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Conceptual Article

Epistemic Justice, Institutional Transformation and the Pursuit of a Decolonised African Academe

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Abstract: Decolonisation aims to create a more just, inclusive, and equitable academic landscape in Africa by centring marginalised voices and embracing diverse epistemologies. Despite the clamour for truly decolonised universities and the incessant calls for transformation, several studies have demonstrated the pervasiveness of epistemic injustice and the laboured pace at which genuine change is happening. Against this background, this article examines the need for decolonising higher education within the African context, exploring the enduring legacies of colonialism and their continued influence on academic institutions. The article analyses colonial power's psychological, epistemic, and cultural dimensions by drawing on key postcolonial and decolonial theories, including the seminal arguments presented by Said, Fanon, Spivak, and Bhabha. The article also critiques the limitations of postcolonial theory and highlights the emergence of decolonial thought as a more radical approach to dismantling colonial structures. The article identifies four key sites for decolonising the African academe: epistemic, pedagogical, institutional, and research-based. Epistemic decolonisation calls for the reclamation of African ways of knowing and challenges the dominance of Western epistemologies. Pedagogical decolonisation focuses on curriculum reform and the integration of indigenous knowledge. Institutional decolonisation addresses the need to dismantle colonial structures within universities and promote academic autonomy. Research decolonisation advocates for community-centred approaches that empower local voices. Finally, the article emphasises the importance of intersectionality in decolonisation efforts and argues that neglecting the interconnectedness of various forms of oppression risks reproducing existing hierarchies.

Keywords: Academia, decolonisation, epistemic justice, higher education, transformation.

1. Introduction

The enduring legacies of colonialism continue to affect the socio-political, economic, and intellectual landscapes of many African nations. These are not merely historical relics but persist in contemporary forms, subtly yet powerfully shaping educational, cultural, and intellectual spheres (Omodan, 2024a; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2021). Drawing from the work of Crawford, Mai-Bornu, and Landström (2021), decoloniality has emerged as a crucial framework for addressing and dismantling these persistent structures of coloniality, offering a critical lens to examine and contest the ongoing effects of colonialism, particularly within academic institutions. Studies such as Omodan (2023a) and Dompere (2020) reveal that as African universities grapple with these historical legacies and the ongoing challenges of neocolonial influence, the imperative for decolonising higher education has become increasingly urgent. A central tenet of the decolonial project is the interrogation of whose knowledge is valued and amplified within academic spaces. Aketema and Ladzepko (2023) and Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2017) remind us that at the heart of the colonial project were education systems explicitly designed to erase and suppress indigenous knowledge systems while elevating Western epistemologies. This historical injustice has resulted in African educational institutions often being dominated by Eurocentric curricula and methodologies, perpetuating the marginalisation of African ways of knowing (Mutongoza, Mutanho, & Makeleni, 2023). The works of Heleta and Mzileni (2024)

and Stein et al. (2020) inspire an interrogation of critical questions: Whose knowledge counts in the academic sphere? Whose voices are granted authority and visibility? How do the historical legacies of colonialism, compounded by neocolonial economic and political structures, continue to shape the present academic realities of African students, scholars, and institutions? These questions are particularly salient in postcolonial Africa, where Western paradigms often dominate, overlooking valuable indigenous approaches.

Decolonial thought challenges the pervasive dominance of Western knowledge systems that govern global academic standards. Mutongoza et al. (2023) contend that as African higher education institutions strive for autonomy and relevance in the 21st century, reclaiming and reasserting African ways of knowing, teaching, and learning has become paramount. Tight (2024) and Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2021) remind us that decoloniality offers an opportunity to rethink and reimagine the very foundations of academic knowledge by advocating for a radical departure from the valorisation of Eurocentric perspectives as infallible. The decolonial discourse must thus be viewed as more than a mere critique of colonial history; it is an earnest call for a new epistemological order grounded in justice, inclusivity, and the recognition of indigenous wisdom (Tobi, 2020; Heleta, 2018). Given the present-day realities, this includes exploring how technology can be leveraged to promote indigenous knowledge and connect African scholars while acknowledging the potential for technology to reinforce existing inequalities. Furthermore, the decolonial project intersects significantly with feminist and queer perspectives, recognising that colonialism also imposed specific gender and sexual norms that continue to impact African societies. This article explores the theoretical foundations of postcolonial studies and its contemporary critiques, situating the discourse within the specific context of African academia and its connection to decolonisation in the broader Global South.

