Decolonial Horizons and Epistemic Justice: Reimagining the Humanities and Social Sciences from the Global South

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Abstract

This paper interrogates the enduring coloniality of knowledge within the humanities and social sciences, with particular focus on African intellectual traditions and epistemic struggles. Drawing on decolonial theory, cognitive justice frameworks, and Southern epistemologies, it argues that prevailing academic paradigms continue to marginalize endogenous knowledge systems through epistemicide, linguistic hegemony, and methodological imperialism. The study critically examines how Eurocentric standards of academic excellence undermine pluriversal knowledge, and explores how indigenous philosophies, oral traditions, and Afrocentric pedagogies offer fertile grounds for epistemic reconstitution. Methodologically, the paper adopts a comparative analysis of curricular structures, publishing trends, and research policies in selected African and Western institutions, alongside case studies from grassroots knowledge production initiatives. It highlights the role of youth movements, digital platforms, and Pan-African intellectual networks in resisting epistemic domination and forging new futures of knowledge. The paper concludes by proposing a reconfiguration of the humanities and social sciences through dialogical ethics, plural rationalities, and decolonial praxis that affirm the dignity, complexity, and validity of all ways of knowing. This contribution speaks directly to the conference's commitment to interdisciplinary reflection and global cooperation, offering a transformative lens for rethinking the future of scholarship in a multipolar world.

Keywords: decoloniality, epistemic justice, cognitive justice, African studies, humanities and social sciences, pluriversality, knowledge decolonization.

1. Introduction

Contemporary knowledge production in the humanities and social sciences remains deeply shaped by what decolonial scholars conceptualize as the *coloniality of knowledge*—the persistence of epistemic structures established during colonial rule that continue to privilege Euro-American ways of knowing (Quijano, 2000; Mignolo, 2011). Although formal colonial administrations have largely receded, their epistemological legacies endure through disciplinary canons, methodological norms, linguistic hierarchies, and institutional standards that determine what counts as legitimate knowledge. Universities, scholarly journals, and research funding

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regimes frequently reproduce these hierarchies, positioning Western epistemologies as universal while relegating non-Western knowledge systems to the status of culture, tradition, or empirical data rather than theory (Grosfoguel, 2013; Santos, 2014).

Within this context, epistemic hierarchies in the humanities and social sciences demand sustained critical interrogation. Dominant paradigms often claim neutrality and objectivity while masking their historical entanglement with imperial power relations (Connell, 2007). Eurocentric theoretical frameworks are routinely treated as benchmarks of academic excellence, marginalizing alternative epistemologies through processes of exclusion that Santos (2016) conceptualizes as *epistemicide*—the systematic devaluation and destruction of knowledge systems associated with colonized peoples. These hierarchies are further reinforced through linguistic dominance, particularly the privileging of English and other colonial languages in scholarly communication, which constrains the visibility and legitimacy of knowledge produced in African and other Global South languages (Bennett, 2015; Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1986). As Ngũgĩ powerfully observes, "*the choice of language and the use of language is central to a people's definition of themselves*," and the domination of language constitutes a domination of the mental universe of the colonized (Ngũgĩ, 1986: 4).

African intellectual traditions occupy a critical yet persistently underrecognized position within global debates on epistemic justice. African philosophies, oral traditions, ethical systems, and indigenous modes of knowledge production have historically generated sophisticated insights into ontology, relationality, governance, and morality (Wiredu, 1996; Hountondji, 1997). However, these intellectual contributions have often been excluded from mainstream theoretical discourse or selectively incorporated only when translated into Western conceptual categories. Paulin Hountondji has critiqued this tendency by warning against static notions of "tradition," emphasizing that "*African tradition... is dynamic*" and internally generative rather than derivative (Hountondji, 2002: 34). Recent work on epistemic and cognitive justice challenges such asymmetries by affirming the equal legitimacy of diverse ways of knowing and calling for a *pluriversal* intellectual order in which epistemologies coexist without hierarchical ranking (Fricker, 2007; Santos, 2014).

