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Ending Curriculum Violence and Academic Ancestral Worship: An Afrocentric Perspective on Decolonising Higher Education in Africa

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ABSTRACT

There have been multiple contributions to the decolonisation agenda in Africa since the onset of calls to decolonise education under the auspices of the #RhodesMustFall protests in South Africa. Nevertheless, these efforts have not resulted in the realisation of a truly decolonised higher education. The present study was built on the premise that decolonising higher education requires a deep analysis of how the perpetuation of academic ancestral worship has been used to maintain the dominance of Western epistemologies at the expense of indigenous peoples. Although closely related, this study conceptualised curriculum violence as how the curriculum reinforces imbalances in knowledge production systems while academic ancestral worship is understood as the veneration of Western academic traditions and scholarships over indigenous knowledge and scholars. To effectively argue for an Afrocentric position on ending these pervasive forms of colonialism in education, the researchers used a literature review methodology, which entailed meticulously searching for published literature using keywords. The study's findings highlight the need to commit to social justice and equity to liberate and transform higher education in Africa using a model that advocates for Afrocentric knowledge creation, validation, and dissemination. This study also raises awareness of curriculum violence and academic ancestral worship. It further increases understanding of their impact on marginalised communities to inform policy and decision-making in educational institutions and lead to the implementation of more inclusive and equitable curricula and practices.

Keywords: *Academic Ancestral Worship, Curriculum Violence, Decolonisation, Epistemology, Higher Education*

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INTRODUCTION

Globally, the decolonisation movement in higher education emerged in response to deep-rooted historical and colonial legacies that have been sustained over time.[1] The movement gained significant momentum in South Africa with the #RhodesMustFall protests that began in 2015 at the University of Cape Town.[2] These protests were a student-led movement in South Africa calling for the removal of the statue of Cecil John Rhodes, which

[1] A. Kayum Ahmed, "#RhodesMustFall: How a Decolonial Student Movement in the Global South Inspired Epistemic Disobedience at the University of Oxford," *African Studies Review* 63, no. 2 (June 20, 2020): 281–303; Riyad A Shahjahan et al., "'Decolonizing' Curriculum and Pedagogy: A Comparative Review across Disciplines and Global Higher Education Contexts," *Review of Educational Research* 92, no. 1 (2022): 73–113.
[2] A Kayum Ahmed, "# RhodesMustFall: Decolonization, Praxis and Disruption," *Journal of Comparative & International Higher Education* 9, no. Fall (2017): 8–13; Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, "Epistemic Freedom in Africa" (Routledge, 2018).

they viewed as a symbol of oppressive historical legacies in higher education institutions.[3] The #RhodesMustFall protests ignited a broader conversation about decolonising education and challenging the dominant Western narratives perpetuating colonial ideologies at the expense of African indigenous knowledge systems.[4] The movement highlighted the need to fundamentally transform higher education curricula, pedagogies, and institutional structures.[5] The protests called for a decolonisation agenda to challenge the hegemony of Western epistemologies and knowledge production.[6] Activists demanded a more inclusive curriculum that acknowledged and valued African knowledge systems, cultures, and histories.[7] They also advocated for increased recruitment of diverse faculty members and support for African academics to foster a more representative and equitable learning environment.[8]

The #RhodesMustFall protests were not limited to South Africa; they resonated with similar global movements and struggles beyond the shores of the African continent.[9] These protests created a platform for critical discussions on the colonial legacy, systemic inequalities, and the need for decolonisation in various spheres of society.[10] According to Nyamnjoh, the #RhodesMustFall protests catalysed the decolonisation movement in higher education and formed an integral part of a larger historical struggle for social justice and equality.[11] The movement drew on the legacy of African struggles and liberation movements that fought against colonial oppression and sought to restore dignity, sovereignty, and self-determination to marginalised communities.[12] In a nutshell, Ndlovu-Gatsheni concludes that the emergence of the decolonisation movement in higher education signified a broader call to challenge and dismantle the entrenched colonial structures and knowledge systems and to create inclusive, equitable, and culturally responsive educational environments.[13]

Despite the positive advancement in the decolonisation agenda in South African universities, several challenges and limitations persist in achieving a truly decolonised system. A significant hurdle is the prevalence of a Eurocentric curriculum, which heavily favours Western epistemologies and perspectives while neglecting and marginalising indigenous knowledge systems, histories, and cultures.[14] One can reflect on how language barriers significantly challenge decolonisation efforts in South Africa. Although predominantly a second language to the majority, English still dominates as the primary language of instruction in South African higher education. This sidelines African languages and the wealth of cultural and historical knowledge they carry.[15] This exclusion or undervaluation of African languages hampers meaningful inclusion and recognition of indigenous knowledge and scholarship. Unfortunately, knowledge production and dissemination systems in African higher education are primarily influenced by Western standards and methodologies, presenting another

[3] Shepherd Mpofu, "Disruption as a Communicative Strategy: The Case of #FeesMustFall and #RhodesMustFall Students' Protests in South Africa," *Journal of African Media Studies* 9, no. 2 (June 1, 2017): 351–73, https://doi.org/10.1386/jams.9.2.351_1.

[4] Luqman Opeyemi Muraina and Yonela Mlambo, "After# RhodesMustFall: Higher Education Decolonization in South Africa and the 'Born Free Generation,'" in *Youth Exclusion and Empowerment in the Contemporary Global Order: Contexts of Economy, Education and Governance* (Emerald Publishing Limited, 2022), 55–73; Portia Roelofs, "Flying in the Univer-Topia: White People on Planes, #RhodesMustFall and Climate Emergency," *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 31, no. 3 (September 2, 2019): 267–70.

[5] Ndlovu-Gatsheni, "Epistemic Freedom in Africa."

[6] Mpofu, "Disruption as a Communicative Strategy..."

[7] S. J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, "Rhodes Must Fall," in *Epistemic Freedom in Africa: Deprovincialisation and Decolonisation* (Routledge, 2018), 221–42; Anye Nyamnjoh, "The Phenomenology of Rhodes Must Fall: Student Activism and the Experience of Alienation at the University of Cape Town," *The Strategic Review for Southern Africa* 39, no. 1 (2017).

[8] Xolela Mangcu, "Shattering the Myth of a Post-Racial Consensus in South African Higher Education: 'Rhodes Must Fall' and the Struggle for Transformation at the University of Cape Town," *Critical Philosophy of Race* 5, no. 2 (July 1, 2017): 243–66; Munene Mwaniki, "South African Higher Education Language Politics Post #RhodesMustFall: The Terrain of Advanced Language Politics," *Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies* 36, no. 1 (March 23, 2018): 25–36.