2. Theorising Postcolonial Discourse

More than just a mere system of social, economic, and political domination, colonialism fundamentally shaped knowledge production, identity, and self-perception in colonised societies. Theorists such as Frantz Fanon, Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, and Homi Bhabha have provided critical insights into how colonial power operates at psychological, cultural, and epistemic levels. Their works remain instrumental in understanding how colonial ideologies persist and influence contemporary academia, particularly within African universities. This section explores four key theoretical perspectives that interrogate the lasting impact of colonialism. Fanon's psychoanalytic approach reveals the deep psychological scars imposed on the colonised and exposes the mechanisms of internalised oppression and alienation. Said's concept of Orientalism highlights the West's construction of the "other" to justify its dominance, a framework that continues to shape global knowledge hierarchies. Spivak's critique of representation interrogates how subaltern voices are systematically marginalised, even within postcolonial discourse. Lastly, Bhabha's notion of the "third space" complicates binary understandings of colonial relations by illustrating the fluidity of cultural identities in postcolonial contexts.

2.1 The psychological dimensions of colonialism: Frantz Fanon

Frantz Fanon's work, particularly *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) and *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), provides a crucial understanding of the psychological dimensions of colonialism. He articulates how colonialism distorts the self-perception of the colonised, creating a sense of inferiority and internalised oppression. Thus, according to Farhan (2018), Fanon's concept of colonial trauma highlights the long-term psychological scars inflicted by systemic violence and racism. This internalisation manifests as a deep-seated sense of inadequacy and a desire to emulate the coloniser, leading to alienation from one's culture and identity. This psychological damage is a key component of colonial control, as it undermines resistance and perpetuates the power imbalance. According to Bhabha (1994a), in *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon demonstrates the internalisation of colonial

stereotypes and the resulting alienation experienced by colonised individuals by focusing on the dynamics of race and representation, as well as the impact of colonial language policies on the psyche of the colonised. His later work, *The Wretched of the Earth*, shifts focus to the collective experience of decolonisation, arguing that it is an inherently violent process necessary for reclaiming the humanity of the oppressed. This assertion, while controversial, must be understood within the context of the pervasive violence inherent in colonial systems (Quinn, 2017; Fairchild, 1994). Fanon's analysis of the Algerian War in *The Wretched of the Earth* illustrates how colonial violence breeds counter-violence, creating a cycle of trauma and retribution. As Gordon (1995) and Fashina (1989) argue, Fanon's work should not be simplified to a mere endorsement of violence but rather understood as an analysis of the psychological and social conditions created by colonialism that make violence a seemingly inevitable outcome. Consequently, in the African academic context, Fanon's theoretical perspectives can be used to illuminate the profound impact of colonial education systems designed to dehumanise and subjugate, emphasising the need for a radical reimagining of education that prioritises the dignity and agency of African scholars and students. This, as noted in studies by Crawford et al. (2021) and Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2021), also relates to the imposition of Western standards and norms, including the decolonisation of curricula, research methodologies, and institutional structures within African universities (Omodan, 2023a).

2.2 Constructing the "Orient": Edward Said's orientalism

Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) laid the foundation for postcolonial critique by exposing how the West constructed and perpetuated an image of the "Orient" as inferior and exotic to justify and maintain colonial dominance. Thus, the Western self-positioning as culturally and intellectually superior continues to resonate in discussions about epistemic hegemony (Said, 2023). Said demonstrated how Western scholarship, literature, and art contributed to the creation of a distorted and stereotypical image of the East, reinforcing colonial power structures. This construction of the "Orient" served to legitimise Western intervention and control over Eastern territories and populations. However, critics have noted that *Orientalism* primarily focuses on the Middle East and does not fully account for the diversity of African colonial experiences (Güven, 2019; Young, 2003). As Mazrui (2005) and Mudimbe (1988) argue, while Said's work is invaluable, it is crucial to recognise the specificities of different colonial contexts and avoid homogenising the experiences of colonised peoples. For example, the colonial experience in sub-Saharan Africa differed significantly from that of North Africa or the Middle East, with variations in colonial administration, economic exploitation, and cultural impact (Cooper, 2005). Furthermore, contemporary scholarship calls for re-evaluating Said's (1978) theories in light of globalisation and new forms of cultural domination, such as through media, economic practices, and technological advancements (de Sousa Santos, 2014; Mignolo, 2011). This is particularly relevant in the digital age, where Rodriguez Medina (2024) and Asea (2022) argue that representations of the Global South continue to be shaped by Western-centric narratives. Within the African academe, Said's critique of knowledge production invites a necessary interrogation of curricula that still privilege Western canons and methodologies and how these methodologies are often disseminated through technology (Hamadi, 2014; Mart & Toker, 2010). This includes examining the role of digital platforms and social media in perpetuating Orientalist stereotypes and representations (Ye, 2023).