Against this backdrop, African decolonial scholars have emerged at the forefront of efforts to reimagine the humanities and social sciences by contesting epistemic hierarchies and asserting epistemic freedom—the right to theorize the world from African historical experiences and lived realities. Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni argues that this struggle requires "provincializing" Western knowledge and dismantling what he describes as the *cognitive empire*, a global system that continues to colonize the minds of formerly oppressed peoples. As he states, "*epistemic freedom in Africa is about the struggle for African people to think, theorize, interpret the world and write from where they are located, unencumbered by Eurocentrism*" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018: 19).

Similarly, Kwasi Wiredu's project of *conceptual decolonization* insists that African philosophers critically examine the conceptual frameworks inherited through colonial languages and institutions. His injunction—often summarized as "*Africa, know thyself*"—underscores the necessity of reclaiming indigenous categories of thought as the basis for intellectual autonomy (Wiredu, 1996). Achille Mbembe complements this position by critiquing what he terms the "imperial denial of common humanity," whereby African experiences are devalued as legitimate sources of theory. His call for a plural, relational, and historically grounded "Creole Africa" challenges rigid epistemic boundaries and affirms African agency in global knowledge production (Mbembe, 2001).

The enduring relevance of Frantz Fanon further illuminates the psychological and epistemic dimensions of colonial domination. Fanon's analysis of internalized inferiority and colonial trauma reveals how epistemic subjugation operates not only at the level of institutions

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but also within subjectivity itself. His assertion that *"true revolution is born of suffering"* emphasizes that epistemic liberation is inseparable from broader struggles for human dignity and social transformation (Fanon, 1963: 93).

It is within this intellectual and political landscape that the present article situates itself. The study seeks to contribute to ongoing decolonial debates by examining how coloniality continues to structure the humanities and social sciences, with particular attention to African epistemic struggles and intellectual resources. Specifically, it pursues four interrelated objectives: (1) to analyze the mechanisms through which epistemic hierarchies are reproduced in contemporary academic institutions; (2) to critically assess how Eurocentric standards of knowledge production marginalize African and other Southern epistemologies; (3) to explore the theoretical and practical contributions of African intellectual traditions to debates on epistemic justice; and (4) to consider possibilities for reconfiguring the humanities and social sciences through decolonial and pluriversal approaches. The central questions guiding the analysis are: How does coloniality continue to shape knowledge production? In what ways are African epistemologies rendered invisible or subordinate? And how might epistemic justice enable the transformation of global knowledge systems toward more equitable and dialogical futures?

2. Conceptual and theoretical framework

This study is grounded in a decolonial theoretical orientation that interrogates the historical and contemporary conditions under which knowledge is produced, legitimized, and circulated. Drawing on theories of coloniality, cognitive justice, and Southern epistemologies, the framework provides an analytical lens for understanding how epistemic hierarchies are constituted and how alternative knowledge systems may be recognized and institutionalized within the humanities and social sciences.

2.1 *Coloniality of knowledge in the humanities and social sciences*

The concept of the *coloniality of knowledge* emerges from Latin American decolonial thought and refers to the enduring epistemological structures established through European colonial expansion that continue to shape modern systems of knowledge (Quijano, 2000; Mignolo, 2011). Modern academic disciplines—including anthropology, sociology, philosophy, and history—were largely institutionalized within colonial contexts and were instrumental in producing classificatory regimes that positioned Europe as the epistemic center of the world (Mudimbe, 1988; Said, 1978). These disciplines not only described colonized societies but also constructed them as objects of study, reinforcing asymmetries between the knowing subject and the known Other.

Eurocentrism, as a foundational feature of these disciplines, is characterized by the universalization of European historical experiences, philosophical traditions, and methodological standards (Dussel, 1995; Connell, 2007). Knowledge produced in Europe and North America is routinely treated as theory, while knowledge from Africa and other regions of the Global South is often relegated to empirical data or case studies. This epistemological ordering naturalizes inequality by obscuring the power relations that underlie claims of universality and objectivity (Grosfoguel, 2013).

