Conceptual Article

Reclaiming Epistemologies of Woundedness: Pain and the Politics of Knowledge in African Higher Education

Bonginkosi H. Mutongoza[1]* [iD]

AFFILIATIONS

[1]Faculty of Education, Walter Sisulu University, Komani, South Africa.

CORRESPONDENCE

Email: bmutongoza@outlook.com*

Abstract: This paper argues that epistemologies of woundedness are essential for transforming knowledge systems historically shaped by Eurocentric and exclusionary frameworks. It explores how wounded epistemologies disrupt traditional knowledge paradigms by centring the lived experiences of communities impacted by colonialism, systemic racism, and historical violence. In postcolonial societies, such as those in Africa, where the legacies of colonialism persist, epistemic healing becomes crucial in reclaiming Indigenous ways of knowing and addressing the psychological and cultural wounds inflicted by these histories. This paper advocates for actively decolonising education systems, curricula, and research practices to restore dignity to marginalised epistemologies and create inclusive spaces for diverse perspectives. Examining the implications for education, social justice, and knowledge production, the paper highlights the need for curricula that recognise Indigenous and African philosophies, dismantling colonial structures within academic institutions, and research practices that amplify voices traditionally excluded from scholarly discourse. Ultimately, the paper calls for a comprehensive rethinking of African knowledge validation processes to foster a more just, democratic, and inclusive intellectual landscape.

Keywords: Decolonisation, epistemic wounds, Indigenous knowledge, social justice.

1. Introduction

The current outlook of the decolonisation movement reflects a dynamism that seeks to address historical injustices and reshape power relations, particularly in the context of higher education and social justice (Mutongoza, Mutanho & Makeleni, 2023; Adefila et al., 2022). According to Kluttz, Walker, and Walter (2020), the decolonisation movement has gained momentum globally, inspired by social movements advocating for racial justice, environmental sustainability, and Indigenous rights. The contemporary decolonisation movements in Africa have been shaped by several historical events since the mid-20th century. World War II exposed African soldiers to ideas of freedom and democracy, fuelling anti-colonial sentiment. Global platforms like the United Nations and the Bandung Conference emphasised self-determination, while the Cold War offered strategic support to liberation movements. Pan-Africanism and the establishment of the Organisation of African Unity unified efforts and established solidarity across the continent, influencing the ongoing fight against neo-colonialism and systemic oppression. Activism has surged in recent years, particularly following events like #RhodesMustFall in South Africa, which sparked similar global movements challenging the presence of colonial symbols and structures within educational institutions. Ahmed (2020) reveals that the #RhodesMustFall campaign and the resultant #FeesMustFall played a central role in emphasising that the fight against colonial legacies is not confined to one region but resonates globally. For further credence, one can consider Henry (2021), who reveals that the Black Lives Matter movement catalysed discussions about colonial legacies and systemic racism. As a result, there has been a growing demand for decolonisation across various sectors, with university students and activists becoming increasingly vocal about the need to decolonise curricula (Heleta & Dilraj, 2024).

A significant aspect of the decolonisation movement involves re-evaluating knowledge systems within higher education. There is growing recognition of the importance of integrating Indigenous knowledges, African philosophies, and non-Western perspectives into academic curricula (Ahmed, 2020; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). This shift builds on the foundational works of scholars and activists such as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Yatta Kanu, George Dei, Neo Lekgotla Laga Ramoupi, and N'dri T. Assié-Lumumba, who have long championed these ideas. Their efforts align with the call to move away from Eurocentric paradigms that have dominated education for centuries (Mutongoza et al., 2023). Educators are increasingly adopting critical pedagogical approaches that encourage students to question dominant narratives and engage with marginalised histories (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2021).

The work of thinkers like Kwesi Prah, Catherine Odora Hoppers, and Mahmood Mamdani has further emphasised the need for transformative educational practices that empower students to challenge the sociopolitical structures perpetuating inequality. Pan-Africanism and the Black Consciousness Movement in the 20th century, as advanced by figures such as William Du Bois, Marcus Garvey, Julius Nyerere, and Kwame Nkrumah, laid the groundwork for such shifts by drawing on the collective suffering of Black communities to formulate political ideologies aimed at liberation and self-determination (More, 2014). As Yacek (2020) argues, transformative educational practices seek to empower students to understand and challenge the sociopolitical structures that sustain educational inequities. By engaging in critical reflection, students can reclaim narratives that have been historically marginalised and begin to construct a more inclusive understanding of knowledge.

Despite the progress made, the journey toward decolonisation remains fraught with challenges. Forbes (2018) highlights that institutional resistance persists as a significant barrier, with some faculty members and administrators hesitant to embrace changes that disrupt entrenched curricula. Mutongoza et al. (2023) suggest that this resistance often stems from fears of losing academic freedom and a reluctance to confront uncomfortable truths about historical injustices. Kwesi Kwaa Prah's work underscores the role of elites in perpetuating these challenges, arguing that many within the post-independence African elite have co-opted colonial systems to maintain their positions of privilege, often impeding meaningful transformation. Additionally, there is a growing concern that institutions may resort to tokenistic gestures rather than pursuing substantive change, offering superficial solutions without addressing deeper systemic issues. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2021) warns that for decolonisation efforts to be meaningful, they must transcend symbolic actions and involve fundamental transformations in policies, practices, and institutional structures. Such transformation demands an earnest commitment to ongoing dialogue, a willingness to confront the complexities of decolonisation, and active resistance against the complicity of elite groups who benefit from maintaining the status quo.

It is crucial to acknowledge that, internationally, the movement has increasingly adopted intersectional perspectives, recognising how various forms of oppression—such as race, gender, class, and sexuality—intersect to shape individuals' experiences. According to Tan (2021), this all-inclusive approach highlights the need to address the complexities of social injustices in an inclusive manner. Collaborative efforts between international academic institutions, community organisations, and Indigenous groups are becoming more common, aiming to create meaningful change that reflects the diverse voices and needs of marginalised communities. Studies such as Tight (2024) and Rodríguez (2022) reveal that such partnerships can facilitate the co-creation of knowledge and support community-led initiatives, ensuring that decolonisation efforts are rooted in the lived experiences of those most affected by colonial legacies.