2.3 The silencing of the Subaltern: Gayatri Spivak

Gayatri Spivak's *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (1988) interrogates the silencing of marginalised voices within postcolonial discourse, exploring the limits of representation for those outside dominant power structures. Spivak argues that Western intellectuals, in their well-intentioned attempts to represent the subaltern, often inadvertently perpetuate "epistemic violence" (Spivak, 1988, p. 283). This violence occurs because these representations, even when sympathetic, are framed within the very discourses that marginalise the subaltern in the first place. The concept of epistemic violence

highlights the inherent power dynamics involved in representation and the difficulty of truly giving voice to the marginalised. As Behera (2023) notes, Spivak critiques the tendency of Western intellectuals to assume they can speak for the subaltern, thus erasing the possibility of the subaltern speaking on their own terms. Spivak's central argument is that the subaltern, by definition, occupies a position outside the hegemonic circuits of representation that determine what constitutes legitimate discourse (Faist, 2017). This does not mean the subaltern is literally mute; rather, their voices are systematically distorted or rendered unintelligible within dominant frameworks. Faist (2017) explains that the subaltern's speech is not heard as legitimate discourse within the established power structures. Spivak's work draws attention to the intersectional nature of subalternity and highlights how factors such as gender, caste, and class can further marginalise individuals and groups (Carley, 2022). This concept is particularly relevant to African academia. R'boul (2024) and Msila (2022) observe that the erasure of local knowledge and the marginalisation of certain groups within African societies remain pressing concerns. These scholars highlight how colonial legacies continue to shape academic practices, often silencing indigenous voices and prioritising Western epistemologies. Furthermore, as de Jong (2022) and Loomba (1998) emphasise, Spivak's work highlights the inherent complexities of representation and the crucial need to consider power dynamics carefully to give voice to marginalised groups. This understanding directly intersects with the call by Chaka (2023) for the decolonisation of research methodologies, advocating for approaches that empower rather than exploit local communities and ensure that research practices do not further perpetuate epistemic violence. By centring indigenous knowledge and methods, research can become a tool for liberation rather than further marginalisation. This includes employing participatory research methods and prioritising community-based knowledge production.

2.4. The "Third Space" of cultural negotiation: Homi Bhabha

Homi Bhabha's influential work, *The Location of Culture*, introduced the concept of the "third space" to describe a site of cultural negotiation and transformation arising from colonial encounters (Bhabha, 1994b). This framework challenged the binary positions of colonisers and colonised, emphasising the fluidity of cultural identities through hybridity and ambivalence (Bhandari, 2022; Chakrabarti, 2012). Bhabha (1994b) argued that colonial power is constantly contested within this liminal zone where cultures intersect, generating new forms of expression and identity through processes like mimicry, where imperfect imitation of the coloniser creates space for subversion. This "third space" is not merely a blending of cultures but a site of constant negotiation and reinterpretation. However, critics like Fay and Haydon (2017) have pointed to the abstract nature of Bhabha's work and its limited engagement with the material realities of colonised peoples, particularly in Africa, where economic and social disparities persist.

In response to these critiques, scholars have examined hybridity within specific contexts (Azada-Palacios, 2022; Mizutani, 2013). This contextual approach allows for a finer understanding of how hybridity operates within specific historical and social conditions. For example, studying the hybridity of language use in postcolonial societies can reveal how colonial languages are adapted and reconfigured to express local identities (Tunde-Awe, 2014). The digital age has introduced new dimensions to hybridity; Bhandari (2022), along with Davis (2010), explores how globalisation and technology create online "third spaces" where African youth negotiate local and global identities. These digital spaces offer opportunities for new forms of cultural expression and exchange. However, this digital hybridity is also marked by inequalities in access and control; Milan and Treré (2019) highlight the need to consider both material and digital contexts alongside Bhabha's theoretical framework, especially within the African context, where disparities in internet access and digital literacy can exacerbate existing social inequalities. Therefore, while Bhabha's concept of the third space offers a valuable theoretical lens, it is crucial to consider its limitations and complement it with analyses of specific material and digital contexts, particularly when examining postcolonial

experiences in Africa. This includes considering the role of social media in creating both opportunities for cultural exchange and new forms of digital colonialism (Kwet, 2019).