The enduring effects of colonial epistemological ordering are evident in contemporary academic practices, including curricula that privilege Western canons, peer-review systems that marginalize non-Eurocentric approaches, and research methodologies that prioritize positivist or extractive paradigms (Bhambra, 2014). These practices sustain what decolonial scholars identify as epistemic dependence, wherein scholars from the Global South remain structurally constrained

in their capacity to generate autonomous theoretical frameworks (Hountondji, 1997). As a result, coloniality persists not as a historical residue but as an active and constitutive force in the organization of modern knowledge.

2.2 *Cognitive justice and epistemic pluralism*

Cognitive justice provides a normative and analytical framework for addressing epistemic inequality by asserting the equal legitimacy of diverse knowledge systems (Visvanathan, 2009; Santos, 2014). Unlike approaches that seek mere inclusion within existing epistemic hierarchies, cognitive justice challenges the foundational assumptions that authorize certain forms of knowledge while disqualifying others. It calls for recognition of multiple epistemologies, including indigenous, oral, and community-based knowledge practices, as valid and theoretically generative.

Central to cognitive justice is the critique of epistemic exclusion—the systematic marginalization of knowledge produced outside dominant epistemological frameworks. Santos (2016) conceptualizes this process as *epistemicide*, referring to the destruction or silencing of entire knowledge systems through colonialism, modernization, and global capitalism. Epistemicide operates through language suppression, educational reform, and the imposition of Eurocentric standards of rationality that delegitimize non-Western modes of knowing.

The politics of recognition plays a crucial role in mediating epistemic justice. Recognition, however, is not merely symbolic; it involves material and institutional transformations in how knowledge is produced, disseminated, and evaluated (Fricker, 2007). Epistemic injustice manifests both as testimonial injustice—where certain knowers are deemed less credible—and hermeneutical injustice—where collective interpretive resources are insufficient to make sense of marginalized experiences. Addressing these injustices requires not only expanding epistemic inclusion but also restructuring the conditions under which knowledge claims are validated within academic institutions.

2.3 *Southern epistemologies and pluriversality*

Southern epistemologies emerge as a critical intervention in global knowledge debates by foregrounding the intellectual traditions and lived experiences of societies historically subjected to colonial domination (Connell, 2007; Santos, 2014). Rather than viewing the Global South as a passive recipient of theory, Southern epistemologies position it as an active locus of knowledge production, capable of generating conceptual frameworks grounded in local histories, struggles, and social realities.

This perspective challenges the assumption that theory must originate in the Global North to achieve global relevance. African, Latin American, and Asian intellectual traditions offer alternative ontologies, ethics, and epistemologies that unsettle Eurocentric assumptions about individuality, rationality, and progress (Wiredu, 1996; Escobar, 2018). These traditions emphasize relationality, communal knowledge production, and the inseparability of knowledge from ethical and political commitments.

Pluriversality, as articulated within decolonial scholarship, provides a conceptual alternative to epistemic universalism (Mignolo, 2011). Rather than seeking a single, all-encompassing epistemological framework, pluriversality affirms the coexistence of multiple, incommensurable yet equally valid ways of knowing. It envisions a world in which knowledge systems engage in dialogical rather than hierarchical relationships. Within the humanities and social sciences, a pluriversal orientation demands a rethinking of disciplinary boundaries,

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methodological norms, and evaluative criteria in ways that accommodate epistemic diversity without subsuming it under dominant paradigms.

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3.1 *Linguistic hierarchies and knowledge validation*

Language functions as a primary site through which epistemic hierarchies are produced and sustained. Scholarly communication in the humanities and social sciences is overwhelmingly dominated by colonial languages—particularly English and French—which serve as gatekeeping mechanisms for academic legitimacy and global visibility (Bennett, 2015). Knowledge articulated in African languages is frequently excluded from prestigious journals, global citation indices, and international conferences, reinforcing a hierarchy in which linguistic proximity to Europe determines epistemic value.

