Tanzania Journal of Sociology

Volume 11 | Issue 2 Article 8

December 2025

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Recommended Citation
Sambaiga, Richard (2025) "Decolonizing Knowledge as Epistemic Justice: Key Conceptual Tendencies from the Global South," *Tanzania Journal of Sociology*: Vol. 11: Iss. 2, Article 8.
Available at: https://commons.udsm.ac.tz/tjso/vol11/iss2/8

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Tanzania Journal of Sociology Vol. 11, Issue No.2, December 2025: 113 - 128

Decolonizing Knowledge as Epistemic Justice: Key Conceptual Tendencies from the Global South

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Abstract

The project of decolonising knowledge has gained renewed prominence as scholars confront enduring epistemic injustices and structural inequalities embedded in global systems of knowledge production. Situated within long-standing anticolonial and postcolonial intellectual struggles, this article interrogates key conceptual dilemmas that continue to shape contemporary debates on decoloniality. Adopting a commentary orientation, it examines what it means to decolonise knowledge by engaging the historical foundations of decolonial thought alongside contemporary critiques that expose the persistence of epistemic hierarchies within modern academic institutions. The article argues that, without conceptual clarity, the decolonial project risks becoming analytically misguided and politically misdirected, potentially reproducing new forms of epistemic dominance under the guise of non-Western alternatives. Moving beyond reductionist and essentialist interpretations, the analysis advances a critical synthesis of decolonial scholarship to demonstrate that decolonising knowledge entails neither epistemic reversal nor indigenisation, but a commitment to epistemic pluralism grounded in reflexivity and institutional transformation. It further contends that coloniality constitutes a global structure of knowledge control reproduced through both transnational and local institutional arrangements, including within the Global South itself. Shedding light on core theoretical and conceptual tendencies, the article contributes to ongoing debates on epistemic justice and the reimagining of global knowledge systems.

Keywords: Decolonisation of knowledge; Coloniality; Epistemic justice; Epistemic pluralism; Global South

Introduction.

Over the past two decades, debates on the decolonisation of knowledge production have gained renewed prominence across the social sciences and humanities. While concerns about epistemic domination and intellectual dependency are not new, having animated anticolonial and postcolonial thought since at least the mid-twentieth century, contemporary discussions have intensified in response to the changing configuration of the global knowledge economy. At the centre of these debates lies a fundamental question; how do historically constituted hierarchies of power continue to shape what counts as legitimate knowledge, who is recognised as a knower, and where epistemic authority is located?

The call to decolonise knowledge is thus situated within a broader project of anti-colonial justice, understood not only as political or economic redress but as an epistemic struggle over meaning, authority, and representation (Connell, 2018). Contemporary systems of knowledge

production remain marked by an unequal international division of intellectual labour, characterised by a concentration of epistemic prestige, research resources, and high-impact publishing outlets in the Global North (Collyer et al., 2019; Nyamnjoh, 2020; Fiormonte, 2025). Within this configuration, the Global South continues to be disproportionately positioned as a site of empirical extraction rather than conceptual production, reinforcing longstanding patterns of epistemic dependency.

Despite the growing visibility of decolonial discourse, the structural conditions that sustain colonial hierarchies in knowledge production remain largely intact. Universities, in particular, function as key sites where coloniality is reproduced through dominant epistemologies, research agendas, and institutional hierarchies. Scholars based in the Global South frequently find themselves researching local contexts to serve the intellectual priorities of Global North audiences, while relying on Northern-based journals and evaluation metrics that marginalise indigenous knowledge systems and local scholarly platforms. Internal academic processes, including tenure, promotion, and research funding, are often shaped by racialised, gendered, and class-based exclusions that mirror the very hierarchies decolonial critiques seek to dismantle (Collyer et al., 2019; Mbembe, 2016; Fiormonte, 2025). In the African context, these dynamics have been shown to reproduce colonial patterns through the privileging of Northern theories over locally grounded intellectual priorities (Zeleza & Mama, 2011; Mbembe, 2016; Branch & Maphilly, 2018).

In response to these enduring inequalities, scholars from both the Global South and the Global North have increasingly interrogated the conceptual vocabularies, analytical frameworks, and practical strategies employed in efforts to localise and decolonise knowledge systems. Central to this interrogation is a growing recognition that decolonisation cannot be reduced to the inclusion of marginalised voices within existing epistemic frameworks, nor to the substitution of Western knowledge with non-Western alternatives. Rather, many scholars argue for an approach that treats knowledge as fundamentally plural, foregrounding the legitimacy of multiple ways of knowing while challenging the epistemic monopolies that have historically structured global knowledge production.

Against this backdrop, this article seeks to contribute to decolonial debates by advancing conceptual clarity on what it means to decolonise knowledge systems in the contemporary global context. Rather than offering an exhaustive review of the literature or proposing a new theoretical model, the article adopts a commentary orientation, engaging critically with key strands of decolonial scholarship in order to distil their underlying conceptual logics, points of convergence, and unresolved tensions. The analysis is guided by decolonial perspectives that conceptualise decolonisation as a multidimensional and dynamic project, one that extends beyond the reversal or replacement of Eurocentric dominance.

