africa by IB researchers is key to generating new knowledge and to improving the understanding of the continent. As outlined by Mitchell and Boyle (2010), knowledge creation refers to those activities undertaken towards generating new ideas. Knowledge as a process (how it is created, for example through data collection and analysis) is differentiated from knowledge as an output. The knowledge creation process such as the representation of ideas, is also differentiated from its impacts on businesses and society.

To create knowledge, the role of the researcher and of the context within which knowledge is created are of key significance. Jakubik's (2011) view of knowledge conversion, the processes through which new knowledge becomes available and accessible to wider audience links to Nonaka, Toyama, and Konno's (2000) ideas which highlight the central role of context (George, 2015). Knowledge needs a context in order to be rigorously created - specifically noting that 'there is no knowledge without place' (Nonaka et al, 2000). Jakubik urges researchers to articulate a better understanding of the emerging community view of knowledge, with knowledge seen as "embedded in human actions and interactions, in situated practices" (2011:375).

One of the most widely cited models for understanding knowledge creation and conversion is Nonaka's theory of knowledge creation, based on the SECI (Socialization – Externalization – Combination – Internalization) model. Through all these stages, there is a need of collecting information/data to be analyzed and to be interpreted. The final stage of this iteration is the creation of new ideas or even theories based on facts. The generated knowledge is then amplified and crystallized by being engaged and shared in a wider knowledge network such as the academia or the society in general. Researchers play a key role in sharing knowledge at the wider network level. By conducting studies on managerial or business phenomena, researchers create and share knowledge that in turn impacts both individuals, businesses, and societies. Researchers are knowledge creators or at least they organize data and make sense of it by constructing models and generating scientific evidence and eventually formulate recommendations toward general societal progress. In this regard, researchers on Africa are lagging in knowledge creation and scientific contribution especially when it comes to IB-related subjects on Africa. Reasons for the limited studies on Africa within IB literature are diverse and complex.

Studies on research challenges in/on Africa are quite rare (Ado and Su, 2016; Berndt and Svensson, 2011). Knowledge creation in the IB literature on Africa is scarce particularly when it comes to current IB hot topics such as China in Africa. However, despite this shortcoming, to the best of our knowledge, no study has investigated the fundamental reasons behind the low level of IB knowledge creation and the lack of significant and frequent studies on IB in Africa. As described earlier in the literature, effective knowledge creation requires individual, organizational, and certainly institutional commitments.

From an institutional theory and institutionalism perspective, one may question how well-equipped African institutional settings (Bansal, 2011) are for research facilitation. Although we acknowledge the existence of multiple institutionalisms, our paper refers to rational choice institutionalism which has become an engine of social scientific research in producing knowledge (Shepsle, 1989, 2006; Hall & Taylor, 1996). Actors, here researchers, face obstacles in the institutional environment which affect their ability to conduct objective significant studies (Hall & Taylor, 1996). The institutional research environment varies across countries. For instance, when it comes to research funding, there are differences in institutional frameworks across African countries. Certain countries such as South Africa have clear mechanisms as to where and how to apply for research grants while less advanced African countries are still struggling to create those kinds of research funding structures.

The institutional gap is even more evident when comparing western and African institutions. In Canada for instance, where one of the authors is based, for all social science research projects, scholars automatically have competitive access to funding at the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC). Institutions such as the research funding agencies often define the pace of knowledge creation as well as the research practices and standards. Many African countries lack key institutions to support research. Yet, many researchers on Africa are based in

Africa. Therefore, it could be tempting to explain literature shortage on Africa by pointing out to Africa's institutional deficiencies.

Research and knowledge creation challenges in/on Africa may not be caused by weak African institutional research settings only. Rather, challenges may also originate from broader African specificities and unique realities such as culture, history, context, or social vulnerabilities (Wanjiru, 2013; Ibeh & Debrah, 2011; Osabutey, Nyuur, & Debrah, 2015; Phelps et al, 2009). Therefore, to understand the reasons behind the evident literature shortage, it is necessary to theoretically position this debate in a broader but contextualized African setting.

In this paper, we build on a contextualization of knowledge creation theory and argue that IB literature shortage on Africa is on one hand due to African institutional weaknesses and on the other hand by a systemic combination of various factors both at the institutional, national, organizational, individual, and environmental levels. All these factors are intertwined with various research stakeholders.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

This study is a descriptive critical analysis of research challenges in Africa based on the experience of university researchers in thirty-five African countries. It adopts a qualitative method through a participant observation approach. For Becker and Geer, (1957), the most complete form of data is the form in which the participant observer gathers it through an observation of event, the events which precede and follow it, and explanations of its meaning by participants, before, during, and after its occurrence. Our choice of this approach is appropriate because we investigate a phenomenon that we dealt with on a regular basis, hence, taking part in all its occurrence stages particularly when conducting fieldwork. Multiple scholars have argued that participant observation best suits contexts where the interviewer can observe more closely what interviewees describe and it enables a more rigorous triangulation based on data sources (Becker and Geer, 1957; Smith, 1978; Spradley, 2016; Uldam and McCurdy, 2013).