[9] Ahmed, "#RhodesMustFall: How a Decolonial Student Movement…"; Ludvig Sunnemark and Håkan Thörn, "Decolonizing Higher Education in a Global Post-Colonial Era:# RhodesMustFall from Cape Town to Oxford," *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies* 45, no. 1 (2023): 53–76.

[10] Kgothatso Brucely Shai and Lebogang T. Legodi, "The Shackles of Colonialism in South African Universities: An Afrocentric Analysis," *Commonwealth Youth and Development* 16, no. 1 (April 11, 2019), https://doi.org/10.25159/2663-6549/4816; Christina Pather, "#RhodesMustFall: No Room for Ignorance or Arrogance," *South African Journal of Science* 111, no. 5/6 (May 28,2015): 1–2.

[11] Nyamnjoh, "The Phenomenology of Rhodes Must Fall..."

[12] Godfrey Maringira et al., "'We Are Not Our Parents' – beyond Political Transition: Historical Failings, Present Angst and Future Yearnings of South African Youth," *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 16, no. 1 (June 18, 2022): 101–17, https://doi.org/10.1093/ijtj/ijab040; Mpofu, "Disruption as a Communicative Strategy..."

[13] Ndlovu-Gatsheni, "Rhodes Must Fall."

[14] Michael Robert Seats, "The Voice (s) of Reason: Conceptual Challenges for the Decolonization of Knowledge in Global Higher Education," *Teaching in Higher Education* 27, no. 5 (2022): 678–94; Saloshna Vandeyar, "Why Decolonising the South African University Curriculum Will Fail," *Teaching in Higher Education* 25, no. 7 (October 2, 2020): 783–96.

[15] Dumisile Mkhize and Robert Balfour, "Language Rights in Education in South Africa," *South African Journal of Higher Education* 31, no. 6 (2017): 133–50; Zakhile Somlata, "Examining the Implementation of Language Policy for Access and Successof Students in Higher Education in South Africa," *South African Journal of African Languages* 42, no. 3 (September 2, 2022): 324–32.

obstacle.[16] As a result, African ways of knowing and knowledge creation, rooted in oral traditions, experiential learning, and community practices, often receive limited value and recognition.[17] This perpetuates unequal power dynamics between Western epistemologies and African knowledge systems.

Globally, studies have revealed that the underrepresentation of indigenous scholars and faculty members in high-profile managerial positions further hinders decolonisation efforts.[18] According to Kidman, the limited presence of indigenous voices and perspectives in higher education institutions reinforces the marginalisation of African knowledge.[19] This is because while indigenous scholars are a welcomed addition to the academe, these scholars are usually by-products of the dominant Western paradigms, thus making it difficult for some to confront colonial remnants. In essence, indigeneity does not automatically equate to affirmation of the decolonial agenda. As a result, African communities' experiences, knowledge, and epistemologies are often overlooked at best and disregarded at worst.[20] This is worsened by institutional resistance to the decolonisation agenda where some academic and administrative staff have been known to resist change by unequivocally adhering to traditional Western-centric norms and standards.[21] Studies have shown that institutional structures and policies perpetuating Western dominance hinder efforts to decolonise curricula and create inclusive learning environments.[22] In addition, the lack of sufficient funding and resources for decolonisation initiatives poses a significant limitation because meaningful transformation requires financial investment in research, curriculum development, training, and support for scholars and students engaged in decolonisation work.[23] Insufficient financial resources can impede the implementation of comprehensive and sustainable changes.[24] The broader socio-political context, including historical inequalities, socioeconomic disparities, and power dynamics, also challenges decolonisation in higher education. While there have been studies on decolonisation efforts in higher education, few have focused on implementing an indigenous framework that addresses curriculum violence and the perpetuation of academic ancestral worship.[25] The present study, therefore, sought to employ an Afrocentric lens to end curriculum violence and academic ancestral worship in Africa.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Concept of Academic Ancestral Worship

An endeavour like the present one is not straightforward because of the gaping dearth of literature on academic ancestral worship. A simple search for the term 'academic ancestral worship' and all its derivatives reveals that this concept has not been adequately problematised in extant literature. The first instance uncovered was in Jackson, who used the term to praise Leopold von Ranke's historical collection of books that were receiving widespread adoration.[26] The second appearance of the term is found in the work of Togo, who used the term to describe groups of scholars who were ardent followers of Professor Yabuuti Kiyosi's contribution to the history of Chinese science.[27] The next instance is found in Painter, who deploys the term to celebrate the legacy of Peter

[16] Shai and Legodi, "The Shackles of Colonialism in South African Universities.."; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, "Rhodes Must Fall."
[17] Dipane J. Hlalele, "Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Sustainable Learning in Rural South Africa," *Australian and International Journal of Rural Education* 29, no. 1 (2019): 88–100; Noluthando S Matsiliza, "Institutional Responsiveness to Decolonisation in Higher Education," *Decolonising Higher Education in the Era of Globalisation and Internationalisation* 273 (2019): 180.
[18] Christine Asmar and Susan Page, "Pigeonholed, Peripheral or Pioneering? Findings from a National Study of Indigenous Australian Academics in the Disciplines," *Studies in Higher Education* 43, no. 9 (September 2, 2018): 1679–91; Dustin Louie, "Aligning Universities' Recruitment of Indigenous Academics with the Tools Used to Evaluate Scholarly Performance and Grant Tenure and Promotion," *Canadian Journal of Education/Revue Canadienne de l'éducation* 42, no. 3 (2019): 791–815.
[19] Joanna Kidman, "Whither Decolonisation? Indigenous Scholars and the Problem of Inclusion in the Neoliberal University," *Journal of Sociology* 56, no. 2 (June 21, 2020): 247–62.
[20] Sabelo J Ndlovu-Gatsheni, "The Emergence and Trajectories of Struggles for an'African University': The Case of Unfinished Business of African Epistemic Decolonisation," *Kronos* 43, no. 1 (2017): 51–77.
[21] Ndlovu-Gatsheni, "Rhodes Must Fall."
[22] André Keet, "Epistemic'othering'and the Decolonisation of Knowledge," *Africa Insight* 44, no. 1 (2014): 23–37; Shireen Motala, Yusuf Sayed, and Tarryn de Kock, "Epistemic Decolonisation in Reconstituting Higher Education Pedagogy in South Africa: The Student Perspective," *Teaching in Higher Education* 26, no. 7–8 (November 17, 2021): 1002–18; Quintin Senekal and Renate Lenz, "Decolonising the South African Higher Education Curriculum: An Investigation into the Challenges," *International Journal of Social Sciences and Humanity Studies* 12, no. 1 (2020): 146–60.
[23] Matsiliza, "Institutional Responsiveness to Decolonisation in Higher Education"; Seats, "The Voice (s) of Reason: Conceptual Challenges for the Decolonization of Knowledge in Global Higher Education."
[24] Senekal and Lenz, "Decolonising the South African Higher Education Curriculum: An Investigation into the Challenges."
[25] Thembela Kepe and Ruth Hall, "Land Redistribution in South Africa: Towards Decolonisation or Recolonisation?," *Politikon* 45, no. 1 (January 2, 2018): 128–37; Motala, Sayed, and de Kock, "Epistemic Decolonisation in Reconstituting Higher Education Pedagogy in South Africa: The Student Perspective"; Senekal and Lenz, "Decolonising the South African Higher Education Curriculum: An Investigation into the Challenges."
[26] Jeremy C Jackson, "Leopold von Ranke and the von Ranke Library," 1972.
[27] Tsukahara Togo, "Scientific Discourse and National/Cultural Identity within the Boundary of Chinese Civilisation: Yabuuti's View on the Dialogue between the Civilisations of China, Korea, and Japan," *East Asian Science, Technology, and Medicine*, 2001, 24–31.