Drawing on critical engagements with the coloniality of power (Quijano, 2000), epistemic violence (Fanon, 1965; Said, 1978; Mudimbe, 1988), and the global infrastructures through which Western epistemologies have been normalised as universal (Hountondji, 1997; Demeter, 2020; Fiormonte, 2025), the article argues that decolonising knowledge requires a sustained interrogation of the epistemic conditions under which knowledge is produced, validated, and circulated. These conditions include academic publishing regimes, curriculum design, research funding architectures, and institutional evaluation systems that continue to marginalise alternative epistemologies while reproducing intellectual dependency in the Global South.

Central to the argument advanced here is the claim that decolonisation is not reducible to processes of indigenisation or epistemic substitution. Instead, it entails what Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2014) conceptualises as an ecology of knowledges, a commitment to epistemic pluralism that recognises the coexistence and mutual relevance of heterogeneous knowledge traditions without imposing hierarchical ordering. From this perspective, coloniality is understood not as an exclusively Western imposition but as a global structure of knowledge control that is often reproduced through local and transnational institutions, including within the Global South itself. Drawing on Mignolo's (2011) notion of epistemic disobedience and Chakrabarty's (2000) call to provincialise Europe, the article advocates for epistemic delinking that enables locally grounded knowledges to achieve global resonance without replicating epistemic domination.

Equally important, the article underscores the need for reflexivity within decolonial scholarship itself. As Táíwò (2022) cautions, uncritical efforts to reclaim precolonial epistemologies risk reproducing essentialist logics and rigid cultural binaries that constrain the emancipatory potential of decolonial critique. A robust decolonial praxis must therefore balance critique with reconstruction, plurality with analytical rigour, and resistance with relational accountability (Hall & Tandon, 2017; Thambinathan & Kinsella, 2021).

It is therefore potent to assert that the essence of decolonising knowledge entails both rectifying historical injustices in epistemology and reimagining the global architecture of knowledge itself. In that respect, structural transformation of the infrastructure that (re)produces epistemic injustice and epistemological humility must be put in place. However, conceptual clarity and contextual responsiveness is vital to the realization of desired outcome of the decolonial project. Hence the need to interrogate foundational assumptions about what constitutes legitimate knowledge, who is recognised as a knower, and how knowledge is valued and circulated across geographies and cultures (Mignolo, 2011; Santos, 2014; Connell, 2007).

Before teasing out the conceptual orientation, it is important to portray a brief overview of the decolonial scholarship. Rather than offering a comprehensive or chronological review of texts, the purpose of the following section is to map key strands of the literature in order to illuminate how debates on coloniality, epistemic injustice, and decolonisation have evolved across anticolonial, postcolonial, and contemporary decolonial traditions. This mapping provides the conceptual background for the subsequent synthesis, enabling the article to distil core theoretical tendencies, points of convergence, and unresolved tensions that shape current debates on decolonising knowledge systems.

Mapping the Terrain of Decolonial Thought: A snapshot of literature review

Foundational works such as Frantz Fanon (1963), Edward Said (1978), and Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1986) exposed the cultural, psychological, and linguistic violence of colonialism. These seminal pieces shed light on the epistemic architectures that sustain the phenomenon of coloniality in non-Western societies, laying the groundwork for subsequent critiques of epistemic domination. Frantz Fanon's (1963) *The Wretched of the Earth* is foundational in the sense that it interrogates not only the economic and political violence of colonialism but also its epistemological effects. He demonstrates how colonialism operates by dehumanising the colonised and replacing their knowledge systems with foreign logics. Decolonisation, he insists, is not simply the achievement of political independence; it is "the veritable creation of new men" (p. 36), a rupture that breaks colonial ways of thinking and inaugurates new categories of thought.

Central to Fanon's critique is the problem of recognition. Under colonial rule, the colonised inhabit what he calls a "narrow world, strewn with prohibitions" (p. 37), one in which their aspirations are shaped by the coloniser's world: "There is no native who does not dream at least once a day of setting himself up in the settler's place" (p. 39). This desire is not emancipatory but mimetic, a distorted form of recognition that affirms the coloniser as the epistemic standard. It reproduces dependency rather than autonomy, for, as Fanon warns, colonial domination "seeks to dehumanize" the colonized(p. 15), and recognition within such a structure can only reinscribe hierarchy. It is within this broader critique of colonial epistemology that The Pitfalls of National Consciousness becomes indispensable. Fanon shows that political liberation does not automatically dissolve epistemic dependency. Instead, the postcolonial nation often inherits the very categories of thought that colonialism instituted. He warns that what emerges after independence is frequently "an empty shell, a crude and fragile travesty of what it might have been" (p. 148), a national consciousness incapable of grounding a genuine project of epistemic renewal.