1.1 Conceptual clarification

In this paper, the epistemologies of woundedness refer to the knowledge systems that emerge from experiences of pain, trauma, and oppression as a result of colonialism. The paper borrows from

Vaditya (2018) and Romão (2014), who, in defining epistemologies of the wound, challenge dominant frameworks by highlighting how marginalised individuals and communities—who have endured historical and ongoing suffering—generate unique and valuable knowledge. As Mutongoza et al. (2023) argue, these epistemologies are crucial for understanding the nature of knowledge and the power dynamics involved in its production, application, validation, institutionalisation, and dissemination. Thus, this paper aligns with the position of Moreton-Robinson (2011), who argues that lived experiences of marginalisation, far from limiting, can serve as powerful sources of epistemic resistance and reformation, creating alternative ways of knowing that contest dominant hegemonic narratives.

On the other hand, Black pain refers to the collective and individual suffering experienced by Black people as a result of systemic racism, colonialism, apartheid, and ongoing racial violence (Etieyibo, 2023; Bhuda & Marumo, 2022; Bonds & Inwood, 2015). Oppression, in this context, refers to the historical and structural systems that perpetuate racial inequality and marginalisation, silencing the voices and knowledge of Black people (Heugh, 2023; Abudu, 2022). Resistance emerges as a response to pain and oppression, where marginalised communities reclaim and reshape their narratives, producing knowledge that challenges dominant structures. This paper explores how Black pain, oppression, and resistance serve as critical lenses through which alternative knowledge systems are generated and sustained in a manner that challenges existing power structures in knowledge production.

2. Historical Roots of Black Pain and Epistemic Marginalisation

Present-day experiences of epistemic marginalisation in Africa are rooted in colonialism and the slave trade, during which Black people were subjected to dehumanising treatment and systematic exploitation, establishing enduring social hierarchies grounded in race (Henry, 2021; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). According to Bonds and Inwood (2015), these hierarchies relegated Black people to positions of subservience and dispossession while reinforcing the supremacy of white European colonisers. Mentan (2018) reveals how the psychological and cultural trauma inflicted by slavery has left deep scars, shaping Black experiences of pain and marginalisation even after its abolition — solidifying their global marginalisation at the hands of white settlers. In the Americas, Higginbotham (2013) indicates that post-slavery societies still grappled with entrenched racism, most notably through segregation laws such as Jim Crow in the United States. Black communities were subjected to structural violence that denied them access to education, healthcare, and political participation. Similarly, in Europe, Black immigrants and diasporic communities continued to face systemic discrimination and were marginalised within the political and social fabric of these societies. Engerman (2020) notes that throughout this period, Black pain was treated as an illegitimate or invisible form of suffering. The knowledge, traditions, and experiences of Black people were often erased or dismissed as inferior to the "civilised" knowledge of their white colonisers (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2021). This erasure through epistemic violence extended beyond physical domination—it degraded the intellectual and cultural contributions of Black people, invalidating their knowledge systems and ways of being.

Colonialism not only exploited Black bodies and resources but also sought to systematically erase Black knowledge systems. Studies by Sebola and Mogoboya (2020) and Moreton-Robinson (2011) demonstrate that African and Indigenous knowledges, including spiritual, agricultural, and communal practices, were often viewed as primitive or backward by European colonisers. From this standpoint, Mutongoza et al. (2023) assert that the dominance of Western education and epistemology during and after colonial rule meant that Black ways of knowing were primarily excluded from formal knowledge production and dissemination systems. In African and Caribbean colonies, European education systems were imposed as a means of "civilising" the Indigenous population. These colonial systems promoted Eurocentric histories, philosophies, and sciences while actively undermining and ignoring African knowledge systems—oral histories, communal knowledge-sharing, and traditional

healing practices were dismissed in favour of written, individualistic, and Western scientific approaches (Suchet, 2002). Bhopal, Brown, and Jackson (2015) note that the effects of this epistemic marginalisation persist in postcolonial societies, where Black intellectual contributions are often overlooked in mainstream academia, and Western thought continues to dominate global discussions on knowledge, development, and progress. Mutongoza et al. (2023) add that even in modern educational institutions, African history and knowledge are often relegated to niche areas of study, reinforcing the notion that Black knowledge systems are peripheral to "universal" knowledge.

The African continent has been a critical site of colonial domination, where Black pain and marginalisation have taken particularly brutal forms. Stelios and Papaioannou (2016) argue that at the heart of the colonial project was the desire to dominate and extract wealth from African lands while imposing European cultures, languages, and governance structures, leaving a legacy of profound economic, political, and social inequality. Perhaps the most diabolical example of racialised oppression in Africa is apartheid in South Africa, under which Black South Africans were confined to poor, overcrowded townships and denied access to quality education, healthcare, and political rights (Burgard, 2006). The physical and psychological violence of apartheid left deep wounds in the collective memory of Black South Africans, as their humanity and dignity were routinely denied, and their knowledge systems were bastardised (Gobodo-Madikizela, 2012). Mathebula and Odeku (2023) and Tshishonga (2019) attest that the apartheid education system, particularly the Bantu Education Act of 1953, was designed to limit educational opportunities for Black South Africans, ensuring they remained a labouring underclass. In essence, apartheid not only oppressed Black bodies but also denied the legitimacy of Black ways of knowing and understanding the world.