Self, a political science discipline boundary-spanner.[28] Finally, Evans employs the term academic ancestral worship in the adoration of the works of experts in Celtic languages and cultures.[29] What is clear from these works is that generally, the term academic ancestral worship has been deployed in a positive light as a somewhat enviable undertaking, yet strikingly, African perspectives are absent from all the preceding contexts. To achieve an Africanised definition of the same, the researchers will begin by conceptualising 'ancestral worship' in the context of indigenous African religions and, from there, derive a working definition of what they refer to as academic ancestral worship.

Unsurprisingly, the earliest Western publishers on African religions saw indigenous religions as religions of Africa's uncivilised peoples, which conflicted with the adoption of Islam and Christianity.[30] From a very Western perspective, Dudley Kidd sought to define African peoples and their customs by arguing,

> "We find the natives associating the spirits of their ancestors with some special animal…ancestors do not live in the actual individual snakes but in the genus… When men are alive, they love to be praised and flattered, fed, and attended to; after death, they want the very same things, for death does not change personality… The most important part of the whole matter seems to be the praising of the ancestral spirit".[31]

The authors of the present manuscript deliberately refer to Kidd and Addison due to their representation of Western perspectives prevailing at the time of colonisation concerning African peoples and ways of life.[32] The present study utilises the same lenses to articulate an Afrocentric meaning of 'academic ancestral worship' in the Western-dominated post-colonial present in which African scholarship is intricately bound. In the authors' considered Afrocentric view, academic ancestral worship means, if the definition above by Kidd is anything to go by, the perpetuation of the Western genus that seeks to (whether deliberately or by happenstance) be the centre of discourse long after its time has passed.[33] Even the demise of colonialism did not signal a commensurate death of the veneration of Western ways in Africa. In academia, this tends to manifest as the prioritisation of Western theories and ways of knowing that are alien to Africa and have no bearing whatsoever on the condition of Africa. The authors conceptualise academic ancestral worship as the tendency to venerate Western academic traditions and scholarship at the expense of indigenous peoples' pieces of knowledge. The phenomenon of academic ancestral worship thus signifies the elevation and reverence given to Western intellectual traditions, theories, and methodologies, often at the expense of indigenous knowledge systems and the scholars who embody them. Predictably, this bias perpetuates a hierarchical power structure in academia that marginalises indigenous knowledge and reinforces coloniality.

The Concept of Curriculum Violence

Curriculum violence refers to the manipulation (intentional and unintentional) of academic programming in a way that disregards or undermines students' intellectual and psychological well-being.[34] This concept highlights education's detrimental effects that perpetuate inequality, reinforce stereotypes, and marginalise others.[35] While curriculum violence can occur globally in various contexts, it is essential to understand its specific manifestations and significance in Africa. In the case of an Africa that is seemingly wrestling with the proverbial ghosts of colonialism, curriculum violence would constitute, among other things, academic programming that disregards indigenous students' cultures, histories, languages, and ways of knowing.[36] This undermines African intellectual contributions and fosters a sense of intellectual dependency among African students. Historically,

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[28] Chris Painter, "Peter Self's Legacy: Economic Hegemony and the Public Domain," *Public Policy and Administration* 18, no. 4 (2003): 41–62.
[29] D Ellis Evans, "The Heroic Age of Celtic Philology," 2004.
[30] James Thayer Addison, "Ancestor Worship in Africa," *Harvard Theological Review* 17, no. 2 (1924): 155–71.
[31] Dudley Kidd, *The Essential Kafir* (London, Black, 1904).
[32] Kidd, *The Essential Kafir*; Addison, "Ancestor Worship in Africa."
[33] Kidd, *The Essential Kafir*.
[34] Erhabor Ighodaro and Greg A Wiggan, *Curriculum Violence: America's New Civil Rights Issue* (Nova Science Publishers Hauppauge, NY, 2010); Juan Mansilla Sepulveda, Sandra Becerra Pena, and Maria Eugenia Merino, "Curriculum Violence: Occidental Knowledge Hegemony in Relation to Indigenous Knowledge," *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences* 190 (May 2015): 434–39, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.05.022.
[35] Savo Heleta, "Decolonisation of Higher Education: Dismantling Epistemic Violence and Eurocentrism in South Africa," *Transformation in Higher Education* 1, no. 1 (October 25, 2016), https://doi.org/10.4102/the.v1i1.9; Charles B Hutchison, Greg Wiggan, and Tehia Starker, "Curriculum Violence and Its Reverse: The under-Education of Teachers in a Pluralistic Society and Its Implications for the Education of Minority Students," *Insights on Learning Disabilities: From Prevailing Theories to Validated Practices* 11, no. 1 (2014): 85–111.
[36] Heleta, "Decolonisation of Higher Education: Dismantling Epistemic Violence and Eurocentrism in South Africa"; Beth Patin et al., "Interrupting Epistemicide: A Practical Framework for Naming, Identifying, and Ending Epistemic Injustice in the Information Professions," *Journal of the Association for Information Science and Technology* 72, no. 10 (October 7, 2021): 1306–18.

African educational systems have often been influenced by colonial legacies prioritising Western knowledge and marginalising indigenous knowledge and perspectives.[37] This Western bias has resulted in the erasure, devaluation, and, at times, misrepresentation of African histories and ways of knowing. When marginalised students are denied the opportunity to be educated in a way that honours their cultural heritage and histories, it leads to a deep sense of alienation, low self-esteem, and a bastardisation of their identities.[38]

Another form of curriculum violence is the perpetuation of stereotypes and biases. Educational materials and practices that reinforce racial, gender, ethnic, or socioeconomic stereotypes also contribute to the marginalisation and stigmatisation of formerly colonised and oppressed peoples.[39] For example, if textbooks depict certain ethnic groups as inferior, it perpetuates harmful stereotypes and limits learners' understanding of diverse experiences and perspectives. Curriculum violence also occurs through a lack of inclusivity and relevance in the curriculum.[40] When educational materials do not reflect the experiences and realities of African students, it creates a disconnection between what is taught and students' lived experiences.[41] Such a dissonance can result in disengagement, disinterest, and a diminished sense of self-worth in the victim of this rabid form of violence. The curriculum must address the needs, aspirations, and challenges faced by African learners to promote their intellectual and psychological well-being.