Fanon places specific responsibility on the national middle class, whose epistemic location is shaped by colonial education. Their "intellectual laziness," "spiritual penury," and the "profoundly cosmopolitan mold that [their] mind is set in" (p. 149) inhibit their ability to imagine alternative futures. They lack the creative and political capacity to forge new epistemic forms, and thus reproduce colonial logics of hierarchy. In Fanon's devastating formulation, the national bourgeoisie is "not engaged in production, nor in invention, nor in building, nor in labor" (p. 150). Instead of leading a transformation, they imitate the colonial bourgeoisie, replacing colonial domination with a localized but not epistemically transformed version of the same order. For Fanon, this vulnerability to colonial divisions in postcolonial societies is attributed to the fact that political liberation was not followed with epistemic transformation.

Fanon further contends that decolonisation demands not a celebration of symbols but a reconfiguration of knowledge itself. True national consciousness emerges only when "the living expression of the nation is the moving consciousness of the whole of the people" (p. 204) not the mimicry of colonial elites. This is why Fanon insists that political emancipation must be coupled with epistemic clarity whereby people must know "where they are going, and why" (pp. 193–194). To illustrate the depth of this epistemic restructuring, Fanon offers a metaphor on development: "If the building of a bridge does not enrich the awareness of those who work on it, then that bridge ought not to be built" (p. 199). Development, in other words, must not reproduce colonial technocracy but foster collective consciousness, agency, and the creation of new knowledge. This is precisely the terrain upon which decolonisation must operate: transforming not only institutions but the epistemic conditions under which subjects interpret the world.

Thus, when Fanon calls for a "new humanism," he situates decolonisation as a process of epistemic renewal, one that dismantles colonial categories while cultivating new modes of relationality and understanding. His insights on mimicry, elite fragility, and the dangers of hollow nationalism expose how deeply colonial epistemology penetrates political life, and why liberation must be conceptual as much as political and material.

Edward Said, in *Orientalism* (1978), shifts the lens from the violence of colonial conquest to the discursive power of Western scholarship itself. Through a genealogical critique of literature, art, and academic texts, Said demonstrated how the "Orient" was not merely discovered but invented through Western representations that served to reinforce imperial dominance. He argued that the Western academy had created an "archive of knowledge" that functioned as a means of controlling and essentializing non-Western societies. Edward Said's

Orientalism (1978) demonstrates that colonial domination is sustained not only through political or military force but through the discursive authority of Western knowledge systems. Said's central insight is that the "Orient" was not a pre-existing reality but "almost a European invention" (p. 1), produced through a long-standing tradition of scholarly, literary, and artistic representations. These representations claimed neutrality yet consistently positioned the West as rational, modern, and superior, while casting the non-Western as exotic, backward, and knowable only through Western expertise. Said shows that such knowledge production "is never far from what… Denys Hay has called the idea of Europe" (p. 7), meaning that Western identity itself is constructed through contrast with an imagined Orient. In this sense, Orientalism is not simply a body of texts but "a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (p. 3).

For Said, the project of decolonising knowledge systems entails dismantling this authority by interrogating the positionality from which knowledge is produced, the institutional structures that sustain it, and the political interests it serves. Said illustrates how Orientalist scholarship operates through what he calls "exteriority," a stance in which the Western scholar assumes the right to define, interpret, and speak for the Orient. "The Orientalist… makes the Orient speak," he writes, yet "is never concerned with the Orient except as the first cause of what he says" (p. 20). Decolonising knowledge, in this light, requires rejecting the assumption that the West possesses an inherent epistemic privilege. It involves creating conditions in which non-Western societies can narrate their own histories, construct their own analytical categories, and critique the discursive frameworks that have objectified them. Said further emphasises that knowledge is inseparable from power: "If the Orient could represent itself, it would; since it cannot, the representation does the job… for the West" (p. 21). To decolonise knowledge is therefore to challenge the unequal distribution of representational power that enables such epistemic substitution.

Said's work has been foundational for contemporary decolonial scholarship because it exposes how deeply colonial power is embedded in institutions, disciplines, and methods of knowledge production. His argument that "knowledge of the Orient, because generated out of strength, in a sense creates the Orient" (p. 22) provides a conceptual basis for later thinkers who trace coloniality in language, archives, university curricula, and global epistemic hierarchies. These scholars extend Said's insight by showing how modern social sciences, development studies, area studies, and even human rights discourse reproduce orientalist assumptions unless critically examined. In this sense, Said's work does not simply critique orientalist texts; it inaugurates a mode of reading that reveals how scholarly practices legitimate asymmetries of power.

The analysis by Edward Said clarifies why decolonising curricula requires more than adding non-Western texts, it requires interrogating the discursive frameworks that define what counts as legitimate knowledge. His work remains vital for contemporary struggles over epistemic justice because it alerts us to the ways in which power and knowledge are co-constitutive, a theme that reverberates throughout decolonial critiques of Western epistemology.

In his seminal work *Decolonising the Mind* (1986) Ngugi wa Thiong'o, writing from the Kenyan postcolonial context deepens the critiques advanced by Fanon and Said by foregrounding language as the central site of epistemic violence and epistemic recovery. While Fanon exposes the psychological and cultural disfigurement of the colonised subject, and Said reveals how Western scholarship constructs the non-Western world as an object of knowledge, Ngugi turns attention to the linguistic mechanisms through which colonialism reorganised African consciousness. He argues that colonialism "dismembered" Africa not only territorially

but mentally, severing people from the languages in which their world was named, narrated, and understood. The most devastating instrument of this dismemberment was what he famously calls the "cultural bomb," whose effect, he writes, "is to annihilate a people's belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves" (p. 3).