Colonial powers used epistemic violence as a tool to legitimise their dominance and invalidate the intellectual and cultural traditions of the people they subjugated. According to Heugh (2023), this process of erasure was central to the colonisation of Africa, where European colonisers systematically undermined African knowledge systems, religious beliefs, and cultural practices. Regrettably, in the postcolonial era, the effects of epistemic violence continue to shape the marginalisation of Black knowledge. Nyamnjoh (2015) argues that many African countries have struggled to fully recover or revive Indigenous knowledge systems even after gaining independence, as the legacy of colonial education and governance remains deeply embedded. As Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) shows, the dominance of Western knowledge in global academia and policymaking perpetuates this marginalisation, as African intellectual contributions are often overlooked or considered secondary to Euro-American perspectives. Moreover, Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2021) contends that postcolonial African states often inherited colonial systems of education and governance, making it difficult to dismantle these structures. As a result, African scholars and thinkers are frequently forced to navigate and contribute to academic systems that still privilege Western knowledge and methodologies, perpetuating the marginalisation of Black epistemologies.

3. Black Experiences and Oppression: The Politics of Silence

Systemic oppression has long functioned to silence Black voices and experiences—a silencing that is not merely physical but deeply rooted in the structures of power and knowledge. According to Allard-Tremblay (2021), systemic oppression is closely linked to the control of discourse, where those in positions of authority—often white, Eurocentric, and colonial powers—determine whose voices are heard and whose are ignored (Laylor, 2024). Silencing operates in various ways, from the outright denial of Black voices in public debates to more subtle forms of exclusion within academic, social, and cultural spheres (Naicker & Luckett, 2022; Sebola & Mogoboya, 2020). Historically, this suppression was evident in the colonisers' efforts to delegitimise African languages, oral traditions, and histories, replacing them with European governance systems, education, and religion (Hlabangane, 2021; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2021; Ouzman, 2004). The politics of silence also manifests in social African institutions that dictate acceptable forms of knowledge and expression. Black individuals and

communities, especially those facing racial discrimination, have often been forced to conform to dominant narratives to gain access to spaces of power and influence (Mutongoza et al., 2023).

Using the lens provided by Baffoe, Asimeng-Boahene, and Ogbuagu (2014), one can argue that this leads to the voicelessness of Black experiences, where individuals may be present within a system but are compelled to silence their true perspectives or lived realities in order to survive or succeed. Thus, while African academics and students are present within higher education institutions, they frequently navigate a system that compels them to silence or modify their perspectives to succeed within existing power structures (Mutongoza et al., 2023; Vaditya, 2018). This dynamic sustains the epistemic dominance of Western knowledge while undermining the legitimacy of African intellectual traditions. This creates a fractured existence in which Black people must navigate between expressing their authentic selves and the pressures to adhere to hegemonic expectations that deny their realities.

At the heart of this silencing lies epistemic injustice, a term coined by Fricker (2007) to refer to the injustice done to someone in their capacity as a knower. Epistemic injustice occurs in two primary forms: testimonial and hermeneutical. In a later work, Fricker (2017) reveals that testimonial injustice happens when the knowledge and experiences of marginalised individuals are discredited or dismissed due to prejudice. For example, the work by Tobias and Joseph (2020) demonstrates that Black people who speak about their experiences of racism may be doubted or ignored because of racial stereotypes that portray them as less credible or authoritative. Black scholars and students in African higher education often face skepticism when sharing their experiences, with their knowledge dismissed, vilified, and undervalued due to entrenched biases (Etieyibo, 2023; Bhuda & Marumo, 2022). Indigenous epistemologies and African intellectual traditions are marginalised in curricula, publishing, and research funding, reinforcing epistemic dependency on Western paradigms. Institutional responses to calls for decolonisation are often superficial, maintaining the dominance of Eurocentric knowledge. This systematic denial of their truth constitutes an epistemic injustice, as their ability to contribute to knowledge is unjustly undermined.

As Goetze (2018) contends, hermeneutical injustice occurs when the marginalised lack the conceptual or linguistic tools to fully articulate their experiences, as the dominant society has not created space for their knowledge. Evidence can be drawn from how, prior to movements like Black Lives Matter, many Black individuals may have felt the weight of systemic racism but lacked the societal language to express the fullness of their oppression (Kinloch, Penn & Burkhard, 2020). One can refer to Besharah and Olivier (2014), who argue that such injustices prevent oppressed communities from fully making sense of their own experiences because the frameworks of understanding are shaped by dominant groups that exclude or marginalise Black perspectives. According to Evans (2019), the result is a denial of knowledge from oppressed communities, rendering Black people invisible in the broader social and intellectual landscape. Their ways of knowing—whether through storytelling, oral history, or lived experience—are treated as inferior or irrelevant by dominant knowledge systems. This silencing is not simply a refusal to listen but an active suppression of knowledge that could challenge or disrupt established power structures (Billups et al., 2022). As Etieyibo (2023) acknowledges, Black pain, wisdom, and experiences are dismissed as either anecdotal or not worth serious academic or institutional engagement, perpetuating the marginalisation of Black intellectual contributions.

Institutions play a crucial role in perpetuating the silencing of Black voices and experiences. These institutions include academia, the media, political systems, legal frameworks, and even educational curricula. Each of these systems has historically operated under Eurocentric assumptions about knowledge, progress, and legitimacy, making it difficult for Black perspectives to gain a foothold (Mutongoza et al., 2023). In African academic institutions, studies such as Maseko (2020) reveal that Black scholars and students often face barriers to entry or progression, whether through discriminatory hiring practices, tokenism, or curricula that ignore or devalue Black contributions. The overwhelming focus on Western philosophers, scientists, and historians as the primary sources of

knowledge reinforces the exclusion of Black thought (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2021). Even in disciplines like African Studies at African higher education institutions, the dominant narratives are often shaped by non-Black scholars, further marginalising Black voices from within.

Similarly, the media frequently silences or distorts Black voices. Black experiences are often sensationalised or framed within stereotypes, leaving little space for nuanced discussion about the structural forces that shape those experiences. Kumah-Abiwu (2020) argues that news coverage of Black communities in Africa and globally tends to focus on crime or poverty, rarely engaging with the systemic causes behind these issues or providing space for Black voices that offer alternative perspectives. This creates a distorted view of Black life that silences the full breadth of Black experiences and insights. In the legal and political systems, Black voices have also historically been silenced. During colonial rule and apartheid, Black people were not only disenfranchised but also denied a legal platform to voice their grievances. More recently, Jones (2021) contended that even in postcolonial contexts, institutions often continue to perpetuate the silencing of Black communities.