The authors of this study are academic researchers from a purely African background, all holding a Ph.D., with more than ten years research experience and extensive travel specifically within Africa over the last decade. In addition to participant observation, which generates more complete information about a phenomenon than data gathered using other methods (Becker and Geer, 1957), this study was enriched with additional inputs from email and telephone surveys of academic respondents. This survey solicited respondents' views of the main challenges they encountered during fieldwork and data collection stages. The main survey question asked was: *In a brief comment, what are the three key challenges that hindered your research projects in/on Africa?*

Participant recruitment criteria included having advanced education of at least a doctoral degree level (All respondents already hold a Ph.D. except two whose doctoral defense is set for 2017) and be active in academic research in/on Africa for at least the last four years. Participants must have conducted at least one fieldwork project in Africa during that timeframe, and be working within IB, international management or fields that are at the crossroads of business and social science. Most participants' research area dealt with China in Africa, international joint ventures, doing business in Africa, and often adopted case study methods. All these selection criteria allowed this study to focus on scholars working in the same or closely related area, enabling data reliability and a more coherent analysis.

The participants were established both in Africa and overseas, all with research interests in/on Africa. Their responses brought interesting insights to this study. This research looks at the challenges from a purely African point of view and therefore has considered only researchers with an African background meaning they are originally from Africa although they may be from the diaspora and affiliated to western universities. Overall, our sample includes twenty-three respondents, all well informed researchers among which some are based in Africa others in Europe and North America. Many have multiple-country experience both in western and African countries. In addition to academic research, many of them had served in African government positions. Additionally, many have conducted research and consulted for several international organizations including the World Bank, IMF, African Development Bank, and United Nations among others. Table 1 describes our respondents' profiles, including us (the authors), with respective research interests and experiences.

Table 1: Respondent Profiling

	Research interests	Country of origin	African countries visited	Years of research experience
Respondent 1	IB/Management	Niger	21	8
Respondent 2	IB/Economics	Kenya	6	14
Respondent 3	Management	Kenya	8	24
Respondent 4	Management	Nigeria	1	4
Respondent 5	Technology/IB	Nigeria	4	12
Respondent 6	IB/Management	Nigeria	3	4
Respondent 7	Finance/IB	Niger	10	7
Respondent 8	Management/social sciences	Benin	8	8
Respondent 9	Project management	Benin	3	7
Respondent 10	IB/Economics	Benin	7	20
Respondent 11	IB/Finance/Economics	Niger	4	7
Respondent 12	Finance/IB	Nigeria	3	26
Respondent 13	IB/Management	Tanzania	2	6
Respondent 14	Management/Strategy	Zimbabwe	3	18
Respondent 15	Law/Governance/Management	Zimbabwe	2	7
Respondent 16	Governance	Nigeria	1	7
Respondent 17	Human resources management	Ghana	5	8
Respondent 18	Business statistics	Senegal	3	9
Respondent 19	Marketing/Management	Togo	3	6
Respondent 20	Economics	Ivory Coast	4	5
Respondent 21	Marketing	Ivory Coast	6	10
Respondent 22	Business law	Cameroon	2	7
Respondent 23	Entrepreneurship	South Africa	7	11

For clarity reasons, from now on in this paper, interviewees refer to people interviewed by all researchers surveyed in this study. Respondents refer to all African researchers surveyed in this study only. Therefore, the authors of this study are also considered as respondents particularly due to the participant approach adopted in this study. Also, the authors of this paper played the role of interviewers during their respective research projects and throughout this paper as well.

To analyze the data, we first considered our own field notes and then extended with surveys of additional respondents. Most field notes were based on authors' recent fieldworks (from 2013 to present) in more than 16 African countries investigating China's presence in Africa, international joint ventures through qualitative approaches. A few respondents also shared their field notes with us. Therefore, our data is significantly relevant to the issue being investigated in this paper, namely exploring the African research contexts and associated challenges. Moreover, the short surveys with all our respondents consolidated our data and complemented information from our field notes. Field notes and survey data were in the form of short comments and bullet points (via emails, telephone, or social media Apps) which were then aggregated for analysis. Some voice messages were taped and later transcribed. When coding the data, we were especially interested in key words and key statements mentioned in those field notes and surveys. Therefore, our analysis first approached the research question from a descriptive yet critical standpoint which led us to identify major challenges researchers faced in conducting research in/on Africa. This led to the identification of knowledge creation obstacles and institutional shortcomings. We ensured data reliability by confirming that all respondents worked on relevant research areas and that their inputs are based on real fieldwork experience. This allowed us to control potential bias during data analysis. The data was organized by identifying pieces of information that point to research obstacles at the two category levels (individual and institutional). To categorize the challenges, key words such as "lack", "weak", "institution", "barrier to", "challenge", "miss", "refuse", "corrupt", "knowledge", "I didn't have", "we faced", "our university", "our government" were meticulously identified, aggregated, and linked to the proposed explanation of research challenges in/on Africa. For each researcher, we identified major issues he/she faced during their research and their explanation of the origins of those issues. We analyzed both the data obtained from fieldwork in Africa and from surveys of the participants. The analysis focused on the challenges from two angles: Individual and institutional. So, when a respondent cites an obstacle, we first determine whether it is more relevant to the person or the institutions including their organization. Then, we subsequently classify the obstacle in one of the following sub-categories: Individual (specific to interviewee or interviewer) or institutional (specific to the organization, country, or environment). The findings are presented in the following section.