Ngugi's argument resonates strongly with Fanon's insistence that colonialism produces a profound epistemic alienation. Ngugi provides the linguistic and pedagogical infrastructure for understanding this process. As he notes in his autobiographical reflections, his early schooling taught him to associate English with intelligence, success, and value, while African languages were linked with shame and backwardness. Specifically, he asserts "the attitude to English was the exact opposite: any achievement in spoken or written English was highly rewarded… English became the measure of intelligence" (p. 12). Colonial education thus enacted what Edward Said describes as the "exteriority" of the coloniser's discourse, referring to the imposition of a worldview that speaks for, defines, and ultimately replaces the self-understanding of the colonised.

For Ngugi, decolonising the mind requires "re-membering" what colonialism dis-membered, namely a wholeness of identity rooted in indigenous languages, cultural memory, and local epistemologies. He argues that language is not a neutral communicative tool but the very carrier of a people's worldview in the sense that "Language carries culture, and culture carries… the entire body of values by which we come to perceive ourselves and our place in the world" (p. 16). By extension, Ngugi shows how the imposition of a colonial language functions as an epistemic coup, a forced substitution of one cultural universe with another. In that regards, the struggle for linguistic decolonisation is inseparable from political and material struggles. In a powerful reflection on African writers' choices, he asks "What is the difference between a politician who says Africa cannot do without European guidance and the writer who says Africa cannot do without European languages?" (p. 26). This question echoes Said's warning that Eurocentric knowledge frameworks reproduce relations of domination even after formal independence. It also mirrors Fanon's critique of the "colonised intellectual" who continues to think through the categories of the coloniser. Thus, Ngugi reframes the linguistic question as a broader issue of epistemic sovereignty, arguing that reclaiming African languages is fundamental to reclaiming African agency.

Through this lens, Ngugi's work becomes a crucial bridge between Fanon's decolonial humanism and Said's critique of Orientalism. If Fanon exposes how colonialism fractures the psyche, and Said reveals how Western discourse constructs the non-Western world as an object of knowledge, Ngugi demonstrates how colonial languages institutionalise these fractures within everyday communication, schooling, literature, and national cultural life. Decolonising knowledge systems, therefore, must involve not only challenging the authority of Western representations as Said urges but also revitalising Indigenous languages and cultural forms as legitimate sites of knowledge production. As such, Ngugi shows that language is both the terrain of colonial domination and the foundation of decolonial recovery. The struggle to restore African languages is thus not merely a cultural project, it is indeed a political, philosophical, and epistemological reorientation toward African ways of seeing, knowing, and imagining the world.

Valentin-Yves Mudimbe's powerful philosophical reflections on the phenomena of coloniality and decoloniality is evident in *The Invention of Africa* (1988). In particular, Mudimbe, the Congolese philosopher introduces a decisive epistemological shift by exposing the structural conditions under which Africa has been constituted as an object of Western knowledge. He

theorises this infrastructure as the "colonial library," a dense constellation of scholarly, administrative, missionary, and scientific practices that "express a normative doxa and its submission to an episteme" (p. 12). The point is not merely that Africa was misrepresented, but that the very conditions of knowing Africa were shaped by epistemic systems that claimed neutrality while securing Western authority. Unfortunately academic disciplines did and continues to participate in translating African worlds into conceptual idioms that reified Western reason as the universal measure of knowledge. It is against this historical architecture that Mudimbe poses his radical provocation; "whether African thought can be imagined outside the structures that have long governed, disciplined, and distorted it" (p. 88).

Mudimbe extends, with philosophical precision, the concerns articulated by Fanon, Said, and Ngugi by turning attention to the disciplines themselves their genealogies, classificatory logics, and epistemic assumptions. He demonstrates that coloniality endures not only through misrecognition, misrepresentation, or linguistic violence, but through the methodological habits that continue to shape African Studies and adjacent fields. As such any academic field risk reproducing fragments of the colonial library when they deploy Western categories as universal or reduce African or other non-Western knowledge systems to empirical material awaiting external interpretation. As Mudimbe notes, even critical African scholarship often "does not destroy completely the relevance of the colonial library" (p. 194), revealing the depth of its epistemic entanglement.

Therefore, locating coloniality at the level of epistemic conditions, Mudimbe reframes what decolonising knowledge must entail. It is insufficient to recover subjugated voices or diversify intellectual canons, the task is to interrogate and ultimately unsettle the conceptual, methodological, and institutional foundations that regulate what counts as knowledge. Decolonisation, in Mudimbe's sense, requires not an additive gesture and tokenistic attempts but a reconfiguration of the frameworks themselves, creating space for African thought to generate its own theoretical horizons. His work thus anchors contemporary decolonial scholarship in a fundamental insight: that epistemic freedom demands dismantling, and not merely critiquing, the classificatory grids that have historically secured Africa's subordinate place within global knowledge systems.