Transgressive Learning as a Framework for the Decolonisation Agenda

This article submits that breaking away from ancestral worship and its inherent curriculum violence is not an easy thing, for it needs critical thinking, unlearning certain things, reimagining new ways of doing things and relearning new ways of seeing the world that has been taken for granted. To achieve this, academia willing to break away from ancestral worship and commit to the decolonisation agenda is needed. In this regard, the researchers borrow Lotz-Sisitka et al.'s transgressive learning as a framework for the decolonisation agenda.[42] In their view, transgressive learning is a form of transformative learning that deliberately transgresses conventional practice and explicitly challenges the hegemony embedded in the current Eurocentric research methodologies, practices, and traditions. This article conceptualises transgressive learning as radical transformative learning that deconstructs coloniality by confronting the hegemonic elements embedded in the Eurocentric education system. It is hoped that a transgressive learning framework offers expansive learning opportunities for it deliberately challenges and transgresses the conventional epistemic norms. In this way, it offers opportunities to forge new ways of thinking, doing things, and viewing the world differently.

Lotz-Sistika et al. recommended that to achieve this, higher education needs transgressive pedagogies that are disruptive to the colonial order.[43] Such pedagogies are not constrained or restricted by the taken-for-granted Eurocentric practices and traditions that do not recognise other ways of knowing and are, therefore, maladaptive to the changing world order. Such an approach, as Thambinathan and Kinsella point out, would require an uncompromisingly radical approach to higher education that challenges both the colonial and neocolonial ritualistic changes that are being done in some higher education institutions which will be described as *transformation to remain the same.*[44] The present study concurs with Tuck and Yang, who contend that decolonisation is not a complementary project but a disruptive and chaotic one that seeks to unsettle and challenge the status quo.[45] In Thambinathan and Kinsella's words, "it is not merely a strategy of inclusion or an 'and', but instead an 'elsewhere' for knowledge production and the imagination."[46] Their point is that if the

[37] Stephanie P Jones, "Ending Curriculum Violence," *Teaching Tolerance* 64, no. 1 (2020): 47–50; Pather, "#RhodesMustFall: No Room for Ignorance or Arrogance."
[38] Jones, "Ending Curriculum Violence"; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, "The Emergence and Trajectories of Struggles for an'African University': The Case of Unfinished Business of African Epistemic Decolonisation."
[39] Ighodaro and Wiggan, *Curriculum Violence: America's New Civil Rights Issue*; Melanie Walker*, "Race Is Nowhere and Race Is Everywhere: Narratives from Black and White South African University Students in Post-apartheid South Africa," *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 26, no. 1 (2005): 41–54.
[40] Shahjahan et al., "'Decolonizing' Curriculum and Pedagogy: A Comparative Review across Disciplines and Global Higher Education Contexts."
[41] Hedda H Askland, Randi Irwin, and Michael Kilmister, "Justice-Centred Curriculum: Decolonising Educational Practices to Create Lateral Learning Spaces Online," *Access: Critical Explorations of Equity in Higher Education* 10, no. 1 (2022): 7–25.
[42] Heila Lotz-Sisitka et al., "Transformative, Transgressive Social Learning: Rethinking Higher Education Pedagogy in Times of Systemic Global Dysfunction," *Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability* 16 (2015): 73–80.
[43] Lotz-Sisitka et al., "Transformative, Transgressive Social Learning: Rethinking Higher Education Pedagogy in Times of Systemic Global Dysfunction."
[44] Vivetha Thambinathan and Elizabeth Anne Kinsella, "Decolonizing Methodologies in Qualitative Research: Creating Spaces for Transformative Praxis," *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 20 (2021): 16094069211014766.
[45] Eve Tuck and K Wayne Yang, "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor," *Tabula Rasa*, no. 38 (2021): 61–111.
[46] Thambinathan and Kinsella, "Decolonizing Methodologies in Qualitative Research: Creating Spaces for Transformative Praxis," 3.

decolonisation and transformation of the higher education agenda are to be successful, academia has to learn to look elsewhere for knowledge.

The preceding arguments resonate with Keane, Khupe and Seehawer and Seehawer, who bemoan the paradox of using the same colonial lenses to criticise colonial education.[47] Theirs is a cry for appropriate conceptual tools to deconstruct the stubborn legacies of colonialism embedded in the education system. They note with concern that a lack of appropriate lenses constrains the current efforts to decolonise education in Africa. In support, this article argues that decolonising higher education requires a deviation from the norms and transgression of inappropriate epistemologies to generate new ones.

METHODOLOGY

Of the several literature review typologies available to carry out research of this kind, the researchers adopted a perspective-driven critical review of literature as described by Grant and Booth.[48] According to the seminal work of Cooper, perspective-driven reviewers can assume one of two roles: (i) neutral representation or (ii) espousal of a position.[49] In neutral representation, Cooper argues that reviewers attempt to ensure that all sides are represented by assuming an impartial position.[50] In the present study, the researchers were convinced that such a role would engender Western perspectives that have long been published at the expense of indigenous peoples. The researchers thus adopted the second role – espousal of a position because this role was more suited to the task at hand. The espousal of a position is all about "accumulating and synthesising the literature in the service of demonstrating the value of a particular point of view. As such, the reviewer may selectively ignore or limit the attention paid to certain information in order to make a point."[51] This position meant a deliberate positioning of the researchers as advocates of the vanquished and perpetually undermined peoples of Africa – peoples whose traditions and ways of knowing have been deliberately and systematically rubbished as inferior.[52] As indigenous African researchers – researchers who have first-hand lived experiences of indigeneity, there was a conviction that a neutral representation of literature would fail dismally in the quest to advocate for an Afrocentric view of dismantling curriculum violence and academic ancestral worship. Thus, a selective search for Afrocentric books, chapters, and peer-reviewed journal articles and conference proceedings on the decolonisation agenda was conducted, opting to prioritise relevance instead of time-sensitive searches on Google Scholar.