4. RESULTS

Although the findings are mainly coming from specific research contexts and projects (China in Africa, joint venture settings, doing business in Africa, and case study approaches), overall, the challenges of conducting IB research in/on Africa are significant and have a considerable impact on the visibility and level of knowledge originating from Africa. Knowledge creation has been hindered principally by individual and institutional factors. Table 2 summarizes the challenges associated to each level of analysis as well as the potential consequences.

Table 2: Summary of issues

Level	Sub-level	Types of challenges	Possible consequences
Individual	Interviewee	Interview recording; interview cancellation; compensation request; anonymity mistrust; unpredictable interviewees.	Project delay; incomplete research; Research disappointment.
	Interviewer	Lack of language skills; confusing terminology; suspicions; inflexible research protocol.	Interpretation bias; stressful fieldwork; ethical misconduct.
Institutional	Organization	Inaccessibility and unavailability of interviewees; incomplete information.	Non-representative sample; corroborating known views on African reality; conformism.
	Country	Lack of official and reliable data; lack of resources.	Misleading results; lack of reference and results comparison.
	Environment	Lack of connectivity; corruption; political interference.	Stressful fieldwork; conflicts of interest; personal physical threats; retaliation.
All combined	All combined		Not culturally-nuanced narratives of Africa; biased interpretations; low knowledge creation in/on Africa; overgeneralization; underdevelopment.

4.1 Individual level: Challenges specific to interviewees

Refusal to tape-record interviews: Overall, gaining approval to tape-record interviews was a challenge as reported by all twenty-three surveyed respondents. For instance, during a recent research project in sixteen African countries, we interviewed seventy-five people among which fourteen refused to be tape-recorded. Many feared that their voice would be recognized although we clearly informed them that audio-records will be confidential and anonymized and destroyed afterwards. This lack of trust in the interview process opened the door for many interviewees to give limited responses or incorrect answers especially when questions appeared embarrassing. Additionally, during our fieldwork, some interviewees confessed, afterwards, that they had depicted a more positive image of their supervisor or their country than they really believed. In fact, it happened that we mostly got the correct and complete answer only once the tape-recorded interview was over, especially when relaxing in informal settings, hanging out with some interviewees afterwards. This indicates that, in Africa, it is sometimes hard to get comprehensive answers on the first sight. Some interviewees needed time to get familiar with the interviewer. During another recent fieldwork, it was only after several weeks of exchange via emails, Facebook, and WhatsApp that some interviewees decided to "tell us the truth" about their tactics of gaining knowledge in international joint ventures.

Withdrawal of consent, cancellation of interviews and deletion of tape-recorded interviews: Based on respondents' feedback, interviewees were reluctant to provide consent for even non-recorded

interviews. Some studies indicated that their survey response rates in Africa are far below usual western survey average response rates (Adeleye et al., 2018). Also, after the interviews, requests to permanently delete audio-recordings and transcripts appeared common. Some confirmed interviewees also cancelled scheduled interviews at short notice just after a few days of approval. When we informally inquired on the reasons behind such cancellations, one interviewee from Ghana reported "I'm scared what I said would potentially compromise my job; I don't want to take that risk". Another interviewee in Ivory Coast said he came under pressure from his partner not to complete the interview and therefore decided to cancel it. Here again, informal inquiries into this cancellation had the interviewee confirming that his partners were suspicious towards the study and did not trust researchers based at, or linked to, a western university. Despite being Africans, respondents were often suspected of spying, simply based on their affiliations to western institutions.

Requests for compensation: Multiple respondents mentioned this issue especially African researchers based in western countries. This comment is consistent with our own experiences of fieldwork in Africa. Often, we came across interviewees who before or after the interview asked for money or a special treatment especially once they knew that we were based in North America. Some interviewees in Cameroon and Benin directly confronted us with this question: "What benefit do I gain in taking part to your research?". Participating in research was viewed as a favor to researchers and many interviewees indicated that they did not know why they would participate in research that did not offer them any significant incentive. In a recent single study where respondents to this survey interacted with 43 companies and approached 100 people for interviews, over twenty potential interviewees clearly expressed their expectation of a financial compensation either before or after the interview. These requests were declined as the research was bounded by strict ethical guidelines. As a result, samples get further reduced. To overcome such challenges, efforts were deployed to explain the overall indirect benefits of research for interviewees such as knowledge transfer, attracting more foreign investments to their country, or improving corporate and institutional governance.