Paulin Hountondji's critique of epistemic domination deepens the decolonial interrogation by theorising the political economy of knowledge production through the concept of "extraversion." Hountondji exposes how colonialism instituted a global division of intellectual labour in which the Global South was systematically positioned as a site of empirical extraction, while theory, interpretation, and epistemic authority were consolidated in metropolitan centres. In this configuration, the colonised world functioned primarily as a reservoir of raw intellectual material: "the colonized world was, first and foremost, a source of data … for shipment to the metropole" (Hountondji, 1997, p. 2). Knowledge production thus mirrored colonial economic relations, reproducing asymmetries in which Southern realities were rendered legible only through Northern analytical frameworks.

The analytical power of Hountondji's intervention is embedded in his insistence that this structure did not dissolve with political decolonisation but was reproduced within postcolonial and contemporary academic systems. This continuity is rigorously demonstrated by Connell (2018), who shows that the global economy of knowledge remains organised around the same extractive logic. As she observes, "in our time, this traffic continues. The periphery is as vital a source of raw materials for the knowledge economy as it is for the material economy" (Connell, 2018, p. 400). For Connell, this persistence is not accidental but structural, sustained

by the concentration of theory-making institutions, journals, and funding bodies in the Global North.

Connell further clarifies the subjective consequences of this arrangement by explicitly naming extraversion as a disciplinary orientation imposed on scholars in the Global South. In her formulation, "intellectual workers in the global periphery are pushed toward a particular cultural and intellectual stance … being oriented to authority external to your own society" (Connell, 2018, p. 401). This orientation is reproduced through citation patterns, academic mobility, publication incentives, and professional recognition, compelling Southern scholars to look outward for epistemic validation. In this way, extraversion operates as a contemporary modality of epistemic subordination, reducing Southern knowledge systems to empirical fodder for Northern theory. Hountondji's critique thus converges with broader decolonial arguments by insisting that epistemic justice requires not merely representational inclusion, but a fundamental restructuring of the global political economy of knowledge, one in which the Global South is recognised as a legitimate site of theory, critique, and conceptual production.

Dipesh Chakrabarty's *Provincializing Europe* (2000) makes decisive contribution in the debate on epistemic hierarchy by unsettling Europe's taken-for-granted status as the universal referent of historical and social analysis. Chakrabarty's critique is neither rejectionist nor celebratory but exposes the epistemic ambivalence. Specifically, he argues, "European thought is at once indispensable and inadequate in helping us to think through the experiences of political modernity in non-Western nations" (Chakrabarty, 2000, p. 16). To address this, he proposes what he callls *translation* not a technical procedure but an epistemological strategy implying possibility for epistemic agency on the part of non-European societies. This agentic appropriation demands engagement with Western categories while simultaneously reworking them through vernacular histories, practices, and social imaginaries that exceed their original conceptual horizons. In that respect, Chakrabarty resists both Eurocentric universalism and epistemic isolationism, opening conceptual space for plural modernities without reproducing a hierarchical centre–periphery logic.

Raewyn Connell's *Southern Theory* (2007) deepens this critique by situating epistemic inequality within the global political economy of knowledge production. Connell demonstrates that what circulates as "general" or "universal" theory is overwhelmingly produced in elite institutions of the global North and reflects their historically specific social concerns. Her assertion that "what appears as global theory is in fact Northern theory" (Connell, 2007, p. xiii) exposes how claims to universality operate as mechanisms of exclusion rather than neutral descriptors. Against this backdrop, and from a standpoint of critical sociology of knowledge, Connell calls for a global sociology grounded in epistemic plurality, one that recognises theory-making as an activity distributed across multiple locations, and insists on respect for intellectual labour produced outside the metropole (Connell, 2007, p. 211). Knowledge, in this framing, is not merely unevenly represented but structurally organised to privilege some locations as sites of abstraction and others as sources of empirical material.

A Portuguese sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos theoretically advances the decolonial critique by conceptualising colonial domination as an epistemic regime sustained through epistemic violence that he terms epistemicide. For Santos, colonialism was not only a political and economic project but a profoundly epistemological one, predicated on the systematic destruction of non-Western ways of knowing. He conceptualizes epistemicide as "the destruction of the knowledge and cultures of these populations, of their memories and ancestral links and their manner of relating to others and to nature" (Santos, 2016, p. 19), and in his book

Epistemologies of the South: Justice against Epistemicide (2014) he further characterises it as the "murder of knowledge." Invoking the logic of genocide, Santos underscores the intentionality and scale of epistemic violence through which Western epistemology secured global authority, not simply by marginalising alternative epistemologies, but by dismantling the social, cultural, and institutional infrastructures that sustained them.