African intellectuals have consistently foregrounded language as a central terrain of decolonization. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986) famously argued that "*language, any language, has a dual character: it is both a means of communication and a carrier of culture*" (p. 13). For Ngũgĩ, the dominance of colonial languages in education and scholarship constitutes a form of cognitive dispossession, severing African intellectual production from its cultural and historical foundations. The marginalization of African-language scholarship also undermines oral knowledge systems, which rely on narrative, performance, memory, and communal participation rather than textual fixation (Fanon, 1963; Wiredu, 1996).

This linguistic hierarchy reflects a broader colonial strategy of fragmentation and control. Patrice Lumumba explicitly warned that "*these divisions, which the colonial powers have always exploited... have played an important role in the suicide of Africa*" (Lumumba, 1962/2002: 178). Linguistic fragmentation—alongside ethnic and territorial divisions—has impeded the development of integrated intellectual traditions capable of contesting Eurocentric dominance. Thus, linguistic marginalization is not merely a technical issue of communication but a structural mechanism that regulates whose knowledge is heard, preserved, and institutionalized.

3.2 *Methodological standardization and epistemic authority*

Beyond language, epistemic marginalization is reinforced through methodological standardization that privileges Euro-American research paradigms as universally valid. Positivist, empiricist, and extractive methodologies—developed within specific Western historical contexts—are frequently treated as neutral benchmarks of scientific rigor (Connell, 2007). Alternative approaches grounded in relationality, lived experience, oral testimony, or indigenous cosmologies are often dismissed as anecdotal, unscientific, or insufficiently theoretical (Smith, 1999).

African leaders and thinkers understood methodological domination as inseparable from political and economic subjugation. Julius Nyerere's philosophy of *ujamaa* emphasized self-reliance and contextually grounded knowledge, rejecting externally imposed models of development and analysis (Nyerere, 1968). Similarly, Kwame Nkrumah argued that "*we must find an African solution to our problems, and that can only be found in African unity*" (Nkrumah, 1963: 217). This call extended beyond politics to knowledge production, insisting that African realities require African-centered analytical frameworks rather than imported epistemologies.

Methodological imperialism also manifests in extractive research practices, where African communities serve as sources of data rather than co-producers of knowledge. Such practices reproduce colonial relations between researcher and researched, reinforcing epistemic authority in Global North institutions (Grosfoguel, 2013). As Jomo Kenyatta's ethnographic work

demonstrated, reclaiming interpretive authority over African societies is itself an act of intellectual liberation (Kenyatta, 1938/1965).

3.3 *Metrics, rankings, and the political economy of knowledge*

The political economy of contemporary academia further entrenches epistemic inequality through metrics, rankings, and evaluation systems that privilege Eurocentric standards of excellence. Global university rankings, journal impact factors, and citation indices disproportionately favor institutions, publishers, and epistemic traditions located in the Global North (Marginson, 2016). These systems reward conformity to dominant theoretical paradigms, methodological norms, and linguistic practices, marginalizing scholarship that is locally grounded, politically engaged, or epistemologically alternative.

Such evaluative regimes function as instruments of epistemic discipline, shaping research agendas and career trajectories in ways that reinforce intellectual dependency (Hountondji, 1997). Nelson Mandela's lifelong struggle against apartheid underscores the broader ethical implications of such hierarchies. His insistence on dignity, equality, and democratic participation resonates with contemporary calls for epistemic justice that challenge structural exclusions in knowledge production (Mandela, 1994).

African feminist and activist traditions further expose the moral contradictions of dominant evaluative systems. Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti's defiance of colonial authority—"*I am beyond their timid lying morality and so I am beyond caring*" (Ransome-Kuti, as cited in Johnson-Odim & Mba, 1997: 122)—speaks to the refusal of externally imposed standards that deny legitimacy to African intellectual and political agency. In the academic sphere, such refusal translates into resistance against metrics that obscure power relations behind claims of neutrality and excellence.