Lack of trust in anonymity: Regardless of the nature of the research project, many African interviewees questioned the anonymity of the interview process. Despite official ethics agreement and the guarantees of confidentiality and anonymity offered, many African interviewees still requested and overemphasized strict privacy and generally displayed suspicious over how data would be used and published. This raised, among some interviewees, the issue of fear for retaliation from their colleagues, supervisors, and partners who often displayed a reticence for opening-up a conversation on specific topics. In a recent research in Central Africa, we had to negotiate three times, with the same three people before they accepted to discuss our questionnaire's item related to informal structures and unconventional communication channels in Africa-China joint ventures. Their reason of refusing the initial invitation was that they did not trust the total anonymity claim of our interviews.

Multiple interviewees requested that the interviews take place outside the workplace to avoid any breach of information. This is sometimes due to the lack of experience of interviewees in participating in research projects. Indeed, during our interviews in sixteen countries, more than 50% of our sample attested that it was their first interview for a research project. In many countries, trust in written ethical guaranty offered by researchers was insufficient as stated by one Nigerian scholar:

In the Nigerian Banking Industry, what is supposed to be a reassurance to officials (ethical consideration) rather becomes the basis to decline/withdraw their promise to support/participate in the research. Statement of ethical consideration in relation to the research get them to think what was probably not in their mind hitherto. They mostly do not want to commit to any written document/evidence. Respondent 5.

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Unpredictable interviewees and rigid research protocols: On multiple occasions, respondents indicated being victims of their own tough, western-inspired, research guidelines. The researchers commented that they struggled with a rigid research protocol. They specifically mentioned that the lack of flexibility over their research agenda and deliverables' deadline put additional pressure to their fieldwork. Indeed, African interviewees often changed their mind instantly over the interview style, the place, the time and sometimes even the questions to be discussed. Our respondents indicated that they were often surprised to face such complications and many (especially those with quantitative method) attested not having a solid backup plan to deal with such unexpected situations. For instance, during our own research fieldwork in 2014, an interviewee in Chad informed us that he travelled to US only once we were already in N'Djamena for the interview. We paid an expensive flight only to find out that our interviewee wasn't in the country and didn't even find it necessary to inform us in advance.

4.2 Individual level: Challenges specific to interviewers

Terminology differences: Across continents and countries, definitions of concepts in both IB and management tend to differ. Therefore, contextualization in Africa becomes crucial for the sake of valid research (Ado & Su, 2016; Kamoche, 1997). For instance, one Kenyan respondent pointed out that in Kenya, a department is a Ministry unit while in Australia a department means a Ministry. Such semantics can easily affect the understanding of an interview question, potentially leading to misinterpretation and misrepresentation of the phenomenon under investigation, especially in Africa where language and cultural diversity are significant.

Also, according to a respondent, "most western editors want to see what they know" being corroborated by the findings. Data must be interpreted by acknowledging local contexts, but researchers often discuss their questionnaires in western languages and styles and this makes the data analysis more challenging especially in the African countries where cognitive specificities exist and English or French is not necessarily the native language. Indeed, one respondent argues that "Data alone is not always sufficient to make logical and conclusive interpretation of responses" and that, in Africa, "knowledge on the local context of the subject being studied is of paramount importance". Therefore, contextualization remains a significant challenge for researchers focusing on Africa and this is even more challenging for scholars from outside Africa. This challenge requires the researcher to cope with the risk of conforming to some dominant, often western, biased perceptions of Africa.

In fact, although Africa is often criticized on data unavailability, some respondents argue that data on issues such as poverty and corruption is surprisingly abundant in/on the continent, highlighting the ease with which biased, non-culturally nuanced, and often western generalized misinterpretations and preconceptions of the African reality are shaped by the availability of skewed data. One respondent comments this issue of data shortage.

The main challenge is access to data. Available data ranges from being patchy to non-existent, which is really a shame and frustrating as a lot of resources and activities are happening around Africa. If agencies are keen on this, I think things can be better, after all, they seem to have data on the negative side – poverty, low education, corruption, political turmoil, etc. and little or nothing on the positive side like innovation and technology. Governments around Africa need to see the vital importance of data as part of their focus as this will enable them to plan and execute projects better, allocate scarce resources more effectively and efficiently. It will also help the continent - government, privates, and researchers - in telling its own story – free, to some extent, of western bias who do desk

research on Africa from afar and say all sort of things that may not be true or complete. (Respondent 12).