This epistemic violence, Santos argues, was constitutive of modern Western epistemology itself, which established its claim to universality through the suppression and disqualification of rival cognitive traditions. Colonialism thus produced not only exploited subjects but silenced knowers, rendering entire epistemic worlds unintelligible or nonexistent within dominant regimes of truth. Importantly, Santos insists that epistemic domination did not end with formal decolonisation, it continues to be reproduced through contemporary institutions of science, law, education, and development, where Western knowledge remains the privileged measure of validity and rationality (Santos, 2014). This persistence is enabled by what he conceptualises as abyssal thinking, a modern epistemological logic that draws an invisible yet absolute line between what counts as knowledge and what is relegated to non-knowledge. As a result, experiences and knowledges on "the other side of the line" are rendered irrelevant or nonexistent, even though, as Santos observes, "the understanding of the world by far exceeds the Western understanding of the world" (Santos, 2016, p. 22).

To redress the devastating phenomenon of epistemicide and its associated practices, Santos calls for a global framework of knowledge production and management system that rejects epistemic monoculture but embraces epistemic pluralism. This is articulated through the concept of an ecology of knowledges. He defines this ecology as one that "is based on the recognition of the plurality of heterogeneous knowledges… and on the sustained and dynamic interconnections between them without compromising their autonomy" (Santos, 2007, p. 27). Knowledge, in this formulation, is always inter-knowledge in sense that it is produced relationally, contextually, and pragmatically rather than hierarchically or abstractly. Rather than rejecting science, the ecology of knowledges situates scientific knowledge as one epistemic practice among others, to be evaluated according to the concrete interventions it enables or constrains. As Santos emphasises, "what we do not know is the product of our ignorance and not of ignorance in general" (Santos, 2014, p. 328). Decolonisation, in this sense, is neither epistemic relativism nor inversion, but a project of cognitive justice one that reclaims silenced knowledges, reconfigures epistemic hierarchies contextually, and grounds social emancipation in the recognition that "no single type of knowledge can account for all possible interventions in the world" (Santos, 2007, p. 33).

To extend the geographic horizon of the decolonial scholarship, Aníbal Quijano and Walter Mignolo represent a distinct Latin American decolonial tradition that locates colonial domination not at the margins of modernity but at its epistemic core (Mignolo, 2011; Quijano, 2007).Writing from the historical experience of Latin America as the first laboratory of European colonial modernity, Quijano advances the concept of *the coloniality of power* to explain how colonial hierarchies of race, labour, authority, and knowledge were constitutive of the modern world-system rather than accidental to it. Coloniality, for Quijano, denotes the enduring structure of domination that outlived formal colonialism and continues to organise global relations of inequality. He argues that Eurocentrism operates as a hegemonic epistemic paradigm that naturalises Western rationality as universal while relegating other knowledges to the status of the pre-modern, the local, or the irrational. As Quijano insists, coloniality is "the most general form of domination in the world today," sustained through the coupling of modernity and a racialised epistemological order (Quijano, 2000, p. 533). What appears as

neutral or universal knowledge is thus inseparable from the historical violence through which European rationality positioned itself as the sole horizon of intelligibility. It is on this basis that Quijano formulates the imperative of epistemic delinking, the need to extricate oneself from the linkages between rationality/modernity and coloniality in order to make possible other rationalities grounded in the historical experiences of subordinated peoples (Quijano, 2007, p. 177).

Walter Mignolo builds directly on Quijano's intervention by elaborating the geopolitics of knowledge and the epistemic consequences of what he calls *the colonial matrix of power*. Mignolo argues that Western knowledge claims authority through zero-point epistemology, implying the fiction of a disembodied, universal standpoint that conceals its geo-historical location in European imperial experience (Mignolo, 2002, p. 64). Against this epistemic illusion, he advances *border thinking* as a mode of knowledge production that emerges from the lived experience of colonial difference and the memory of the colonial wound. Border thinking does not merely critique Eurocentrism from within its conceptual vocabulary; it seeks to delink from the very epistemic foundations of Western modernity by opening alternative genealogies of thought grounded in Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and subaltern histories of resistance. As Mignolo argues, decolonial thinking requires a delinking from the rhetoric of modernity and an opening toward epistemic horizons rendered invisible by the coloniality of knowledge (Mignolo, 2011, pp. 44–46). In this formulation, modernity and coloniality are inseparable because they are two sides of the same coin (Mignolo, 2011).

Quijano and Mignolo advocate for *pluriversality*, a decolonial horizon that rejects the universalisation of any single epistemic tradition in favour of a world in which multiple epistemologies coexist without hierarchy. This position does not entail a wholesale rejection of Western knowledge, but a refusal of its claim to epistemic supremacy. As Mignolo clarifies, decoloniality "is not anti-European but it is anti-colonial," directed against the arrogance of epistemic privilege rather than against particular cultural traditions (Mignolo, 2011, p. 47). Their shared Latin American perspective grounds decolonial theory in the historical trajectories of colonial violence inaugurated in the Americas, and insists that epistemic emancipation cannot be achieved through reform within Eurocentric frameworks alone. Instead, decolonisation demands epistemic disobedience, the reactivation of silenced genealogies of thought, and the construction of alternative infrastructures of knowledge rooted in historical experience, political struggle, and cognitive justice.