3. **Critiques, Adaptations, and Decolonial Thought**

While postcolonial theory has been instrumental in revealing the lingering effects of colonialism on knowledge production, culture, and identity, it has not been without criticism. Scholars have questioned its applicability to the material conditions in postcolonial societies, its reliance on Western theoretical frameworks, and its potential detachment from pressing socio-economic realities. In response, decolonial thought has emerged as an alternative framework, advocating for a more radical reconfiguration of knowledge systems and a deliberate move away from servitude to Eurocentric epistemologies. This section explores three interrelated themes and their contemporary applications. The first theme examines concerns about the limitations of postcolonial discourse, particularly its tendency to prioritise textual analysis over material realities. The second theme traces the development of decolonial thought, highlighting its call for epistemic delinking and the reclamation of indigenous knowledge systems. The final theme clarifies the differences between postcolonialism and decoloniality, demonstrating how these perspectives inform ongoing efforts to transform education, research, and governance in formerly colonised societies.

3.1 Critiques of postcolonial theory

Despite its valuable contributions to understanding the lasting impacts of colonialism, postcolonial theory has faced significant critiques. A central concern revolves around the potential disconnect between its theoretical frameworks, often developed within Western academic contexts, and the material realities of postcolonial societies. This critique highlights a possible gap between theoretical discourse and the lived experiences of those who have endured colonialism and its aftermath. This disconnect can lead to a sense of irrelevance or even alienation among those whose experiences are being theorised.

A key criticism of early postcolonial work, particularly that of Edward Said, centres on its primary focus on textual analysis, sometimes at the expense of analysing the underlying economic and political structures that perpetuate colonial power (Ahmad, 1992). This textual emphasis, some argue, risks overlooking the concrete material conditions shaped by colonial exploitation. Similarly, Frantz Fanon's emphasis on violence as a means of liberation has been critiqued for its perceived determinism (Caute, 1970), potentially neglecting other forms of resistance, agency, and the complexities of postcolonial struggles.

These critiques emphasise the need for theoretical approaches that directly engage with the convoluted social, economic, and political conditions of postcolonial societies. This includes considering the role of global capitalism in perpetuating neocolonial forms of exploitation (Yeros & Jha, 2020). As McClintock (1992) argues, it is crucial to move beyond a purely textual or discursive understanding of colonialism and to consider the material effects of colonial power, including resource extraction, environmental degradation, and the establishment of exploitative economic systems.

This material focus extends to technology, where uneven access, infrastructure, and control perpetuate new forms of dependency and digital colonialism (Couldry & Mejias, 2019). The digital realm is not neutral; it reflects and reinforces existing power imbalances. This includes examining the environmental impact of digital technologies and the unequal distribution of technological resources.

3.2 The emergence of decolonial thought

Decolonial thought emerged partly in response to perceived shortcomings in postcolonial theory. While postcolonialism often focuses on the cultural and psychological legacies of colonialism,

decoloniality, as articulated by scholars like Mignolo (2011) and Quijano (2007), advocates for a more radical "delinking" from Eurocentric knowledge systems. Quijano's concept of the "coloniality of power" emphasises the enduring influence of colonial power structures in contemporary global systems, including economic, political, and knowledge production systems. Omodan (2023a) cautions that this delinking is not about rejecting all Western knowledge but about creating space for other epistemologies to flourish. This perspective argues that, even after formal independence, colonial patterns of domination persist through neocolonial economic policies, political influence, and control over information and technology. This neocolonial control can manifest in various ways, including funding dependencies that constrain the autonomy of universities in the Global South and shape research agendas (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). According to Jacoby (2002), this includes the influence of international development organisations and their imposition of Western-centric development models. A decolonial approach to academia in Africa and other formerly colonised regions necessitates fundamentally rethinking research methodologies, curricula, and institutional governance (Mutongoza et al., 2023). This delinking is about creating space for alternative epistemologies to flourish and contribute to global knowledge production, including leveraging technology to disseminate this knowledge. It also involves recognising the intersectional nature of colonial power and acknowledging how it interacts with gender, sexuality, race, class, and other forms of social difference (Read, 2024; Lugones, 2007). This requires engaging with the complex and diverse experiences of marginalised groups within postcolonial societies (Omodan, 2024b).

