

## Changing Incrementally the Academic Publishing Ecosystem: A South-North Collaboration – Reflections from Madagascar

<https://doi.org/10.22151/politikon.55.CON1>

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### Abstract

*The global academic publishing industry, with its entrenched colonial practices, perpetuates inequality between the Global South and North. In this context, young Malagasy scholars face numerous challenges, including limited academic writing skills and a lack of awareness about international publishing opportunities. Moreover, asymmetric power dynamics, imposed by senior scholars, hinder their ability to publish and promote their work online while language barriers confine them to French-speaking journals, limiting global exposure and collaboration. To address these issues, the Economic Social Research Council-funded project Hybricon organized a publishing workshop during the conference called "Hybriconference" in Madagascar, fostering a unique south-north dialogue. The event brought together global south and north scholars and editors, facilitating collaboration and knowledge exchange. It served as a model for mutually beneficial partnerships, showcasing the importance of inclusive publication practices. The initiative aims to decolonize the publishing ecosystem, emphasizing equity, diversity, inclusivity, intersectionality, and ethical responsibility.*

### Keywords

Academic publishing; Decolonizing academia; Diversity; Inclusion; South-North collaboration

The academic publishing industry requires incremental changes to decolonize dominant practices that sustain South-North inequality, promote top-down diffusion of information and knowledge, maintain asymmetric power dynamics, perpetuate unequal access to resources among scholars, uphold centralized and Western-centric academic discourses/discussions, and more. It is crucial to build fair and inclusive spaces within the publishing ecosystem, where scholars from both the Global South and North collaborate to establish a mutually beneficial partnership. This collaborative effort aims to enhance knowledge dissemination in academia, ultimately leading to the decolonization of these spaces.

The journey to publication for young Malagasy scholars is riddled with challenges. For instance, due to insufficient training, they possess limited proficiency in academic writing skills and an incomplete understanding of the publication process for (top) international

journals. Numerous young Malagasy scholars we encountered were unaware of the diverse range of international publishing opportunities beyond what their professors were instructing them about. Frequently, they fall prey to predatory journals that require substantial fees, resulting in articles being published without proper peer review, thus diminishing the quality of their work. These issues collectively emphasize the pressing need to equip local researchers with the necessary skills to effectively share their research on a global scale.

Drawing from past discussions with early-career Malagasy researchers during an academic blogging training in the northern part of the country (in Antsiranana) and in the central part (in Antananarivo), the members of the team of the Malagasy NGO ARAKE have gained insight into some of the challenges they encounter. Many of these researchers experience internal constraints imposed by senior scholars that hinder their ability to publish at both regional and international levels. For instance, they might be prohibited from sharing their work on online platforms like Researchgate and Academia.edu, and some senior scholars might even appropriate/ steal the work of junior researchers. To illustrate, one scholar shared with us that after she defended her thesis, one of the professors who was involved in supervising her research consistently utilized data from her work in his subsequent successful publications, all without obtaining her consent and without including her name in the publication as an author or the owner of the data. We observed a sense of fear among these young scholars, as some of them are still pursuing their PhDs and are concerned that not adhering to their supervisors' instructions could jeopardize their chances of obtaining their degrees. These instances underscore the substantial role asymmetric power dynamics play within the publication processes in the country.

Due to Madagascar's history as a former French colony, language has consistently acted as a barrier, limiting international exposure and outreach. Consequently, most scholars tend to publish in French-speaking journals. Research published in Malagasy journals or written by Malagasy authors tends to garner attention primarily from Francophone scholars. This circumstance hampers Malagasy scholars' access to networks and exposure within the broader publishing industry, particularly among English-speaking audiences. Moreover, this curtails their global impact, preventing the dissemination of their knowledge on an international scale and hindering engagement with a broader audience. This situation stifles the exchange of ideas and confines local scholars to a smaller network. However, some fields of research flourish more effectively in English-speaking contexts. Furthermore, a lack of financial resources obstructs these researchers from attending international conferences,

participating in professional training, and receiving feedback on their papers, all of which could aid in enhancing the quality of their work.

Local journal editors also play a crucial role in the publication ecosystem, but they too face numerous challenges. Many of those editors have received minimal training in utilizing technology, which could be a valuable asset. Regrettably, numerous local editors can only publish their articles on their institutions' websites. Lastly, they do not substantially benefit from funding and grants. All of these issues underscore the necessity for substantial efforts to elevate local outlets to meet international standards and attain recognition and reputation on a global scale.

In this context, as part of the Hybricon project<sup>10</sup>, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and hosted at the University of Reading, we organized a groundbreaking workshop on publishing academic books and articles in Madagascar in July 2023. Known as "Hybriconference,"<sup>11</sup> this event adopted a hybrid format, combining online sessions with in-person discussions in Fenerive-Est, a remote location in Madagascar. The workshop served as a testing ground for a bilingual session conducted in English and French with translation into Malagasy, leveraging technology for communication.

This south-north dialogue and workshop brought together Malagasy scholars from the University of Antananarivo, Institut Supérieur de la Technologie Régionale de la Côte Est (ISTRCE), the University of Toamasina, and editors from esteemed academic outlets such as *Politikon: The IAPSS Journal of Political Science* and *Cambridge Review of International Affairs (CRIA)*. This event serves as an exemplary illustration of a mutually beneficial collaboration between scholars from the global South and North, as well as publishers and editors. More than 150 individuals (scholars, students, policy-makers, and Malagasy officials) joined the event, with over 90% of in-person participants taking part in an international conference or a workshop focused on academic publishing for the first time.

As a global South scholar myself, I have experienced limited access to networks in my field. However, having previously published in Global North journals, I found some of those outlets' processes to be highly inclusive. I never experienced fear or apprehension when submitting my manuscript; instead, I felt supported and guided. Language has never posed a barrier in this process. This positive experience led me to confidently reach out to those editors and invite them to participate in Hybricon's event.

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<sup>10</sup> University of Reading. 2023. "About HYBRICON." <https://research.reading.ac.uk/madagascar-hybricon/abouthybricon/>.

<sup>11</sup> University of Reading. 2023. "HYBRICONFERENCE: Piecing the peace together: hybridization processes and the local." <https://research.reading.ac.uk/madagascar-hybricon/researchpolicy/hybriconference/>.

All participants had the opportunity to learn from one another. While the primary intention was for global South scholars to glean insights and learn from the editors and senior Malagasy scholars, it also provided a chance for global North editors to gain an understanding of the challenges faced by these young individuals. This endeavour aligns with the ethical responsibility and capacity-building efforts of global North journal editors. This facet of the initiative contributes to our vision of decolonizing international publishing and addressing practices that require eradication.

Frequently, global South scholars encounter substantial difficulties when submitting work to prominent journals published by global North institutions. For instance, editors often insist on citing scholars featured in the journal or well-known global North scholars. In other cases, the ideas and arguments put forth by global South scholars in their papers might not align with the perspectives of global North journals, for example when adopting decolonial approaches. Hence, it becomes imperative to embrace paradigms centred around inclusive publication, intersectionality, and a sense of responsibility or duty of care throughout the publication process.

While Hybricon marks a pioneering effort in Madagascar, we are diligently striving to arrange additional sessions and sustain our endeavours. Collaborating with local NGOs and universities, governmental institutions, and local as well as regional and international researchers, we are committed to furthering this initiative and expanding its scope. We aim to extend its reach beyond the island, potentially extending to the African continent as a starting point.