Configurations of Academia Requiring Urgent Dispossession and Exorcism

To ensure that African universities do not perpetually *transform to remain the same* in relation to the decolonisation agenda, it is imperative to rethink how universities are organised. The current configuration does not reflect the political will and African energies on the ground calling for a truly decolonised higher education. This section explores some of the fundamental ways in which colonial standards are venerated in a way that is so violent to African peoples. The researchers interact with these aspects by cross-referencing them to Western understandings of ancestral worship.

The Language of the Shrine

A prominent feature of 'ancestral worship' is the sanctimonious respect for indigenous languages in rites of worship – in fact, to digress from the official language used in rites of worship is a frowned-upon sacrilege. Sadly, higher education systems in Africa operate as shrines where Western values and languages are esteemed higher than indigenous languages. This hegemony of Western languages is a classic case of academic ancestral worship in African universities. Unsurprisingly, the efforts to decolonise have been looked at with subtle manifestations of suspicion and contempt, often hoodwinked by the excuse of 'exorbitant' costs of resource

[47] Moyra Keane, Constance Khupe, and Maren Seehawer, "Decolonising Methodology: Who Benefits from Indigenous Knowledge Research?," *Educational Research for Social Change* 6, no. 1 (2017): 12–24; Maren Kristin Seehawer, "Decolonising Research in a Sub-Saharan African Context: Exploring Ubuntu as a Foundation for Research Methodology, Ethics and Agenda," *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 21, no. 4 (2018): 453–66.

[48] Maria J Grant and Andrew Booth, "A Typology of Reviews: An Analysis of 14 Review Types and Associated Methodologies," *Health Information & Libraries Journal* 26, no. 2 (2009): 91–108.

[49] Harris M Cooper, "Organizing Knowledge Syntheses: A Taxonomy of Literature Reviews," *Knowledge in Society* 1, no. 1 (1988): 104.

[50] Cooper, "Organizing Knowledge Syntheses: A Taxonomy of Literature Reviews."

[51] Cooper, "Organizing Knowledge Syntheses: A Taxonomy of Literature Reviews," 110.

[52] Ndlovu-Gatsheni, "The Emergence and Trajectories of Struggles for an'African University': The Case of Unfinished Business of African Epistemic Decolonisation."

production and the 'noble' pursuit of internationalisation.[53] Drawing from Hammine and Hudley, Mallinson, and Bucholtz, it becomes clear that any sober attempt to decolonise must begin by addressing the language dilemma allowed to persist unchallenged for so long.[54] Academia in Africa is desperate for urgent decolonising, especially concerning the language of instruction because the current academic landscape in Africa presents systems of higher education that unthinkingly follow Western language traditions with little to no regard for indigenous language contexts and the benefits that can be obtained from them. Very little has changed since the study by Alidou, who argued that despite the fall of colonialism in Africa, most universities on the continent insisted on the use of colonial languages (for example, English is still dominant in former Anglophone colonies, French in former Francophone colonies, and Portuguese in Lusophone colonies).[55] Although evidence suggests numerous benefits of home languages in learning, most African universities fixate on this naive loyalty to Western languages.[56] The paradox here is that in Western countries, home languages are so much prioritised that even minorities benefit from practices like code-switching while in Africa, Western languages are held in high esteem regardless of the cost to students.[57] The researchers consider that dismantling academic ancestral worship and decolonisation requires discomfort to confront and address imperialism's continuing effects in the present higher education system.

The Etiquette of the Shrine

As with all places of worship, there are etiquettes and conducts expected at shrines of worship. In the context of universities, there seems to be an unending veneration of systems and ways of knowing that have gone beyond their proverbial 'sell-by date'. This is especially well-captured in the work of Kidd, who saw ancestors as men with an insatiable appetite for praise, even beyond their deaths.[58] While inaccurate and unsubstantiated, the researchers find the work of Kidd to be very accurate in describing the state in which African universities find themselves. Western ways of education persistently get praised and venerated in aspects such as university rankings, thesis examination, university reputation, journal ranking systems, and several other such aspects.[59] It is astounding that university rankings remain an influential metric in determining the quality of higher education, regardless of how the system is rooted in (and actively promotes) colonial legacies.[60] While seemingly objective, these rankings have long been criticised for reinforcing colonial legacies, perpetuating global inequality, marginalisation, and replicating Western-centric knowledge structures.[61] One only needs to consider how these rankings are predominantly dominated by institutions from Europe and North America, consistently in the top positions.[62] As a result, university rankings reinforce the idea that Western education is superior and the only legitimate standard of academic excellence, marginalising knowledge systems from other cultures. According to Achugbue and Tella, Fauzi et al. and Ndofirepi, the methodologies used to compile

[53] Haley De Korne and Wesley Y Leonard, "Reclaiming Languages: Contesting and Decolonising 'Language Endangerment'from the Ground Up," *Language Documentation and Description* 14 (2017): 5–14; Paul J Meighan, "Decolonizing English: A Proposal for Implementing Alternative Ways of Knowing and Being in Education," *Diaspora, Indigenous, and Minority Education* 15, no. 2 (2021): 77–83.

[54] Madoka Hammine, "Educated Not to Speak Our Language: Language Attitudes and Newspeakerness in the Yaeyaman Language," *Journal of Language, Identity & Education* 20, no. 6 (2021): 379–93; Anne H Charity Hudley, Christine Mallinson, and Mary Bucholtz, "Toward Racial Justice in Linguistics: Interdisciplinary Insights into Theorizing Race in the Discipline and Diversifying the Profession," *Language* 96, no. 4 (2020): e200–235.

[55] Hassana Alidou, "Medium of Instruction in Post-Colonial Africa," in *Medium of Instruction Policies* (Routledge, 2003), 207–26.

[56] Nkonko M. Kamwangamalu, "The Issue of the Medium of Instruction in Africa as an 'Inheritance Situation,'" *Current Issues in Language Planning* 19, no. 2 (April 3, 2018): 133–35, https://doi.org/10.1080/14664208.2017.1357987; Lizzi O. Milligan and Leon Tikly, "English as a Medium of Instruction in Postcolonial Contexts: Moving the Debate Forward," *Comparative Education* 52, no. 3 (July 2, 2016): 277–80, https://doi.org/10.1080/03050068.2016.1185251.

[57] Jessica G Cox, Ashley LaBoda, and Najee Mendes, "'I'm Gonna Spanglish It on You': Self-Reported vs. Oral Production of Spanish–English Codeswitching," *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition* 23, no. 2 (2020): 446–58.

[58] Kidd, *The Essential Kafir*.

[59] Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni, "The Dynamics of Epistemological Decolonisation in the 21st Century: Towards Epistemic Freedom," *The Strategic Review for Southern Africa* 40, no. 1 (2018).