According to Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2021), the educational curricula of many African countries still reflect a Eurocentric worldview that marginalises African history, culture, and knowledge systems. African students, from primary school through university, are continually taught from textbooks that prioritise European history, philosophy, and scientific achievements while relegating African contributions to secondary or optional status (Omodan, 2024; Mutongoza et al., 2023). This institutionalised erasure perpetuates the notion that Black knowledge is peripheral or irrelevant to global understanding, thereby silencing Black experiences and denying their intellectual value.

4. Resistance and Survival: Knowledge Birthed From the Wound

Black pain, though rooted in historical oppression and violence, has paradoxically served as a wellspring of resistance and empowerment. Throughout history, Black communities have transformed their experiences of suffering into powerful counter-narratives that challenge dominant systems of oppression (Kolluri & Tichavanduka, 2023). As Graham (2004) reveals, these counter-narratives emerge from the understanding that Black pain, rather than being a mere symptom of victimhood, holds the potential to reconstruct and reclaim knowledge. In the face of dehumanisation and exclusion, Black individuals have used their lived experiences to subvert imposed narratives and forge new ways of knowing that are grounded in the realities of Black life. One can draw from the seminal work of White (1983), which demonstrates that during the era of slavery in the Americas, enslaved Africans crafted spirituals, songs, and oral stories that spoke to their pain but also conveyed messages of hope, resistance, and eventual freedom. According to Romão (2014), these counter-narratives disrupted the dominant discourse that sought to depict Black people as inferior or submissive, showcasing their humanity, resilience, and agency instead. The transformative power of Black pain extends beyond artistic expressions to include intellectual and political movements.

One of the most profound forms of resistance is epistemic resistance, a process through which Black people reclaim and assert their knowledge in the face of systemic oppression and epistemic injustice. Through suffering and survival, Black communities have developed unique forms of knowledge that challenge dominant epistemologies and provide alternative frameworks for understanding the world (Fricker, 2017). Similarly, Phalafala (2020) argues that oral histories and Indigenous knowledge systems have persisted in many African cultures despite centuries of colonial attempts to erase them. African societies have long held that wisdom is carried in stories, songs, rituals, and collective practices. Even when these forms of knowledge were discredited by colonisers as "primitive" or "unscientific," Black communities continued to pass down their intellectual traditions through oral histories and cultural practices (Heleta & Phiri, 2023). This is a form of epistemic resistance wherein marginalised groups assert the validity of their knowledge systems despite the denials and exclusions imposed by dominant powers. A critical example of epistemic resistance can be found in the decolonial movement in contemporary African higher education. According to Omodan, Mpiti, and Mtsi (2023),

scholars and students alike have called for the decolonisation of curricula, advocating for the inclusion of African perspectives, histories, and knowledge systems in the academic canon. This movement is thus a direct challenge to the Eurocentric epistemologies that have dominated African universities since colonial times (Maseko, 2020). Abudu (2022) argues that in reclaiming their intellectual heritage and demanding a space for African knowledge systems, Black scholars engage in epistemic, intellectual, and political resistance.

Central to Black resistance and survival is the role of collective memory and oral histories in preserving the experiences and knowledge of Black communities. Studies such as Heugh (2023) and Kumalo (2021) reveal that while colonial and postcolonial powers often sought to erase or rewrite Black histories, Black communities have maintained their stories and truths through the intergenerational transmission of knowledge. Collective memory—the shared remembrance of past events and experiences within a community—functions as both a tool of survival and a form of epistemic resilience (Basevich, 2020). In African contexts, oral histories have been vital in preserving the knowledge and experiences of Black people throughout the diaspora. From griots in West Africa, who serve as custodians of cultural memory, to the storytelling traditions of the African diaspora in the Caribbean and the Americas, oral histories ensure that Black pain and resilience are remembered and passed down (Smart, 2019). This tradition of oral history offers a counterpoint to the written records of colonial powers, which often distorted or erased the contributions of Black people. Oral histories preserve the past and serve as a mode of resistance in the present. They keep alive the memories of resistance movements, from anti-colonial struggles in Africa to civil rights movements in the United States. Sutherland (2023) reveals that the stories of the Maroons—escaped enslaved people who formed their independent communities—are still told in Jamaica and Suriname as a testament to Black resistance and self-determination. These stories provide Black communities with a sense of continuity and connection to a long history of resilience and defiance against oppression. Thus, in the absence of official recognition or validation, Black communities rely on their shared memories of oppression, survival, and resistance to forge new paths, ensuring that their knowledge remains vital and transformative.

5. The Epistemic Value of Trauma: Pain as a Source on Knowledge

Trauma, often seen as a debilitating force, holds profound epistemic value in shaping and generating knowledge. Within this framework of epistemologies of woundedness, trauma is not merely an experience of individual suffering but a significant source of insight and understanding (Vaditya, 2018). The work by Mutongoza et al. (2023) and Romão (2014) demonstrates that this framework challenges traditional notions of knowledge production that prioritise objectivity and detachment, advocating instead for the recognition of subjective, lived experiences as valid forms of knowing. Trauma, particularly when it stems from oppression, racial violence, or systemic marginalisation, can offer unique perspectives on power, injustice, and resilience (Ndebele, 2016). These insights are not easily captured through conventional epistemological frameworks; rather, they emerge from the depth of personal and collective suffering, revealing truths about the social world that are otherwise obscured (Abudu, 2022). In this sense, trauma plays a dual role: on the one hand, it exposes the fractures and failures of oppressive systems, while on the other, it opens up possibilities for alternative ways of knowing and being. Studies like those by Leibowitz (2017) demonstrate that trauma complicates the boundaries between the knower and the known, highlighting how individuals and communities internalise, respond to, and resist forms of violence. Consequently, conceptualising trauma as a valid form of knowledge production elevates the narratives of those who have endured it, acknowledging their lived experiences as critical contributions to the broader understanding of oppression and resilience (Romão, 2014).