3.3 Key distinctions and contemporary applications

A key distinction between postcolonial and decolonial thought lies in their primary focus. Postcolonial studies often analyse the effects of colonialism, whereas decoloniality aims to actively undo the colonial matrix of power. Mutongoza, Linake, and Makeleni (2024) argue that this includes addressing ongoing epistemic violence that silences Indigenous voices and perpetuates Western dominance in academic discourse. The focus on action and transformation distinguishes decoloniality from the more analytical approach of postcolonialism. Decolonial scholars like Mills (1997) have highlighted the "epistemology of ignorance," which describes how dominant groups actively maintain ignorance about the realities of systemic injustice. This relates to the "genres of being human" (Wade, 2017) imposed by coloniality, which marginalise or erase non-Western ways of being. Building on this, scholars like Escobar (2004) and, more recently, Johnson and Mbah (2024) emphasise the need to move beyond development paradigms rooted in Western modernity and embrace alternative visions of social and economic organisation, often drawing on Indigenous knowledge and practices. This involves recognising the value of Indigenous knowledge systems in addressing contemporary challenges (Whyte, 2018), a distinction that also has implications for how we approach research and knowledge production. While postcolonial studies may analyse the representation of the "other" in Western literature, decolonial approaches seek to create spaces for the "other" to speak for themselves. This requires a fundamental shift in power dynamics and a commitment to centring marginalised voices. This includes embracing Indigenous epistemologies, promoting African languages in education and research, and supporting the development of culturally relevant curricula (Mutongoza et al., 2023).

4. Sites for decolonising the African Academe

As demonstrated by the several debates on decolonisation, the decolonisation of the African academe demands critical engagement across various interconnected domains. This section explores four key sites requiring urgent intervention: epistemic, pedagogical, institutional, and research-based decolonisation.

4.1 Epistemic decolonisation: reclaiming African ways of knowing

At the heart of transforming the African academe lies epistemic decolonisation—a process that challenges the enduring dominance of Western-centric knowledge systems and affirms the validity of indigenous African epistemologies (Mungwini et al., 2019). Epistemic justice is a central concern, demanding a critical examination of whose knowledge is legitimised and valued within academic spaces. Western epistemology has often functioned as a form of epistemicide (de Sousa Santos, 2014), systematically erasing and marginalising alternative ways of knowing. Fleming et al. (2023) and Thambinathan and Kinsella (2021) argue that this erasure is particularly evident in research methodologies and Western theoretical frameworks, effectively silencing the rich oral traditions embedded within African societies. Decolonial efforts, therefore, advocate for the elevation and revitalisation of indigenous knowledge systems, promoting methodologies grounded in local contexts. As championed by Thambinathan and Kinsella (2021) and Chilisa (2012), collaborative, community-based research approaches offer powerful models, ensuring that research prioritises local voices and remains relevant to the communities it engages. Furthermore, epistemic decolonisation demands moving beyond extractive data collection practices by harnessing technology for community empowerment and facilitating the documentation, preservation, and dissemination of indigenous knowledge (de Sousa Santos, 2014). These transformative practices underscore the need for participatory and inclusive approaches that democratise the production and circulation of knowledge. Omodan and Dastile (2023) argue that these approaches democratise research by centring African voices and ensuring that indigenous knowledges are recognised and validated. For Omodan and Dastile (2023), participatory methodologies challenge the dominance of Western epistemologies and create space for alternative and often overlooked ways of knowing by engaging communities as co-producers of knowledge. This transformation is essential for decolonising research and fostering more contextually relevant and authentic knowledge production in Africa.