[60] Ruth Kiraka et al., "University League Tables and Ranking Systems in Africa: Emerging Prospects, Challenges and Opportunities," *Understanding the Higher Education Market in Africa*, 2020, 199–214; Isaac N Obasi, "World University Rankings in a Market-Driven Knowledge Society: Implications for African Universities," *Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies* 6, no. 1(2008): 1–18.

[61] Muhammad Ashraf Fauzi et al., "University Rankings: A Review of Methodological Flaws," *Issues in Educational Research* 30, no. 1 (2020): 79–96; Douglas Rhein and Alexander Nanni, "The Impact of Global University Rankings on Universities in Thailand: Don't Hate the Player, Hate the Game," *Globalisation, Societies and Education* 21, no. 1 (2023): 55–65.

[62] Annabelle Estera and Riyad A Shahjahan, "Globalizing Whiteness? Visually Re/Presenting Students in Global University Rankings Websites," *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 40, no. 6 (2019): 930–45; Rhein and Nanni, "The Impact of Global University Rankings on Universities in Thailand: Don't Hate the Player, Hate the Game."

university rankings often favour institutions that align with Western norms, philosophies, and research agendas.[63]

Academic ancestral worship is similarly prominent in the journal ranking systems and the determination of 'quality' publications. Just as the West dominates university rankings, they also dominate high-impact journals, and African publishers are the perennial sickling of the publishing industry.[64] African publishers are often looked at with suspicion, especially concerning the quality of peer review. Thus, even on matters that pertain to Africa, European and North American publishers are often deemed more reliable. This begs the moral question, 'Who has the authority to produce, assess, and disseminate African knowledge?' The etiquette of ancestral worship also becomes apparent when one considers how regulators, such as the Department of Higher Education and Training in South Africa, glorify and venerate Western knowledge systems by accrediting Western journals and discrediting African journals as 'predator publishers'. Would the natural predator not be the one that comes from a different jurisdiction to invade and gobble scholarship for the benefit of their insatiable appetite? Such biases disregard non-Western publishers' rich contributions and scholarship and engender a colonial mindset where Western knowledge is presented as superior. The resultant gap often means that indigenous pieces of knowledge and non-Western epistemologies are often sidelined or dismissed, reinforcing the exclusion of indigenous communities.[65] This etiquette of academic ancestral worship at African universities perpetuates the notion that Western benchmarks are universally applicable, undermining the importance of localised solutions and reinforcing the colonial tendency to impose Western standards on non-Western societies.

The Posture at the Shrine

Worshippers at shrines usually express postures of worship such as raising hands, chanting, singing, dancing, and prostration – all of which are meant to outwardly express an inward reality of reverence to a supreme being. Using the same analogy, it is imperative to note that processes and ways of academia at African universities appear to be steeped in similar blind allegiances to Western traditions in a way that glorifies North America and Europe as if they are supreme and infallible. One can draw on how teaching and learning resources in most African universities blindly venerate Westernness while affording local pieces of knowledge and intelligence mere ritualistic attention.[66] In reading the works of Dawson and Olusanya, Mallewa and Ogbo, one gets the impression that universities in Africa reinforce Western dominance by not actively challenging the status quo.[67] It is imperative to note that university libraries are still pregnant with literature that, at best, can be termed relics of the obsolete colonial past.[68] Even the journals subscribed to by institutions uphold this colonial legacy by being exclusionary to African systems of knowledge production and the ethics thereof,[69] and the reviewers of

[63] Edwin Iroroeavwo Achugbue and Adeyinka Tella, "Publication in High Impact Journals and Implications for University Rankings of African Universities," in *Impact of Global University Ranking Systems on Developing Countries* (IGI Global, 2023), 309–34; Fauzi et al., "University Rankings: A Review of Methodological Flaws"; Amasa Ndofirepi, "African Universities on a Global Ranking Scale: Legitimation of Knowledge Hierarchies?," *South African Journal of Higher Education* 31, no. 1 (2017): 155–74.

[64] Ndlovu-Gatsheni, "The Dynamics of Epistemological Decolonisation in the 21st Century: Towards Epistemic Freedom."

[65] José Augusto Chaves Guimarães et al., "Cultural Biases in Knowledge Organization Systems: A Discussion Regarding International University Rankings," *NASKO*, 2019, 48–62; Babangida Muhammad Musa et al., "Tertiary Education Trust Fund Sponsored Conferences and Staff Motivation in Gombe State University of Nigeria," *African Journal of Management and Business Research* 10, no. 1 (2023): 78–94.

[66] Eunice Nyamupangedengu and Cuthbert Nyamupangedengu, "Contextualizing the Curriculum: A Teacher Educator's Response to Calls for Decolonizing the Higher Education Curriculum at a South African University," in *Studying Teaching and Teacher Education: ISATT 40th Anniversary Yearbook* (Emerald Publishing Limited, 2023), 37–52; Shan J Sappleton and Doug Adams, "On Decolonizing US Education: Lessons from the Caribbean and South Africa.," *Professional Educator* 45, no. 1 (2022): 42–57; Yirga Gelaw Woldeyes, "Colonial Rewriting of African History: Misinterpretations and Distortions in Belcher and Kleiner's Life and Struggles of Walatta Petros," *Journal of Afroasiatic Languages, History and Culture* 9, no. 2 (2020): 133–220.

[67] Marcelle C Dawson, "Rehumanising the University for an Alternative Future: Decolonisation, Alternative Epistemologies and Cognitive Justice," *Identities* 27, no. 1 (2020): 71–90; Bolajoko O Olusanya, Macpherson Mallewa, and Felix Akpojene Ogbo, "Beyond Pledges: Academic Journals in High-Income Countries Can Do More to Decolonise Global Health," *BMJ Global Health* 6, no. 5 (2021): e006200.

[68] Jess Crilly, "Decolonising the Library: A Theoretical Exploration," *Spark: UAL Creative Teaching and Learning Journal* 4, no. 1 (2019): 6–15; Andrea Jimenez, Sara Vannini, and Andrew Cox, "A Holistic Decolonial Lens for Library and Information Studies," *Journal of Documentation* 79, no. 1 (2022): 224–44.

[69] William Yat Wai Lo, "Soft Power, University Rankings and Knowledge Production: Distinctions between Hegemony and Self-determination in Higher Education," *Comparative Education* 47, no. 2 (2011): 209–22; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, "The Dynamics of Epistemological Decolonisation in the 21st Century: Towards Epistemic Freedom"; Tebello Tlali, "An Afrocentric Perspective on Knowledge: Finding a Middle Ground between the Indigenous and Cosmopolitan Pedagogies," in *Fostering Diversity and Inclusion Through Curriculum Transformation* (IGI Global, 2023), 1–14.

knowledge are predominantly trained the Western way.[70] Yet the student in such institutions is expected to somehow champion the decolonial agenda.