In the African context, the intersection of personal and collective trauma is particularly significant. Historical and ongoing experiences of colonialism, slavery, apartheid, and systemic racism have

profoundly shaped individual and communal identities. African societies have borne the weight of trauma inflicted by external forces, from the brutal exploitation and dehumanisation during the colonial era to the racial segregation and dispossession of apartheid (Abudu, 2022; Henry, 2021). These traumas are not limited to the individuals who directly experienced them; they are passed down through generations, becoming embedded in the collective memory and consciousness of African communities. Naicker and Luckett (2022) contend that the collective nature of trauma in Africa highlights the shared experiences of violence, displacement, and exclusion. The apartheid regime in South Africa serves as a pertinent example, having inflicted deep wounds on entire communities, severing cultural ties, erasing Indigenous knowledge systems, and perpetuating cycles of poverty and inequality (Sebola & Mogoboya, 2020). Trauma, in this context, acts as both a reminder of historical injustices and a call to resist their perpetuation, fostering a collective sense of agency and survival. Experiences of violence and suffering, particularly within historically marginalised communities, inform alternative epistemologies that challenge dominant Western notions of knowledge (Lotz-Sisitka et al., 2015).

In many African societies, ways of knowing that emerge from trauma are expressed through oral traditions, storytelling, and collective memory. These forms of knowledge not only preserve the history of oppression but also serve as acts of resistance, refusing to let the experiences of the oppressed be erased or forgotten (Vaditya, 2018). Oral histories, for instance, become critical tools for transmitting wisdom, values, and lessons learned from past traumas, offering new ways to interpret and navigate the world (Bouka, 2021). Suffering and violence are not viewed merely as physical or emotional disruptions but as experiences that provide profound insights into human dignity, morality, and the nature of justice. The process of survival itself becomes a way of knowing; communities that have endured systemic violence develop nuanced understandings of power, resistance, and healing (Mutongoza et al., 2023). These alternative epistemologies challenge the dominance of rationalist, detached forms of knowledge, asserting that lived experiences, particularly those marked by trauma, are vital for understanding the complexities of oppression and survival.

6. Decolonising Knowledge: Challenging Dominant Epistemologies

The decolonial theory emphasises the importance of dismantling colonial legacies that continue to shape global knowledge systems. As Hlabangane (2021) contends, decolonisation calls for epistemic justice, which involves addressing the systematic exclusion and marginalisation of non-Western ways of knowing. This framework challenges the dominance of Eurocentric epistemologies that have historically positioned themselves as the universal standard of knowledge. According to Mutongoza et al. (2023), colonisation was not just a territorial conquest but also a conquest of knowledge, imposing Western systems of thought while devaluing and erasing Indigenous, African, and non-Western knowledge systems. Decolonial theorists such as Mignolo (2007) and Quijano (2007) argue that achieving epistemic justice requires undoing these colonial structures, which continue to dictate what is considered valid knowledge in academic institutions, politics, and society. As Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2021) urges, this involves questioning and critically engaging with the intellectual traditions and frameworks that have long-defined knowledge production, ensuring that previously silenced or subordinated voices have the space to contribute and reshape what is understood as knowledge. The call for decolonisation is thus an attempt to rectify the epistemic injustices imposed on colonised peoples, promoting more equitable and inclusive intellectual landscapes.

Decolonising African higher education requires the intentional integration of Indigenous knowledges and African philosophies into academic curricula, fostering an inclusive intellectual space where multiple ways of knowing coexist. Mutanho (2021) highlights how Indigenous knowledges, rooted in holistic, community-oriented traditions, offer a critical alternative to Western paradigms that prioritise individualism and empiricism. However, one must be wary of the long-term impacts of colonialism; as Tshishonga (2019) argues, colonialism systematically devalued these knowledge systems,

dismissing them as primitive. To counter this, Bhuda and Marumo (2022) advocate for reasserting African epistemologies, such as Ubuntu, in teaching and research to foster learning approaches that prioritise collaboration, oral traditions, and community-based methodologies. Furthermore, as Ezeanya-Esiobu (2019) points out, Indigenous knowledge is deeply embedded in language, yet African languages remain marginalised in academia. Promoting Indigenous languages in research, publishing, and instruction can help restore epistemic legitimacy to African intellectual traditions. Recognising the dominance of Western methodologies, Tshishonga (2019) and Mutanho (2021) both call for expanding research approaches to include participatory action research, storytelling, and oral history, ensuring that African ways of knowing are validated. Rather than rejecting Western knowledge, Omodan (2024) argues for a pluriversal approach where multiple epistemologies are valued equally. This shift requires institutional commitment, including establishing research centres on Indigenous knowledges, funding projects that document African philosophies, and incentivising scholarship that challenges colonial knowledge hierarchies. Through these efforts, higher education in Africa can move beyond symbolic gestures towards meaningful transformation that recognises and legitimises African intellectual traditions.

Eurocentric knowledge models have historically silenced or erased the emotional and subjective dimensions of lived experiences, particularly those of oppressed peoples (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). Black pain, in this sense, resists such erasure by foregrounding the raw, lived realities of suffering, survival, and resilience in the face of systemic injustice. It exposes the inherent violence and limitations of dominant knowledge systems by centring the experiences of Black communities, particularly in postcolonial African contexts (Sebola & Mogoboya, 2020). This concept demands that we reconsider whose knowledge is valued and how power dynamics shape the production and dissemination of knowledge. For example, the emotional and psychological trauma inflicted by colonialism, apartheid, and systemic racism has produced rich counter-narratives that resist the dehumanising discourses embedded in Eurocentric knowledge systems (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2021; Fricker, 2007). These counter-narratives challenge the neutrality of Western epistemologies, exposing their complicity in perpetuating inequality and exclusion. In contemporary movements like #RhodesMustFall and #BlackLivesMatter, Black pain is vocalised not just as a demand for justice but as an epistemic intervention, urging the world to recognise the value of Black experiences as critical sources of knowledge (Adefila et al., 2022). The process of acknowledging and validating Black pain disrupts the hegemony of Eurocentric knowledge, creating space for more diverse and inclusive forms of understanding. It insists on the necessity of rethinking knowledge through the lens of lived experience, trauma, and resilience, particularly those rooted in blackness and other marginalised identities.