Suspicions about researcher's background: This challenge arises when the researcher is not familiar with the local culture. Often, interviewees seem more comfortable with someone they trust and whom understands their culture. Although, the researcher may be African, in some instances, the country of origin plays a big role on how much information and openness he/she gets during the interview. Respondents emphasized on the idea that researchers must be aware of this potential risk of mistrust based on their degree of foreignness. For instance, during a research project in Zinder, Niger, in 2014, it was very easy to get interviewees' trust on sensitive questions because it was taking place in the interviewee's and interviewer's same hometown. Such interviewing chemistry based on cultural similarities are of central importance in Africa especially when the interview questions are delicate or carry the risk of making interviewees give politically-correct answers. Indeed, in those hometown interviews, often the interviewees started their answers by "I can say this because it's you!" which suggests that if it were an unfamiliar interviewer, or one who did not share a common culture, they may be less likely to even answer that same question or accept to be interviewed in the first place.

Lack of local language skills: In some countries, interviewees could speak only their national language such as Swahili, Lingala, Hausa, Yoruba, Wolof, etc. Therefore, the fact that some interviewees couldn't speak foreign languages such as English or French requires the researcher to ideally know the local language or look for local translators and make sure to translate it correctly. In our recent research projects, we personally had to interview several people in their local dialects and this challenge was even bigger in countries where translators to foreign languages were rare or costly. Also, those translators sometimes spoke only the local dialect and their national language which is sometimes neither English nor French (e.g. Portuguese), while these two languages are the most commonly used by researchers in Africa. As pointed out by a respondent *"common terminologies such as patronage, meritocracy and many more take a very different meaning and application"* in Africa.

4.3 *Institutional level: Challenges specific to the studied organizations*

Foreign partners blocking information: We have come across cases where interviewees were instructed to disregard our inquiries especially in cases where Chinese partners were involved. A few researchers also reported this issue especially those who studied international partnerships in Africa. However, we often overcame such barriers by interviewing people outside their workplace. A few employees even insisted on their desire to be interviewed despite their partner's directives to not do so. Many Africans didn't really have the organizational power to allow interviews to take place with other Africans. Indeed, in most of the partnerships we investigated, African partners tended to lack decision power in the partnerships. This challenge was most recurrent in ventures where Africans had minority share ownership. Hence, foreign partners carefully controlled external communication channels. This has often involved limited access to corporate information for African employees (who often occupy lower-level positons in the company; see also Ado, Su, and Wanjiru, 2016) and restrictions over information sharing including through interviews. These limitations often erected strong barriers to researchers who wanted to interview Africans involved in foreign partnerships.

High non-Africans employee ratio: In some Africa-Foreign joint ventures, non-African employees surprisingly outnumbered Africans. For researchers, this has made African participant recruitment

harder. When studying an issue from an African standpoint, it is often common to interview only Africans as we did in our 2014 fieldwork. However, in some companies of interest, there were only few Africans who met interviewee selection criteria because most employees were non-Africans or were denied authorization to participate in the research by their supervisors. Additionally, in one of our research projects, while we were interested in African employees who worked for more than three years in Africa-China partnerships, many Africans tended not to fit our selection criteria because they did not stay longer in the joint venture due to constant tensions or to personal dissatisfactions.

4.4 Institutional level: Challenges specific to the country/region

Lack of official and reliable data: Often, researchers were confronted with the problem of data unavailability at the official level in many African countries. Reasons range from the nonexistence of national data collecting systems or institutions to the unwillingness of governments or officials to share it. This has made access to official data difficult both at the national and local levels. This becomes even more challenging when, in some countries, access to government key decision makers is a nightmare unless the researcher engages in an unethical conduct to gain access to information. One of this paper's authors has some experience as a visiting scholar at the office of the special adviser on Africa at United Nations Headquarters, in New York. One thing he realized is that many African officials were contacting the UN office to get data on their own country. Additionally, underfunded statistical agencies and missing data increased the risks of research being skewed to what is convenient and measurable rather than what is important and representative. A recent report from the World Bank (2017) pointed out to the data crisis in several African countries where, according to World Bank's president Jim Kim, "there are big data gaps or no data at all". Many researchers acknowledged such challenges and complained fiercely on the issue that, from an empirical perspective, the main challenge about African countries is to find reliable data. A Kenyan respondent stated that data on corruption are either censored or missing for many years, even if this is not true for all African countries. Many respondents support such point of view including a Nigerian respondent who indicates that "the statistics office is useless… there are no data series".