In addition, the research foci in some African universities also require considerable attention if the decolonial agenda is to succeed. It would appear that research areas at African universities are almost always a reaction to global trends as led by Western institutions and funding agencies. The prioritisation of Western research foci areas continually yokes Africans to depend on Western epistemologies that devalue indigenous knowledge and reproduce colonial hierarchies.[71] According to Dawson, this blinded bias is anchored in the reality that universities are founded on and endorse Western epistemologies at the expense of non-Western ones.[72] This dehumanising violence against indigenous peoples is also evident in the privileges of the West at the expense of the South in a way that Venugopal refers to as a form of global neo-colonialism.[73] One can also consider how the assessment of research degrees and doctoral theses in most African universities involves policy-enabled mandatory scrutiny by Western academics in a manner that appears to point to the West as the standard against which knowledge is evaluated.[74] This constitutes academic ancestral worship, especially when one considers how such standards, although initially meant to provide rigorous feedback, have the undertones of perpetuating the 'Western genus of academia' that seeks to be the centre of discourse beyond its expiration. In some very unfortunate instances, those subjected to this practice end up being forced to interpret their work through Eurocentric lenses that the examiner will prescribe – this must never be left unchallenged.[75]

The Unexplainable at the Shrine: Of Spirits and Spiritism

Spiritism, rewards, and punishments are inherent characteristics of religious shrines. The researchers use 'spiritism' to refer to the third force that compels worshippers at a shrine to act as if hypnotised. In other words, spiritism is the unexplainable third force that compels participants to comply with the rules, procedures, rituals, and traditions of the shrine without questioning them. This article draws similarities between the spiritism of religious shrines and how universities, especially in Africa, operate as shrines of academic ancestral worshipping where scholars are whipped into compliance with templated Western traditions, rituals, norms, values, and standards, thereby excluding and preventing other ways of thinking, knowing and being. In his critique, Dawson noted that African universities are sites that perpetuate coloniality by producing and validating knowledge informed by North American and Eurocentric philosophies and are often biased against the colonised people's bits of knowledge.[76] To add to this, the researchers argue that instead of promoting critical thinking, upcoming researchers in African universities are often schooled into dogmatic religious compliance, which disempowers them to challenge the hegemony of Western knowledge systems. By the time they graduate and start their academic careers, they have already been stripped of their epistemic freedom.[77] This corroborates Alfonso-Nhalevilo's argument that the African school system continues to play its colonial role of suppressing other ways of knowing and perpetuating Western epistemic hegemony.[78] Thus, many African researchers are accomplices to coloniality for failing to challenge the very theories informing their studies and practice.

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[70] Gordon Crawford, Zainab Mai-Bornu, and Karl Landstrom, "Decolonising Knowledge Production on Africa: Why It's Still Necessary and What Can Be Done," *Journal of the British Academy* 9, no. Supplementary Issue 1 (2021): 21–46; Gandolina Melhem et al., "Association of International Editorial Staff with Published Articles from Low-and Middle-Income Countries," *JAMA Network Open* 5, no. 5 (2022): e2213269–e2213269.

[71] Bernd Reiter, "Fuzzy Epistemology: Decolonizing the Social Sciences," *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* 50, no. 1 (2020): 103–18; Hamza R'boul, "Postcolonial Interventions in Intercultural Communication Knowledge: Meta-Intercultural Ontologies, Decolonial Knowledges and Epistemological Polylogue," *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication* 15, no. 1 (2022): 75–93.

[72] Dawson, "Rehumanising the University for an Alternative Future: Decolonisation, Alternative Epistemologies and Cognitive Justice."

[73] Rajesh Venugopal, "Neoliberalism as Concept," *Economy and Society* 44, no. 2 (2015): 165–87.

[74] Anita Devos and Margaret Somerville, "What Constitutes Doctoral Knowledge?: Exploring Issues of Power and Subjectivity in Doctoral Examination," *TheAustralian Universities' Review* 54, no. 1 (2012): 47–54; S Schulze and E M Lemmer, "The Administration of the Doctoral Examination at South African Higher Education Institutions," *South African Journal of Higher Education* 33, no. 2 (2019): 180–94.

[75] Terence Lovat, "' Ways of Knowing' in Doctoral Examination: How Examiners Position Themselves in Relation to the Doctoral Candidate.," *Australian Journal of Educational & Developmental Psychology* 4 (2004): 146–52.

[76] H. J. Dawson and E. Fouksman, "Labour, Laziness and Distribution: Work Imaginaries among the South African Unemployed," *Africa* 90, no. 2 (February 11, 2020): 229–51, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0001972019001037.

[77] Ndlovu-Gatsheni, "The Emergence and Trajectories of Struggles for an'African University': The Case of Unfinished Business of African Epistemic Decolonisation."

[78] Emilia Z de F Afonso Nhalevilo, "Rethinking the History of Inclusion of IKS in School Curricula: Endeavoring to Legitimate the Subject," *International Journal of Science and Mathematics Education* 11 (2013): 23–42.

In other words, the debate about decolonising higher education should go deeper and focus on what Ndlovu-Gatsheni described as the right to cognitive justice or epistemic freedom.[79] He defined epistemic freedom as the "right to think, theorise, interpret the world, and develop their methodologies and write from where one is located and unencumbered by Eurocentrism."[80] The point that Ndlovu-Gatsheni makes here is that academic freedom without epistemic or cognitive justice is inadequate. In other words, academic freedom is limited to demanding the right to diverse ideas, whereas epistemic freedom goes deeper to demand cognitive justice, which focuses on the need to rethink and deconstruct the colonial thought systems that African universities inherited. The authors contend that to achieve this, African researchers must first exorcise the academic shrines from the spiritism that compels them to blindly follow Eurocentric thoughts and standards without questioning them. In the researchers' considered view, it is this spiritism that is currently inhibiting progressive thinking. The researchers view spiritism as the university's hidden curriculum that silently transmits the message that African knowledge is inferior, African journals are predator journals, Africa cannot produce quality knowledge, African scholars are inferior, and Africa cannot develop its theories, among many other anti-Africa messages.[81] Bombarded by these messages in their research careers, the African scholars are silently converted and baptised into total allegiance and become bona fide servants of the colonial system that chained their people and force-marched them out of their freedoms, which they lost forever.