7. Conclusion

Wounded epistemologies play a crucial role in reshaping knowledge systems by validating the experiences of historically marginalised groups. By recognising trauma, pain, and suffering as legitimate sources of knowledge, wounded epistemologies challenge exclusionary, often Eurocentric frameworks and elevate lived experiences—especially those marked by colonialism, systemic racism, and historical violence. This approach broadens our understanding of valuable knowledge, centring diverse perspectives to foster more equitable epistemic landscapes. In postcolonial societies, where the scars of colonialism and racial oppression remain, epistemic healing is essential. Beyond political and economic reform, it calls for acknowledging and repairing the devaluation of Indigenous and non-Western knowledge systems. This healing involves decolonising curricula and research methodologies, restoring dignity to excluded perspectives, and creating inclusive spaces for diverse epistemologies. Such shifts in education, social justice, and knowledge production are vital. Therefore, educators and policymakers must re-imagine curricula to include Indigenous African knowledges, dismantling colonial legacies. In social justice, addressing epistemic injustice opens new paths to combat systemic inequalities. Future research should democratise knowledge systems, amplify marginalised voices, and critically assess power dynamics in knowledge production. By integrating

diverse epistemologies, we can work towards a more just and inclusive understanding of the world that respects multiple ways of knowing.

8. Declarations

Funding: This research did not receive any external funding.

Acknowledgement: The author declares no acknowledgement.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Data Availability Statement: This article is based entirely on publicly available data and information sourced from peer-reviewed articles, reports, and other academic publications cited in the manuscript. No new primary data were generated or analysed during this study. Readers may refer to the cited sources for detailed information.

References

Abudu, K. U. (2022). Colonial legacy and knowledge production in Africa: Re-echoing the need for epistemic decolonisation. In D. Masaka (Ed.), *Knowledge production and the search for epistemic liberation in Africa* (pp. 49–67). Cham: Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-07965-8_5

Adefila, A., Texeira, R., Morini, L., Garcia, M., Delboni, T., Spolander, G., & Khalil-Babatunde, M. (2022). Higher education decolonisation: Whose voices and their geographical locations. *Globalisation, Societies and Education, 20*(3), 262-276. https://doi.org/10.1080/14767724.2021.1887724

Ahmed, A. K. (2020). #RhodesMustFall: How a decolonial student movement in the Global South inspired epistemic disobedience at the University of Oxford. *African Studies Review, 63*(2), 281–303. https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2019.49

Allard-Tremblay, Y. (2021). Rationalism and the silencing and distorting of Indigenous voices. *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy, 24*(7), 1024-1047. https://doi.org/10.1080/13698230.2019.1644581

Baffoe, M., Asimeng-Boahene, L., & Ogbuagu, B. C. (2014). Their way or no way: "Whiteness" as agent for marginalising and silencing minority voices in academic research and publication. *European Journal of Sustainable Development, 3*(1), 13-32. https://doi.org/10.14207/ejsd.2014.v3n1p13

Basevich, E. (2020). W. E. B. Du Bois's socialism: On the social epistemology of democratic reason. *Philosophical Topics, 48*(2), 23–50. https://www.jstor.org/stable/48652120

Besharah, C., & Olivier, M. (2014). The power of voice: Challenging racism and oppression. *Education Matters: The Journal of Teaching and Learning, 2*(2), 26-40.

Bhopal, K., Brown, H., & Jackson, J. (2015). BME academic flight from UK to overseas higher education: Aspects of marginalisation and exclusion. *British Educational Research Journal, 42*(2), 240–257. https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3204

Bhuda, M. T., & Marumo, P. (2022). Ubuntu philosophy and African Indigenous Knowledge Systems: Insights from decolonisation and indigenisation of research. *Gender and Behaviour, 20*(1), 19133-19151.

Billups, S., Thelamour, B., Thibodeau, P., & Durgin, F. H. (2022). On intersectionality: Visualising the invisibility of Black women. *Cognitive Research: Principles and Implications, 7*, 100. https://doi.org/10.1186/s41235-022-00450-1

Bonds, A., & Inwood, J. (2015). Beyond white privilege: Geographies of white supremacy and settler colonialism. *Progress in Human Geography, 40*(6), 715–733. https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132515613166

Bouka, Y. (2021). Women, colonial resistance, and decolonisation: Challenging African histories. In O. Yacob-Haliso & T. Falola (Eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of African Women's Studies* (pp. 1295–1313). Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

Burgard, S. A. (2006). Class, race, and inequality in South Africa. *Contemporary Sociology: A Journal of Reviews, 35*(6), 568-570. https://doi.org/10.1177/009430610603500610

Engerman, S. (2020). Slavery without racism, racism without slavery. *Journal of Global Slavery, 5*(3), 322–356. https://doi.org/10.1163/2405836X-00503005

Etieyibo, E. (2023). Race, intellectual racism, and the opened door. *Critical Philosophy of Race, 11*(2), 309–338. https://doi.org/10.5325/critphilrace.11.2.0309

Evans, K. (2019). The invisibility of Black girls in education. *Relational Child & Youth Care Practice, 32*(1), 77-90.

Ezeanya-Esiobu, C. (2019). *Indigenous knowledge and education in Africa.* Los Angeles: Springer Open.

Forbes, S. (2018). Who is afraid of decolonisation? *The SOAS Journal of Postgraduate Research, 11*, 124–132. https://doi.org/10.25501/SOAS.00026316

Fricker, M. (2007). *Epistemic injustice: Power and the ethics of knowing.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Fricker, M. (2017). Evolving concepts of epistemic injustice. In I. J. Kidd, J. Medina, & G. Pohlhaus Jr (Eds.), *Routledge Handbook of Epistemic Injustice* (pp. 53–60). London: Routledge.