Taken together, linguistic hierarchies, methodological standardization, and evaluative regimes constitute a mutually reinforcing architecture of epistemic marginalization. These mechanisms sustain Eurocentric dominance while limiting the capacity of African and other Global South epistemologies to shape the humanities and social sciences on their own terms.

4. African knowledge systems and epistemic alternatives

African knowledge systems constitute a rich and internally coherent body of epistemic traditions that offer substantive alternatives to Eurocentric paradigms in the humanities and social sciences. Rather than being residual or premodern forms of knowing, these systems articulate distinct ontological, ethical, and pedagogical orientations grounded in communalism, relationality, and holistic understandings of reality. Contemporary African philosophers and cultural theorists have conceptualized this intellectual project as *conceptual decolonization*: the critical recovery and renewal of indigenous categories of thought as the basis for epistemic autonomy (Wiredu, 1996).

4.1 *Indigenous african philosophical traditions*

Indigenous African philosophies are underpinned by ontological assumptions that differ fundamentally from Western individualism and dualism. Reality is commonly understood as relational, dynamic, and constituted through interaction among humans, ancestors, spiritual forces, and the natural environment (Mbiti, 1969; Wiredu, 1996). Knowledge, within this framework, is inseparable from ethics, social responsibility, and communal well-being.

Kwasi Wiredu's work on conceptual decolonization has been particularly influential in articulating the philosophical significance of these traditions. He argued that African philosophy must critically examine indigenous concepts on their own terms rather than through inherited Western categories, advocating intellectual independence in which Africans "think for themselves" rather than merely "think in English" (Wiredu, 1996: 20). This position challenges the assumption that philosophical rigor is exclusive to Western analytic traditions and underscores the capacity of African languages and concepts to generate original philosophical insights.

Similarly, Léopold Sédar Senghor's articulation of African epistemology emphasized participatory and affective modes of knowing. His oft-cited formulation—"*Emotion is African, as Reason is Hellenic*" (Senghor, 1964: 72)—was not a rejection of rationality but a critique of its reduction to abstraction and detachment. Senghor's work foregrounded the epistemic value of embodied, intuitive, and participatory knowledge, situating African ways of knowing within a broader critique of Western epistemological dualisms.

Molefi Kete Asante's theory of Afrocentricity further systematizes African philosophical principles as the foundation for knowledge production. Asante (1998) identifies core elements of what he terms "the mind of Africa," including holism, inclusiveness, poly-consciousness, and the unity of material and spiritual worlds. As he observes, "*there are several elements in the mind of Africa that govern how humans behave with regard to reality*" (Asante, 1998: 17). These principles collectively affirm a relational and communal epistemology that challenges the fragmentation characteristic of Eurocentric thought.

4.2 *Oral knowledge, memory, and social reproduction*

Oral traditions constitute a central epistemic modality within African societies, serving as repositories of history, ethics, cosmology, and scientific knowledge. Contrary to colonial assumptions that equated orality with intellectual deficiency, African oral systems operate through complex mechanisms of memory, performance, repetition, and communal validation (Vansina, 1985). Knowledge is preserved and transmitted not through textual fixation alone but through embodied practices embedded in social life.

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o has consistently emphasized the epistemic significance of orality and language in sustaining collective memory. He argues that "*the choice of language and the use to which it is put is central to a people's definition of themselves in relation to their natural and social environment*" (Ngũgĩ, 1986: 4). His description of colonial education as a "*cultural bomb*" highlights how linguistic displacement functions to erode confidence in indigenous knowledge systems and sever communities from their historical memory (Ngũgĩ, 1986).

The philosophical legitimacy of oral knowledge has also been defended by Sophie Oluwole, whose work on the Yoruba *Ifa* corpus demonstrated its internal logic, philosophical rigor, and epistemic sophistication. Oluwole rejected claims that African philosophy emerged only through Western contact, arguing instead that African thought is structured around a "harmony of opposites," where apparently contradictory positions are understood as complementary rather than mutually exclusive (Oluwole, 1997). This epistemic orientation challenges binary logic and affirms pluralism as a foundational principle of African knowledge systems.