This shows that many African countries suffer from weak statistical databases and keen deficiency of research infrastructure. Therefore, it becomes harder for researchers to collect information from national sources or through institutional channels, a preliminary step often necessary to most research investigations. This makes researchers to sometimes deviate from rigorous criteria of participant recruitment. For instance, a respondent points out that:

> *In most cases, international researchers are squeezed for time. They are therefore often forced to go for research samples that are easy to get, rather than the most appropriate ones. Thus, for participants in organizations, if the CEO or senior management was the most appropriate interviewee, the researchers often settle for a lower tier because of the inability to get the most appropriate interviewee due to time constraints. Respondent 3.*

In addition to these country specific factors, many respondents raised issues related to institutional access to journal articles. In fact, researchers, particularly those based in Africa, pointed at the lack of access to wider knowledge through reliable and affordable journal publishers. Their universities often do not subscribe to data bases nor to journal article publishers. Worst, their local institutions do not even give them significant incentives or research funding to have an individual subscription to those journals. Therefore, many said that it is discouraging not having full access to the existing recent literature and build on it. We personally experienced cases where our African colleagues based in

Africa asked us to send them copies of published articles because they couldn't afford them. Often, this type of shortcomings led to study duplication because Africa-based authors didn't have the possibility to know what is already done by other researchers. This problem becomes even more serious for some respondents, many from French speaking Africa, who complained about dominant English-written literature.

Lack of resources: Many researchers are not sufficiently funded when conducting research in/on Africa. Our respondents based in Africa often pointed out the lack of research grants and incentives from both their academic institutions and governments. This poses a challenge of meeting ethical standards and sample representativeness, leading researchers to limit their studies on small cases or just a few interviews which could lead to overgeneralization. For instance, a participant underlines the challenges related to obtaining more funding to conduct a good research:

Based on my personal experiences and my research area ...the main challenges are lack of infrastructures and possibly stakeholders' support from relevant government agencies targeted for the research. I applied for ...grants in 2014 and I needed a support letter from relevant agencies in Nigeria but I couldn't get any. None of the government ministers nor their subordinates replied to my email to give support letters that they would take part in the research. Respondent 4.

Research funding in many African countries is indeed lacking, making researchers less effective in conducting large scale studies and in creating knowledge.

4.5 *Institutional level: Challenges specific to the environment*

Lack of connectivity: Many African interviewees didn't have access to information technologies and therefore lacked even basic email accounts. This led to phone and face-to-face communications only. Indeed, the limited access to internet and information technologies is an additional challenge. In many cases a skype or video interview would have eased our data collection process. However, due to the meager connectivity and the lack of access to technological infrastructures for many potential interviewees, researchers (especially those based in the west) had no choice but to physically travel to meet each interviewee. This requires money. The challenge is that researchers often must comply with specific funding requirements and constrained budgets. Travelling in Africa also raises the issue of transportation hardship. For instance, during a recent fieldwork, we planned a trip of less than 100 km inside the Republic of Benin (from Cotonou to Lokossa) and it took us more than 5 hours by car because the road was deficient and no other alternative was available. At certain point during that trip, we thought of withdrawing that company from our sample, but fortunately, we safely, and overall successfully, completed the trip and interviews in that region. Such road challenges were common to several countries where road trips were unforgettably tough experiences that sometimes came along with safety concerns.

Physical safety concerns: Researchers who visited unfamiliar sites either unaccompanied or without a familiar companion to meet interviewees reported that they did not feel safe during that experience. Research sites that were isolated or difficult to access but which were relevant to a study require additional security measures in some African countries. A respondent reported feeling concerned for their personal safety when the interviewee misinterpreted some questions or when a request for payment was declined by the interviewer. A female researcher reported selecting particular data collection methods or site selection decisions informed by this concern. Insecurity concerns and wider institutional deficiencies relevant to specific contexts affected both male and female

researchers. During our 2014 fieldwork, we personally excluded interviews in the North-East Nigeria region to avoid the Boko Haram threat.

Corruption and political interference: Collecting data in Africa often involves interaction with politicians appointed in government or state-owned company positions. Researchers coming from western universities are sometimes seen as activists that either support or oppose the nation's government. For example, during our interviews in Francophone Africa, interviewees often asked us questions such as: Which political party do you support? What is your ethnic group? Are you with us or no? There were several interviewees who saw researchers as people advocating certain civil society causes or ideologies. Often, interviewees who have stakes in national politics and support the ruling party tended to oppose research projects that investigate sensitive or unwanted subjects such as searching the causes of a state-owned company's poor performance. One of our African researchers has once been denied entry into an African country although he had the proper documentation and entry visa. The official reason given by local immigration was that the researcher obtained his visa in another African country where he was not a resident. But, after long negotiations at the border, we realized that the reason was much more political coupled with a hope for bribery for border immigration. We resisted those unprofessional requests and were finally granted access into the country after lobbying with a foreign diplomatic official.

5. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

From this study, we realized that a range of research challenges exist at multiple levels in Africa. These challenges affect the reality of knowledge creation in on African business, since the research which informs it continues to be disproportionately influenced by western ways and non-culturally-nuanced views. In addition to research challenges, some specific views are prioritized while others are sidelined. This mix of practical and methodological issues explains the low knowledge creation and the limited reach of African academic outputs even through African-based journals. Leading IB journals are predominantly based in the West and reflect the contexts and cultures within which they operate, often preferring papers that don't deviate from an "acceptable outcome".

Another interesting point is the disconnection that was occasionally experienced by researchers of African origin when conducting research between their home environment (their national identities) and their host environments (their European or North-American university affiliations). The well-funded research infrastructure and the abundant data within the host university environment was often in stark contrast to the limited resources and missing infrastructure in the home environment. When investigating the reality of conducting research in/on Africa, it becomes clear that such disconnections may result in an insulated and potentially unexpected reality of research and knowledge creation from the environments they study. Furthermore, compounding the isolation and relative scarcity of African IB researchers may underlie the limited data or research on Africa within globally leading IB journals and community. For instance, the AIB African chapter was installed only recently, in 2014, with its inaugural conference in August of that same year.

While our study found that African contexts are tough to explore because of some obvious reasons such as researcher's lack of resources, linguistic weakness, and cultural insensitivity, our explanation is that all these obstacles pave the way to the wrong research approaches and ultimately lead to potentially biased data, interpretation, and conclusions. The question is now more about how can one interpret a biased data when one does not even realize that their data is biased? This same question can also be asked with regards to the types of interview questions asked and the adopted perspective.

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How can one have valid findings when their theoretical approach (western models blindly replicated in African contexts) is methodologically or culturally biased? Our study points out to the idea that many study conclusions may be misleading because of researchers' cultural bias. Therefore, knowledge creation in the African context is still subject to many challenges not only those intrinsic to research in general but more specifically to contextualizing and addressing the demands of the specific nature of the African continent.

Although knowledge creation theory may explain, generically and partly, why researching African contexts is tough, it does not yet answer how non-culturally aware research has become exuberant by blindly mobilizing western models to African contexts. Our explanation of this unfortunate phenomenon is that some researchers have fallen into the trap of desperately looking for "fact" (see also Kamoche, 1997) for a commonly accepted "truth" and therefore easily leaning towards accommodating "Africa to their method" rather than "their method to Africa". Connecting this knowledge creation perspective to the institutional view, we understand that to comprehensively grasp the challenges of exploring African research contexts, we need to distinguish obstacles that researchers can control and those they cannot. Indeed, many challenges are beyond the control of individual researcher and can be addressed only by universities, governments, and institutions that regulate or finance the academia. For instance, a researcher can understandably state that he/she was not able to study or access a whole region because of conflicts or civil war but one must clearly refrain from generalizing their findings from a single case study to all Africa. Unfortunately, nowadays, this kind of overgeneralization is increasingly happening.

While institutions can play a role in helping researchers overcome certain challenges by for example offering research grants, they cannot totally control what a researcher puts in his/her results nor can they reasonably force him/her to contextualize his/her model or method in Africa. Ultimately, overcoming research challenges in Africa needs a dichotomous solution that requires both institutional commitment and knowledge creation code of conduct lined up with academic rigor and integrity as well as ethical and intellectual honesty.

From a more practical standpoint, looking forward and building upon the limited literature on IB research challenges in Africa, this study identified some key challenges and has raised major concerns that need to be addressed to create knowledge and to improve the experience of researchers across Africa. Not addressing these issues will pave the way towards potentially long-term damaging consequences for Africa and for researchers interested in Africa. Although institutional and knowledge creation theories may be useful in understanding the theoretical underpins of African research challenges, the following important lessons have both empirical, methodological, and practical significance for researchers to move forward.

Lesson 1: This study shows that knowledge creation is low and IB literature meager not because Africa is not interesting to research but most likely due to the challenges associated with doing research in Africa. Indeed, the continent still appears to many as tough for IB research. Conducting research in Africa requires resources, flexibility, and determination because the continent still faces major issues ranging from unavailability of information to unfamiliarity of Africans vis-à-vis research processes. Therefore, it is the researcher's responsibility to adapt, ethically, to local contexts and people, not the opposite. After all, many interviewees do not even understand the utility of the research that scholars conduct. Ado *et al.*, (2016) partially raised such issue.

Lesson 2: Conducting research in Africa does not have to always fit into the conditionality that often characterizes research protocols in western countries. Many African interviewees are still new to

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such research procedures and may need time to familiarize themselves to the process of opening-up to (often) strangers (interviewers) about their "private" activities. Many interviewees do not feel comfortable or secure enough to discuss certain information during interviews. Interviewers should therefore take the time to familiarize themselves with their interviewees to get more complete answers to their questions. Therefore, when conducting research in Africa, western standards, including ethical guidelines, should be adjusted to responsibly fit the particularities of local African contexts.