Gobodo-Madikizela, P. (2012). Remembering the past: Nostalgia, traumatic memory, and the legacy of apartheid. *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology, 18*(3), 252-267. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0029078

Goetze, T. S. (2018). Hermeneutical dissent and the species of hermeneutical injustice. *Hypatia, 33*(1), 73-90.

Graham, M. (2004). Empowerment revisited—social work, resistance and agency in Black communities. *European Journal of Social Work, 7*(1), 43–56. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369145042000217393

Heleta, S., & Dilraj, I. (2024). Decolonisation is not even a footnote: On the dominant ideologies and smokescreens in South African higher education. *Transformation in Higher Education, 9*(0), a416. https://doi.org/10.4102/the.v9i0.416

Heleta, S., & Phiri, S. (2023). "Dem European teachings in my African school": Unpacking coloniality and Eurocentric hegemony in African education through Burna Boy's *Monsters You Made*. In N. Andrews & N. E. Khalema (Eds.), *Decolonizing African studies pedagogies: Knowledge production, epistemic imperialism and Black agency* (pp. 121-144). Cham: Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-37442-5_6

Henry, W. L. (2021). Black Lives Matter, decolonisation and the legacy of African enslavement. In S. Isaacs (Ed.), *Social problems in the UK: An introduction* (2nd ed., pp. 25-42). London: Routledge.

Heugh, K. (2023). Linguistic and epistemic erasure in Africa: Coloniality, linguistic human rights and decoloniality. In T. Skutnabb-Kangas & R. Phillipson (Eds.), *The Handbook of Linguistic Human Rights* (pp. 55-70). Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119753926.ch4

Higginbotham, F. (2013). *Ghosts of Jim Crow: Ending racism in post-racial America.* New York: New York University Press. https://doi.org/10.18574/nyu/9780814724460.001.0001

Hlabangane, N. (2021). The underside of modern knowledge: An epistemic break from Western science. In M. Steyn & W. Mpofu (Eds.), *Decolonising the human: Reflections from Africa on difference and oppression* (pp. 164-185). Johannesburg: Wits University Press.

Jones, B. L. (2021). The loud silence of racism: It is killing us all. *The American Journal of Bioethics, 21*(2), 4-6. https://doi.org/10.1080/15265161.2020.1864107

Kinloch, V., Penn, C., & Burkhard, T. (2020). Black Lives Matter: Storying, identities and counter-narratives. *Journal of Literacy Research, 52*(4), 382-405.

Kluttz, J., Walker, J., & Walter, P. (2020). Unsettling allyship, unlearning and learning towards decolonising solidarity. *Studies in the Education of Adults, 52*(1), 49-66. https://doi.org/10.1080/02660830.2019.1654591

Kolluri, S., & Tichavanduka, A. A. (2023). The counter-deficit lens in educational research: Interrogating conceptions of structural oppression. *Review of Educational Research, 93*(5), 641-678. https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543221125225

Kumah-Abiwu, F. (2020). Media gatekeeping and portrayal of Black men in America. *The Journal of Men's Studies, 28*(1), 64-81. https://doi.org/10.1177/1060826519846429

Kumalo, S. H. (2021). Resurrecting the Black Archive through the decolonisation of philosophy in South Africa. In S. Morreira, K. Luckett, S. H. Kumalo, & M. Ramgotra (Eds.), *Decolonising curricula and pedagogy in higher education: Bringing decolonial theory into contact with teaching practice* (pp. 19-36). London: Routledge.

Laubscher, L. (2024). Some sound, some fury, signifying very little: Frantz Fanon and psychological scholarship in South Africa. *South African Journal of Psychology, 0*(0), 1-14. https://doi.org/10.1177/00812463241287141

Laylor, A. (2024). Knowledge production and colonial myths: Centring Indigenous knowledges through decolonisation. In N. N. Wane (Ed.), *Education, Colonial Sickness* (pp. 131–150). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-40262-3_7

Leibowitz, B. (2017). Power, knowledge and learning: Dehegemonising colonial knowledge. *Alternation Journal, 24*(2), 99-119. https://doi.org/10.29086/2519-5476/2017/v24n2a6

Lotz-Sisitka, H., Wals, A. E., Kronlid, D., & McGarry, D. (2015). Transformative, transgressive social learning: Rethinking higher education pedagogy in times of systemic global dysfunction. *Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability, 16*, 73–80. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cosust.2015.07.018

Maseko, S. (2020). A reflection on the politics of knowledge production at South African universities: When Black identity meets the legacies of institutional racism. In Y. G. Acar, S. M. Moss, & Ö. M. Uluǧ (Eds.), *Researching peace, conflict, and power in the field* (pp. 301–319). Springer.

Mathebula, T. H., & Odeku, K. O. (2023). An analysis of post-apartheid anti-fronting interventions fostering mainstreaming of Black South Africans into the corporate sector. *Laws, 12*(6), 87. https://doi.org/10.3390/laws12060087

Mentan, T. (2018). *Africa in the colonial ages of empire: Slavery, capitalism, racism, colonialism, decolonisation, independence as recolonisation, and beyond.* Langaa Research & Publishing Common Initiative Group.

Mignolo, W. D. (2007). Introduction: Coloniality of power and de-colonial thinking. *Cultural Studies, 21*(2/3), 155-167. https://doi.org/10.1080/09502380601162498

More, M. P. (2014). The intellectual foundations of the Black Consciousness Movement. In P. C. Vale, L. Hamilton, & E. H. Prinsloo (Eds.), *Intellectual traditions in South Africa: Ideas, individuals and institutions* (pp. 173–196). University of KwaZulu-Natal Press.