4.2 Pedagogical decolonisation: Cultivating culturally relevant education

Curriculum reform is a cornerstone of decolonising African higher education. This process seeks to meaningfully integrate Indigenous knowledge into academic programmes and cultivate culturally relevant pedagogies (Shahjahan et al., 2022). According to Pillay (2016), landmark movements like #RhodesMustFall illustrated the urgency of decolonising physical symbols, spaces, and curricular content. This movement catalysed broader conversations about decolonisation throughout South African higher education, resulting in incremental curriculum changes—though the process continues to face significant complexities (Knudsen & Andersen, 2018). Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2023) argues that while developing African studies curricula that explicitly prioritise African perspectives represents a crucial step forward, integrating Indigenous knowledge into curricula presents inherent challenges. This is exemplified by Yende (2020), who notes that balancing global academic standards with the imperative for culturally relevant content requires careful and ongoing negotiation. Crucially, Mutongoza et al. (2023) warn that tokenistic inclusion of Indigenous knowledge must be avoided; genuine decolonisation necessitates a fundamental shift in underlying epistemological frameworks. Multilingual education also emerges as a vital tool in pedagogical decolonisation, facilitating the transmission and preservation of Indigenous languages and the rich knowledge they encode (Chaka, 2023). Nevertheless, effective implementation of multilingual education requires substantial institutional support and dedicated resources. Overcoming these challenges demands a sustained commitment to reshaping the educational landscape in ways that authentically reflect the continent's diverse cultural and intellectual heritage.

4.3 Institutional decolonisation: dismantling colonial structures

Institutional decolonisation is essential for achieving meaningful and lasting transformation within African higher education. Despite growing recognition of its importance, significant barriers continue to impede progress. Jansen and Walters (2022) reveal that these barriers include deeply

entrenched bureaucratic structures, many of which are direct legacies of colonial administrations and are inherently resistant to change. The persistent reliance on Western funding, often accompanied by conditions that reinforce Western epistemologies and priorities, further constrains institutional autonomy and distorts research agendas, diverting them from locally defined needs (Albertus, 2019). These funding dependencies similarly impact access to technology and digital resources, influencing the availability of tools and how they are deployed. Heleta (2018) notes that the persistence of colonial mindsets among some faculty and administrators adds to these challenges, generating resistance to transformative reforms. True decolonisation demands systemic change that transcends superficial adjustments. It requires a fundamental reimagining of institutional priorities and the development of policies that actively promote academic autonomy and foster transformative change (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2017). Drawing from the work of Omodan (2024a) and Ciofalo, Dudgeon, and Nikora (2022), one can aver that it is imperative for African universities to critically confront their historical legacy as instruments of colonial governance and to realign themselves with the aspirations and needs of their communities. This realignment necessitates addressing issues of access and equity, ensuring that historically marginalised groups within African societies have genuinely equal opportunities to participate in higher education (Omodan, 2024b; Asea, 2022). Such an inclusive approach underscores the urgent need for robust institutional frameworks that actively promote academic autonomy and facilitate transformative change.

4.4 Research decolonisation: empowering communities through knowledge production

Research decolonisation is a critical process that intersects with and amplifies efforts toward epistemic and institutional transformation. A central component of this endeavour is the rigorous interrogation of Western research methodologies and theoretical frameworks, which have historically marginalised or overlooked African oral traditions and diverse knowledge systems (Thambinathan & Kinsella, 2021). Decolonial research challenges these imbalances by prioritising collaborative, community-centred approaches that elevate local voices and ensure that research provides tangible, beneficial outcomes for the communities involved (Chilisa, 2012). As R'boul (2024) argues, this transformative shift requires a fundamental realignment of power dynamics within the research process, where traditionally dominant research paradigms are dismantled and replaced by equitable, participatory practices. Fleming et al. (2023) further emphasise the need to depart from extractive methodologies, advocating for frameworks that empower communities as co-creators of knowledge rather than passive subjects. Consequently, decolonising research is not merely about incorporating indigenous elements into established academic structures; Omodan (2024b) calls us to acknowledge that it represents a profound reimagining of educational practices, systems, and priorities. This reimagining must be deeply rooted in the rich, diverse intellectual traditions of the African continent, challenging the dominance of Western paradigms and fostering the development of knowledge systems that reflect and honour the lived experiences and wisdom of local communities.

5. **Intersectionality and the Broader Implications**

The decolonisation of education demands an intersectional approach to fully address the complex, interconnected systems of oppression inherited from colonial rule. Colonialism established multiple layers of control, such as racialised, gendered, and class-based subjugation, each reinforcing and compounding the others (Knudsen & Andersen, 2018). Drawing from Crenshaw's (1989) intersectionality arguments, this article aligns with de Saxe and Trotter-Simons (2021), who argue that dismantling extant colonial remnants in academia requires recognising how these forms of oppression operate in tandem and mutually reinforce one another. Without an intersectional perspective, Harris and Watson-Vandiver (2020) warn that transformation efforts risk inadvertently reproducing existing hierarchies, potentially excluding or marginalising specific groups within an otherwise "liberated" framework. An education system that fails to engage with intersecting

identities neglects the compounded discrimination faced by individuals at the nexus of race, gender, class, and other social categories (Mirza, 2015). To achieve true liberation, a decolonised education must centre these intersections and ensure that all groups, regardless of their multiple, overlapping identities, are equitably included in the transformation process.