Clearly, the decolonial agenda is not about replacing one hegemonic centre with another but about reconfiguring the global system of knowledge production to be inclusive, pluralistic, and democratically grounded. This involves correcting the distortions and exclusions produced by global inequality and reshaping knowledge systems in a way that reflects epistemic justice. Building on this imperative, Maghiji and colleagues (2022) emphasize that decolonisation must involve a fundamental reconstitution of how knowledge is valued and produced, one that moves beyond the superficiality of representational diversity. Clara Wilson, in her review of Tuhiwai Smith's Decolonising Research Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples (1999), reinforces this by critiquing how Western culture positions itself as the ethnocentric centre of legitimate knowledge. Smith, Wilson notes, challenges the dominant Western narratives and "regimes of truth," revealing how Western research is deeply encoded in imperial and colonial discourses that shape the very gaze of the researcher (Wilson, 2001, pp. 129–130).

This critique finds further support in Heleta's (2018) analysis of South African universities, where Eurocentric knowledge systems continue to dominate the curriculum, marginalizing and

devaluing other worldviews. According to Heleta, true decolonisation requires ending the reliance on imposed theories and shifting toward frameworks informed by local histories and lived experiences. The persistent dominance of Eurocentric frameworks, which Macedo refers to as "the pedagogy of big lies," continues to displace alternative epistemologies (Heleta, 2018, p. 17). Thambinathan and Kinsella (2021) deepen this conversation by arguing that there is no universal blueprint for decolonising research methodologies. Instead, they propose a set of guiding practices, critical reflexivity, reciprocity and respect for self-determination, openness to "Other(ed)" ways of knowing, and a commitment to transformative praxis. They assert that embracing decolonial approaches is not optional but a moral imperative when engaging with communities impacted by colonial legacies (Thambinathan & Kinsella, 2021, p. 12).

Extending this line of inquiry into institutional practices, Hall and Tandon (2017) argue that most higher education institutions operate with only a narrow slice of the world's vast epistemic diversity. Drawing on Boaventura de Sousa Santos, they invoke the concept of "epistemicide"—the systematic erasure of non-Western knowledge systems through colonial conquest and the global dominance of Western epistemology (p. 10). This "knowledge dictatorship," they argue, must be dismantled through a commitment to "knowledge democracy," which recognizes and integrates multiple ways of knowing, including spiritual, land-based, and community-rooted knowledges, as well as those born from resistance movements and lived experiences of the marginalized (p. 12). This helps explain why some knowledge forms are deemed illegitimate simply because they cannot be reconciled with dominant scientific methodologies. Taken together, these contributions converge in their insistence that decolonising knowledge requires epistemological pluralism, institutional transformation, and an ethical commitment to justice.

Over time, decolonial scholarship has evolved into a multidisciplinary field that engages both the conceptual foundations and practical imperatives of epistemic justice. From its early critiques of imperial knowledge systems to more recent interventions in institutional reform, curriculum transformation, and research methodologies, the decolonial project has expanded its intellectual and political scope. This evolution reflects a growing recognition of key questions like how knowledge is constructed, who gets to produce it, and what forms are deemed legitimate. Against this backdrop, it becomes imperative to sharpen our conceptual tools to effectively engage in this discursive and political struggle. The pursuit of a decolonized knowledge system thus requires a theoretically sound and contextually sensitive framework, one capable of grasping the shifting logics of coloniality and articulating viable alternatives. In what follows, I turn to some of the key theoretical and conceptual orientations that animate the growing literature on decolonising knowledge.

Theoretical and Conceptual Tendencies in the Decolonial Debate

Rather than treating decolonial scholarship as a sequence of discrete intellectual contributions, this commentary approaches the field relationally, asking what shared analytical concerns, conceptual commitments, and unresolved tensions emerge across its diverse traditions. Approached this way, decolonial scholarship does not cohere around a single theory or methodological programme, but around a set of interlocking conceptual tendencies that collectively frame coloniality as an enduring epistemic condition and decolonisation as a complex unfinished project. Thus, five conceptual orientations can be discerned in the debate on decolonising knowledge in the Global South.

The most foundational tendency lies in the reconceptualisation of coloniality as an epistemic condition of modernity, rather than as a residual effect of historical colonial rule. Across

anticolonial, postcolonial, and decolonial traditions, colonial domination is shown to persist through the infrastructures of knowledge production that normalise Western epistemologies as universal, objective, and authoritative. Modern knowledge systems are thus understood not as neutral inheritances but as historically constituted through colonial encounters that organised the world into hierarchical distinctions between knower and known, theory and data, centre and periphery. This insight reorients the decolonial project away from symbolic inclusion toward a deeper interrogation of the epistemic conditions under which knowledge is produced and legitimised.