Guardians of indigenous knowledge, such as Vusamazulu Credo Mutwa, further emphasize the ethical dimensions of oral epistemologies. Mutwa understood knowledge as a sacred trust transmitted across generations, stressing the "significance of peace" as a prerequisite for intellectual and cultural continuity (Mutwa, 1999). In this sense, oral knowledge is inseparable from moral responsibility and collective survival.

4.3 *Afrocentric pedagogical approaches*

Afrocentric pedagogies translate African epistemic principles into educational practice by re-centering African histories, philosophies, and cultural experiences within curricula and teaching methodologies. These approaches challenge Eurocentric models of education that privilege abstraction, competition, and hierarchical authority, advocating instead for dialogical, communal, and contextually grounded learning environments (Asante, 1991; Dei, 2012).

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's call for linguistic decolonization has profound pedagogical implications. Writing and teaching in African languages is not merely a cultural preference but an epistemic intervention that restores the integrity of African conceptual systems and affirms the authority of indigenous knowledge producers (Ngũgĩ, 1986). Afrocentric pedagogy thus reconceptualizes education as a process of cultural reclamation rather than assimilation.

Julius Nyerere's philosophy of *ujamaa* provides a socio-pedagogical framework rooted in communal responsibility and self-reliance. His assertion that "*no nation has the right to make decisions for another nation; no people for another people*" (Nyerere, 1968: 44) reflects an epistemic ethic that rejects externally imposed models of knowledge and development. In educational terms, *ujamaa* emphasizes collective learning, social relevance, and the moral purpose of knowledge.

Afrocentric approaches also require rethinking assessment and scholarly authority. Rather than privileging standardized metrics and individual achievement, they value collective inquiry, ethical accountability, and the social consequences of knowledge production. In this respect, African pedagogical traditions align closely with contemporary movements for epistemic justice, which seek to correct the historical silencing of African voices by restoring the dignity, validity, and institutional presence of indigenous scholarship (Santos, 2014).

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5.1 *Youth, student movements, and knowledge politics*

Youth and student movements have emerged as critical actors in contemporary struggles over knowledge production and institutional transformation. Across African and Global South universities, students have mobilized against curricula, symbols, and governance structures that reproduce colonial epistemic hierarchies. Movements such as *#RhodesMustFall* and *#FeesMustFall* articulated demands not only for material access to education but also for epistemic inclusion, curricular Africanization, and institutional accountability (Heleta, 2016; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018).

These movements foreground knowledge politics as a central dimension of decolonization. Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni conceptualizes these struggles within what he terms the *cognitive empire*, arguing that epistemic domination persists through patronizing structures that naturalize Eurocentric authority. As he asserts, "*there is no decolonization without de-patronization*," emphasizing that dismantling coloniality requires deep epistemic, gendered, and institutional transformation (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2021: 63). Student activism thus represents a generational refusal of inherited epistemic subordination and a demand for intellectual self-determination. Beyond universities, youth-led initiatives—including reading collectives, political education forums, and community dialogues—extend epistemic contestation into public life. These spaces challenge the monopoly of formal academia over knowledge production and affirm popular education as a legitimate site of theory formation (Freire, 1970; Mafeje, 2000).

5.2 *Digital infrastructures and knowledge circulation*

Digital infrastructures have become crucial arenas for epistemic negotiation and visibility, particularly for marginalized voices excluded from traditional academic publishing. Online platforms—such as open-access journals, blogs, podcasts, social media forums, and digital archives—enable scholars and activists to circulate ideas beyond institutional and linguistic gatekeeping mechanisms (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018). These platforms facilitate what can be described as counter-hegemonic knowledge circulation, allowing African and Global South intellectuals to bypass conventional metrics of academic legitimacy. Digital spaces also foster dialogical knowledge production, where academic, activist, and community knowledges intersect. In this sense, they contribute to epistemic democratization by disrupting hierarchical distinctions between "expert" and "lay" knowledge.