Lesson 3: Although in this paper, we argue that Africans may be less exposed to cultural bias risk on African matters, being an African researcher is not enough to justify one's study validity on Africa or one's understanding of all African cultures. Many researchers, despite being Africans or having an African background, underestimate the complexities and cultural variations not only across African countries but within a single country as well. Many languages coexist in Africa and thought processes as well as cognitive predispositions differ across nations. Therefore, researchers need to move from non-culturally-nuanced to culturally-nuanced mindsets to conduct IB research comprehensively and rigorously in the continent. Such change of mindset is necessary for researchers, particularly those based in the west or with limited knowledge of Africa's history and reality. Once again, cultural contextualization is of central importance in convincingly researching African contexts.

Lesson 4: The critique that Africa's narratives are often coming from western lenses or at least from not culturally-nuanced researchers is further exacerbated by a weak institutional setting and inadequate or nonexistent research infrastructure, thus, limiting researchers' productivity in knowledge creation. Often, enormous challenges disfavor African researchers during fieldwork (much so at data-collection stage) especially when it comes to research funding, interviewee recruitment, and accessing reliable data and decision makers in Africa, not to mention the already meager literature on many specific African business topics. Therefore, for Africa's narratives to primarily come from African voices or at least from more culturally-aware researchers, a more systemic approach is needed to address the fundamental problems that undermine research in Africa. This means more research support from African governments, more technology-driven fieldwork, and more sensitization of citizens regarding research and its benefits for people. Finally, researchers must promote more awareness about the state of research and knowledge creation in Africa and advocate for more support from African institutions.

6. CONCLUSION

So far, this study from a "research on research" point of view, has brought a new light on understanding the challenges faced by researchers working in/on Africa. It brings a contribution to the literature by highlighting major issues that hinder research and knowledge creation in business particularly in IB and management although other disciplines may also suffer from these same challenges. In addition to the insights from knowledge creation and institutional perspectives of the research challenges, this study highlights various systemic risks, concerns, and potential damaging consequences of not taking into consideration the specificities of the African context when designing/conducting research in/on Africa.

The paper also nurtures the debate over the reasons why Africa remains underrepresented, at least from a culturally-aware knowledge creation perspective, and as to why the controversy on more African narratives needs to be repositioned and revisited. Indeed, often the IB literature on African

topics is weak or nonexistent and, to the best of our knowledge, our study remains the only one that investigated the fundamental and systemic reasons of such weakness from knowledge creation and institutional standpoints. In addition, this study contributes to the rising debate of Africans' marginal contribution to IB literature and proposes new avenues towards understanding and overcoming the challenges that may explain the meager contribution on Africans.

Also, the study highlights several challenges that arise from the conduct of business research in/on Africa, presented from an African perspective. This is an underexplored area, with existing research dominated by non-culturally-sensitive views on African realities. Some of the challenges relate to the type of information and insight within IB literature that are being blindly applied to African research contexts. This is most likely promoting conformism notwithstanding differing contexts instead of facilitating a shift from dominant paradigms. The study also questions the ways in which IB researchers conceptualize and communicate their knowledge of African contexts with regards to existing IB literature. An intellectually fairer approach of African contexts may require significant updates from epistemological, conceptual, theoretical, and practical standpoints.

7. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The limitations of this study include the possibility that the identified challenges may vary in nature across countries and researchers may deal with them differently. The paper gives a description of individual and eventually consolidated experiences among a limited number of African researchers involved in the study. Although, respondents' and authors' combined experience covers most of the sub-Saharan African region, our sample of twenty-three respondents is quite restrictive. Therefore, one may not generalize these findings.

Also, from an empirical perspective, this paper mainly focused on contexts of qualitative researchers, international joint ventures, and China in Africa although the latter topic remains controversial in Africa. Therefore, despite the objective approach of our study, this paper does not aim to generalize its arguments to all subject matters and regions in Africa. Another limitation is related to the fact that this study used a participant observation method. This method potentially has some subjectivity bias related to respondents' unique experiences as well as authors' unique fieldwork challenges. Therefore, future studies can explore our research question using other methods to bring additional evidence on the topic.

Additionally, future researchers should integrate more succinctly and since the early stages of their research projects the specificities of the African context. Moreover, scholars should even immerse in the local context when deemed necessary by living and experiencing those local realities beforehand, especially when conducting an ethnographic study for example. Such customized approaches will likely give the researcher more insights in understanding and interpreting the phenomenon. Also, in this study, we did not measure the level of significance of each challenge. We therefore encourage future researchers to quantitatively determine the contribution of each challenge in explaining the meager knowledge creation in/on Africa. Finally, future research can consider the idea that because western-based researchers may enjoy more research funding, they may be able to publish more on Africa although many of those scholars may be culturally disconnected from the continent and therefore may keep creating non-culturally-nuanced knowledge leading to a wider narrative gap vis-à-vis "African voices".

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