A second, closely related tendency concerns the diagnosis of epistemic hierarchy as a structural feature of the global political economy of knowledge. Decolonial scholarship consistently demonstrates that inequalities in knowledge production are not reducible to uneven representation or marginal visibility. Instead, they are embedded in a global division of intellectual labour that concentrates theory-making, conceptual authority, and standards of academic excellence in the Global North, while positioning the Global South primarily as a site of empirical extraction. This structure is reproduced through publishing regimes, funding architectures, citation economies, and evaluation metrics that compel scholars in the Global South to orient their work toward external validation. Collectively, these critiques underscore epistemic dependency as an institutionalised condition rather than an individual failure, reinforcing the claim that decolonising knowledge requires structural transformation rather than discursive correction alone.

A third and particularly significant tendency is the rejection of epistemic substitution as a viable decolonial strategy. While early interpretations of decolonial thought were sometimes read as calls to replace Western knowledge with indigenous or non-Western alternatives, the literature increasingly cautions against such reductionist and essentialist moves. Across diverse contributions, there is a shared insistence that decolonisation cannot be achieved by inverting epistemic hierarchies or installing a new monoculture in place of an old one. Instead, decolonial scholars advocate for epistemic delinking from claims of universality and the cultivation of epistemic plurality. Calls to provincialise Europe, engage in epistemic translation, and embrace pluriversality articulate a commitment to dismantling epistemic monopolies while resisting both relativism and nativism. In this framing, decolonisation is understood as a reordering of epistemic relations rather than a reversal of dominance.

Closely aligned with this position is a fourth tendency that conceptualises decolonisation through epistemic pluralism and relationality. Knowledge is increasingly understood as plural, situated, and context-dependent, with no single epistemic tradition capable of exhausting social reality. Rather than rejecting scientific or/and Western knowledge, decolonial scholarship situates it as one epistemic practice among others, to be assessed in relation to the forms of understanding and intervention it enables. This pluralist orientation challenges epistemic monocultures while affirming the legitimacy of indigenous, experiential, spiritual, and community-rooted knowledges without collapsing them into a homogenised category of the local. Decolonisation, from this perspective, is inseparable from cognitive justice and the recognition that multiple ways of knowing coexist without hierarchical ordering.

A fifth tendency foregrounds praxis, reflexivity, and institutional transformation as integral to the decolonial project. Decolonisation is not treated as a purely conceptual exercise but as an ethical and political undertaking that must reshape how knowledge is produced, circulated, and governed. Attention to language, research ethics, relational accountability, and institutional governance reflects a growing recognition that universities and research systems are not neutral

spaces but active sites in the reproduction of coloniality. Equally important is the reflexive turn within decolonial scholarship itself, particularly warnings against romanticising precolonial epistemologies or reproducing rigid cultural binaries. This reflexivity underscores the need for conceptual rigour and contextual sensitivity, especially in Global South debates where decolonial rhetoric can inadvertently reproduce new forms of exclusion.

By and large, these tendencies suggest that decolonial scholarship is best understood as a critical project of epistemic justice rather than a prescriptive programme of epistemic replacement. Its unifying concern lies in dismantling the epistemic infrastructures that monopolise authority and in creating conditions for multiple ways of knowing to coexist dialogically. From this perspective, decolonisation emerges as a multidimensional and ongoing process involving critique, reconstruction, and institutional reform. This commentary is inspired , and aligns with those strands of decolonial thought that emphasise epistemic pluralism, conceptual clarity, and reflexive praxis, arguing that the transformative potential of decolonising knowledge depends less on the proliferation of decolonial vocabularies and concepts than on sustained interrogation of the epistemic architectures through which coloniality continues to be reproduced both outside and within the Global South itself.

Conclusion

This article has shown that decolonisation of knowledge is neither a monolithic nor a linear endeavour, but a dynamic and multi-dimensional struggle against epistemic injustice whose effectiveness requires conceptual clarity. The analysis has demonstrated that coloniality persists as a structurally embedded epistemic condition, reproduced through the institutional infrastructures of contemporary knowledge production, including universities, publishing regimes, funding architectures, and evaluative metrics. Approaches to decolonisation that prioritise symbolic inclusion or epistemic substitution risk misidentifying the source of epistemic inequality, mistaking representational change for structural transformation. Without a clear diagnosis of how epistemic hierarchies are institutionally organised and normalised, decolonial interventions may unintendely reproduce new forms of epistemic dominance rather than dismantle existing ones.

Equally important, the article affirms that decolonial debates have been intellectually productive and practically consequential, generating a rich repertoire of conceptual tools that are indispensable for both critique and practice. From foundational anticolonial and postcolonial critiques to contemporary Southern theorisation, decolonial scholarship has persistently challenged Eurocentric claims to universality while advancing alternative frameworks such as epistemic justice, epistemic disobedience, pluriversality, and the ecology of knowledges. The argument advanced here is not a dismissal of these contributions, but a call to mobilise them with greater reflexivity and analytical rigour. Decolonisation, as articulated in this article, is neither an epistemic reversal nor replacement of epistemic hegemony with another, but a commitment to epistemic pluralism grounded in the transformation of institutional arrangements through which knowledge is produced, validated, and circulated. As an unfinished yet vital intellectual and political project, decoloniality ultimately demands the reimagining of global knowledge systems as plural, dialogical, and accountable, capable of advancing epistemic justice across diverse contexts, including within the Global South itself.

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