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's insistence that "*language, any language, has a dual character: it is both a means of communication and a carrier of culture*" (Ngũgĩ, 1986, p. 13) acquires renewed significance in digital contexts. Online spaces allow for the resurgence of African languages as vehicles of intellectual exchange, challenging the linguistic monoculture of global academia and expanding the epistemic public sphere.

5.3 *Pan-African and Global South intellectual networks*

Pan-African and Global South intellectual networks constitute another vital site of epistemic contestation. These networks—formal and informal—facilitate transnational collaboration, South–South dialogue, and the co-production of theory grounded in shared histories of colonialism and resistance (Connell, 2007; Santos, 2014). Such formations resonate with earlier Pan-African intellectual traditions that emphasized unity as a condition for epistemic and political liberation. Contemporary networks challenge the assumption that theoretical innovation flows unidirectionally from the Global North, instead asserting Africa and the Global South as sites of conceptual generation. Achille Mbembe, Paulin Hountondji, and Achie Mafeje have all underscored the need for autonomous intellectual traditions that resist dependency on Western theoretical validation. Achie Mafeje, in particular, rejected Western universalism and advocated *Africanity* as a combative methodological orientation. He argued that social scientists "*should increase the level of social awareness and consciousness of the citizens of their societies*" (Mafeje, 2000: 67), positioning scholarship as an ethically and politically engaged practice rather than a detached academic exercise.

6. Reconfiguring the humanities and social sciences

Reconfiguring the humanities and social sciences requires a fundamental shift in epistemological orientation, institutional practice, and ethical commitments. Central to this transformation is the dethroning of Eurocentrism—the assumption that Western knowledge systems possess universal applicability and epistemic superiority (Bhambra, 2014). Dialogical ethics and participatory knowledge production offer an alternative foundation for scholarly practice. These approaches emphasize reciprocity, co-creation, and accountability to communities, aligning with African epistemic traditions that understand knowledge as relational and socially embedded (Wiredu, 1996; Santos, 2014). Plural rationalities—rather than a single dominant logic—must be recognized as legitimate modes of understanding reality.

Kwasi Wiredu's call for *conceptual decolonization* remains central to this project. His injunction, often summarized as "*Africa, know thyself,*" underscores the necessity of critically examining inherited conceptual frameworks and recovering indigenous categories of thought as resources for contemporary theory (Wiredu, 1996). Similarly, Paulin Hountondji's critique of

static notions of tradition cautions against romanticization, insisting that endogenous knowledge be understood as dynamic, critical, and open-ended. As he notes, "*there is no absolute origin at all, and the concept of endogeneity itself should therefore be relativised*" (Hountondji, 2002: 35). Institutionally, reconfiguration entails curricular reform, changes in research evaluation, and diversification of publishing practices. Afrocentric and Africa-centered paradigms, as articulated by scholars such as Asante (1998), provide methodological tools for grounding scholarship in African historical experiences and intellectual priorities without lapsing into essentialism.

7. Conclusion

This article has examined the persistence of coloniality in the humanities and social sciences and the diverse ways in which African and Global South intellectual traditions contest epistemic marginalization. Through an analysis of linguistic hierarchies, methodological dominance, institutional metrics, and contemporary sites of resistance, the study has demonstrated that epistemic injustice is structurally embedded yet actively challenged across multiple arenas. The theoretical contribution of this work lies in synthesizing decolonial theory, cognitive justice, and African epistemologies to articulate a pluriversal vision of knowledge production. As Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o reminds us, the struggle over language and culture remains central to resisting the "colonization of the mind" (Ngũgĩ, 1986). Ndlovu-Gatsheni's critique of the cognitive empire further underscores that epistemic freedom requires sustained, critical, and collective effort beyond symbolic inclusion. The implications for interdisciplinary scholarship and global cooperation are profound. Moving toward epistemic justice demands not only recognizing multiple ways of knowing but restructuring the institutions that govern knowledge production. The pluriversal academy envisioned here is one in which African, Global South, and Western epistemologies engage in dialogical rather than hierarchical relations, affirming the dignity, complexity, and validity of all knowledge traditions.

Acknowledgements

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