Moreton-Robinson, A. (2011). The white man's burden: Patriarchal white epistemic violence and Aboriginal women's knowledges within the academy. *Australian Feminist Studies, 26*(70), 413-431. https://doi.org/10.1080/08164649.2011.621175

Mutanho, C. (2021). *Exploring decolonising the university's Science curriculum through bottom-up decolonisation: Affordances and hindrances.* Unpublished PhD thesis, Rhodes University, Education Department, Grahamstown.

Mutongoza, B. H., Mutanho, C., & Makeleni, S. (2023). Ending curriculum violence and academic ancestral worship: An Afrocentric perspective on decolonising higher education in Africa. *E-Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences, 4*(12), 143-160. https://doi.org/10.38159/ehass.202341213

Naicker, V., & Luckett, K. (2022). Haunting in postcolony: Race, place and intergenerational trauma on a South African campus. In L. Pillière & K. Bigand (Eds.), *Memory and identity: Ghosts of the past in the English-speaking world* (pp. 133–150). Routledge.

Ndebele, N. S. (2016). To be or not to be: No longer at ease. *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education, 15*(1), 15-28. https://doi.org/10.1177/1474022215613610

Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S. (2018). The dynamics of epistemological decolonisation in the 21st century: Towards epistemic freedom. *Strategic Review for Southern Africa, 40*(1), 16-45. https://doi.org/10.35293/srsa.v40i1.268

Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S. (2021). The cognitive empire, politics of knowledge and African intellectual productions: Reflections on struggles for epistemic freedom and resurgence of decolonisation in the twenty-first century. *Third World Quarterly, 42*(5), 882-901. https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2020.1775487

Nyamnjoh, F. B. (2015). Black pain matters: Down with Rhodes. *Pax Academica, 1*(1/2), 47-70.

Omodan, B. I. (2024). The roles of epistemology and decoloniality in addressing power dynamics in university education. *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, 1-15. https://doi.org/10.1080/14767724.2024.2335661

Omodan, B. I., Mpiti, P. T., & Mtsi, N. (2023). A conceptual analysis of what it means to decolonise the curriculum. *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research, 22*(7), 344-355. https://doi.org/10.26803/ijlter.22.7.18

Ouzman, S. (2004). Silencing and sharing southern African Indigenous and embedded knowledge. In C. Smith & H. M. Wobst (Eds.), *Indigenous Archaeologies: Decolonising theory and practice* (pp. 195–212). Routledge.

Phalafala, P. U. (2020). Decolonising world literature through orality. In S. Helgesson, B. Neumann, & G. Rippl (Eds.), *Handbook of Anglophone World Literatures* (pp. 193-208). De Gruyter. https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110583182-014

Pityana, N. B. (2021). Steve Biko: Philosopher of Black Consciousness. In A. Adebajo (Ed.), *The Pan-African pantheon: Prophets, poets, and philosophers* (pp. 391-409). Manchester University Press.

Quijano, A. (2007). Coloniality and modernity/rationality. *Cultural Studies, 21*(2-3), 168–178. https://doi.org/10.1080/09502380601164353

Rodríguez, D. (2022). The transdisciplinarity and epistemic communities: Knowledge decolonisation through university extension programmes. *Geographical Research, 60*(1), 113-125. https://doi.org/10.1111/1745-5871.12524

Romão, J. E. (2014). Epistemology of the oppressed: The way to enhance the intercultural dimension of citizenship education. In A. Teodoro & M. Guilherme (Eds.), *European and Latin American higher education between mirrors* (pp. 41-54). Brill.

Sebola, M., & Mogoboya, M. J. (2020). Re-imagining Africanisation of sustainable epistemologies and pedagogies in (South) African higher education: A conceptual intervention. *South African Journal of Higher Education, 34*(6), 237-254.

Smart, C.-A. (2019). African oral tradition, cultural retentions and the transmission of knowledge in the West Indies. *IFLA Journal, 45*(1), 16-25. https://doi.org/10.1177/0340035218823219

Stelios, M., & Papaioannou, E. (2016). The long-run effects of the scramble for Africa. *American Economic Review, 106*(7), 1802-1848. https://doi.org/10.1257/aer.20131311

Suchet, S. (2002). 'Totally wild'? Colonising discourses, Indigenous knowledges and managing wildlife. *Australian Geographer, 33*(2), 141-157. https://doi.org/10.1080/00049180220150972

Sutherland, M. E. (2023). Africanisms in the Caribbean region: African descendants' resistance to enslavement and subjugation in post-emancipation. *Journal of Black Studies, 54*(5), 355-373. https://doi.org/10.1177/00219347231170859

Tan, S. E. (2021). Whose decolonisation? Checking for intersectionality, lane-policing and academic privilege from a transnational (Chinese) vantage point. *Ethnomusicology Forum, 30*(1), 140-162. https://doi.org/10.1080/17411912.2021.1938447

Tight, M. (2024). Decolonisation and higher education: A critical review of a contemporary concern, policy and theory. *Higher Education Policy, 37*, 59-72. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41307-022-00296-8

Tobias, H., & Joseph, A. (2020). Sustaining systemic racism through psychological gaslighting: Denials of racial profiling and justifications of carding by police utilising local news media. *Race and Justice, 10*(4), 424–455. https://doi.org/10.1177/2153368718760969

Tshishonga, N. (2019). The legacy of apartheid on democracy and citizenship in post-apartheid South Africa: An inclusionary and exclusionary binary? *AFFRIKA Journal of Politics, Economics and Society, 9*(1), 167-191. https://doi.org/10.31920/2075-6534/2019/9n1a8

Vaditya, V. (2018). Social domination and epistemic marginalisation: Towards a methodology of the oppressed. *Social Epistemology, 32*(4), 272–285. https://doi.org/10.1080/02691728.2018.1444111

White, J. (1983). Veiled testimony: Negro spirituals and the slave experience. *Journal of American Studies, 17*(2), 251–263. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021875800017370

Yacek, D. W. (2020). Should education be transformative? *Journal of Moral Education, 49*(2), 257–274. https://doi.org/10.1080/03057240.2019.1589434