A non-intersectional approach to decolonisation fails to address critical dimensions of oppression that disproportionately affect marginalised groups. One can argue that focusing solely on indigenising the curriculum without addressing gender dynamics within Indigenous communities risks marginalising the knowledge and experiences of Indigenous women. In many Indigenous communities, women are central to transmitting traditional ecological knowledge—such as expertise in agriculture, plant medicine, and sustainable practices (von Maltitz & Bahta, 2024; Hlatywayo, 2021). However, Enzenweke (2015) argues that the perspectives of male elders are often given more space, thereby silencing essential female contributions to cultural heritage. This silencing manifests in stark educational disparities, as reflected in data showing that Indigenous women, in some contexts, experience lower educational attainment than their male counterparts (Park, 2021). Similarly, Gilroy et al. (2018) demonstrate that decolonising language policies without accounting for the needs of students with disabilities may inadvertently introduce new forms of exclusion. These overlooked barriers highlight the importance of adopting a comprehensive, intersectional approach to ensure all students have equal educational opportunities (Cooms et al., 2024).

Adopting an intersectional approach to decolonisation holds significant transformative potential for education. First, as Asea (2022) contends, it ensures the inclusion of diverse voices and experiences in the creation of knowledge, leading to a richer, more rounded understanding of history, culture, and society. This inclusive approach enhances the curriculum and engenders critical thinking among students by exposing them to a broader spectrum of perspectives. Moreover, intersectional decolonisation contributes to more equitable access to education by addressing intersecting barriers and improving outcomes for marginalised students who face compounded disadvantages (Sibanda & Maseko, 2024). One can draw from the challenges faced by Black girls in low-income communities, who encounter unique forms of discrimination arising from the intersection of racism, sexism, and classism. Morris (2022) argues that this intersectional lens highlights how Black girls experience disproportionate academic struggles and disciplinary actions, often referred to as the "pushout" phenomenon, compared to their peers. An intersectional decolonisation approach can thus identify these unique barriers and work toward eliminating them, ensuring that these students have the support they need to succeed.

Furthermore, intersectionality challenges the deep-seated power dynamics within educational systems between the coloniser and the colonised, and also those within colonised communities. Gender and class hierarchies within Indigenous and postcolonial societies are often overlooked in the context of decolonisation; yet, they play a crucial role in shaping social relations and power structures (Sheehan, 2020). An intersectional approach helps promote more equitable social relations and contributes to creating inclusive, non-hierarchical communities by addressing these internal power dynamics (Gram-Hanssen, Schafenacker, & Bentz, 2022). Ultimately, Mutongoza et al. (2023) convince us that when the decolonisation of education is aligned with broader social justice objectives, stakeholders can more readily work to dismantle multiple, intersecting forms of oppression. This process contributes to the development of a more inclusive, fair, and liberated society where all individuals can thrive, regardless of their intersecting identities.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

This article explored the complex dimensions of decolonising higher education within the African context and highlighted the enduring impact of colonial legacies on academic institutions. Through engaging with foundational postcolonial theories and the subsequent development of decolonial thought, the article demonstrated the urgent need for a radical shift away from Eurocentric

knowledge systems and institutional structures. The article's analysis of key sites for decolonisation—epistemic, pedagogical, institutional, and research-based—emphasised the interconnectedness of these efforts and the necessity for a holistic approach. Crucially, this article has emphasised the importance of intersectionality in decolonisation efforts. Through recognising the interconnectedness of various forms of oppression, including those based on race, gender, and class, higher education practitioners can avoid reproducing existing hierarchies and ensure that the process of decolonisation is genuinely inclusive and equitable. The decolonisation of the African academe is not merely an academic exercise; it is a vital project for social justice that is intended to create a more just, inclusive, and equitable future for African scholars, students, and communities. It is a continuous critical reflection, action, and transformation process requiring ongoing engagement with power, knowledge, and identity complexities.

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