The Rewards and Punishment System of the Shrine

It is essential to note that the current configuration of higher education in Africa, which is highly dependent on Western epistemologies, traditions, values, and ethics, does not support transformation. Hodson is quick to caution that "you cannot attack a people's knowledge without offending the knower, for the knower and their knowledge are intricately bound."[82] Thus, the epistemic struggle of Africa is politically charged, for it will disrupt not only the knowledge systems in African universities but also the political structures that support them.[83] As a result, epistemic decolonisation is not an uneasy discourse in a continent whose activities are still heavily dependent on the will of the colonial masters. In essence, de-Westernising African universities is a risky endeavour which usually attracts resistance from the beneficiaries of the status quo. In some cases, especially in former Whites-only universities, one has to carefully consider how engaging in decolonial research will affect their employment. When truly implemented, the decolonial agenda may even threaten the funding of the institutions as some institutions are still heavily dependent on external funding from Europe, America, or Asia. Thus, any academic who dares challenge the status quo will likely be chastised into compliance while those who comply are celebrated as good researchers. Moreover, through the many years they spent in training and working with the Eurocentric epistemologies, many African academics have developed a blind allegiance to Eurocentric paradigms, which makes it difficult to critique them. As a result, it takes radical thinking for one to escape this trap. On the other hand, the university systems have structures that monitor compliance with international standards. Ndlovu-Gatsheni notes that it is through these structures that researchers are whipped into line.[84] While research ethics are fundamental in ensuring fair practice and preventing the violation of research participants, they continue to silence other pieces of knowledge and ways of being by expressing the monocultural Eurocentric interpretation of ethical behaviour as universal standards that every researcher should comply with.[85] By delimiting what ought to be viewed as acceptable research ethics, Eurocentric research ethics impose European values as the universal standards that should guide human behaviour in research, thereby suppressing other ways of knowing and being.

A Way Forward: Towards the African Pluraversity

Having established the various factors hampering the quest for decolonised higher education in Africa, this section proposes a way out of the present conundrum of academic ancestral worship in African universities. Three cardinal questions shape the decolonisation agenda for institutions genuinely courting transformation: How is 'knowledge' created? How is 'knowledge' validated? and How is 'knowledge' disseminated? The researchers consider that genuine decolonisation happens only when these three questions are answered in a

[79] Ndlovu-Gatsheni, "The Dynamics of Epistemological Decolonisation in the 21st Century: Towards Epistemic Freedom."
[80] Ndlovu-Gatsheni, "The Dynamics of Epistemological Decolonisation in the 21st Century: Towards Epistemic Freedom," 17.
[81] Musa et al., "Tertiary Education Trust Fund Sponsored Conferences and Staff Motivation in Gombe State University of Nigeria."
[82] Derek Hodson, *Teaching and Learning about Science: Language, Theories, Methods, History, Traditions and Values* (Brill, 2009).
[83] Hodson, *Teaching and Learning about Science: Language, Theories, Methods, History, Traditions and Values*; Chrispen Mutanho, "Exploring Indiginising the University's Science Curriculum through Bottom-up Decolonisation: Affordances and Hindrances," 2021.
[84] Sabelo J Ndlovu-Gatsheni, "Decoloniality as the Future of Africa," *History Compass* 13, no. 10 (2015): 485–96.
[85] Mutanho, "Exploring Indiginising the University's Science Curriculum through Bottom-up Decolonisation: Affordances and Hindrances."

manner that puts Africa and her people at the centre. As such, any attempt that does not merge these three questions will not deliver decolonised higher education, as the following subsections will demonstrate. This is exemplified by Ndlovu-Gatsheni, who argues for rethinking the decolonial trajectory to awaken African researchers to the reality that African audiences are African researchers' prime targets.[86] Below is Figure 1, depicting an Afrocentric perspective of challenging academic ancestral worship in African universities.

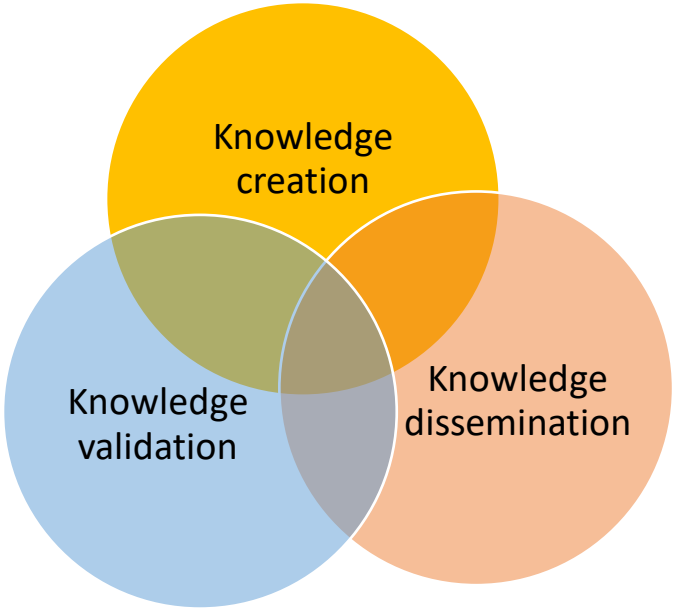

Figure 1: Authors' model for challenging academic ancestral worship

Figure 1 above reveals that the interaction of 'Knowledge creation', 'Knowledge validation', and 'Knowledge dissemination' produces four possible outcomes for African higher education, three of which are inadequate in the decolonisation agenda. The following subsections will explore the importance of each intersection and demonstrate why institutions not in charge of all three knowledge states will never truly be decolonised.

Outcome 1: Knowledge creation and validation without dissemination

African universities must create and validate their multifaceted knowledge rooted in their unique capacity to offer context-specific solutions and drive self-reliant development. This approach fosters cultural resonance and ownership and empowers these institutions to actively engage in global intellectual discourse, thus enriching the global knowledge landscape. Through tailoring knowledge to local contexts, African universities can effectively address region-specific challenges that external sources of knowledge may overlook. This localised knowledge creation imbues a sense of ownership as it reflects the experiences, concerns, and aspirations of the local population.[87] However, a critical aspect to consider in this outcome is the danger posed by surrendering control of knowledge dissemination to external sources that do not seek to put Africa at the centre. This jeopardises their contributions' accuracy, credibility, and applicability, potentially leading to solutions disconnected from the actual challenges.[88] Such an overreliance on external players perpetuates a cycle of dependency, inhibiting the development of local expertise and the growth of intellectual autonomy. The lack of representation from diverse geographical and cultural contexts hampers the richness of the global intellectual dialogue, limiting the scope for cross-cultural collaboration and holistic problem-solving.[89] This can perpetuate the dominance of Western narratives that may not adequately address the nuances of African regions and cultures.

[86] Ndlovu-Gatsheni, "The Dynamics of Epistemological Decolonisation in the 21st Century: Towards Epistemic Freedom."
[87] Hao Zhang and Hajime Nakagawa, "Validation of Indigenous Knowledge for Disaster Resilience against River Flooding and Bank Erosion," in *Science and Technology in Disaster Risk Reduction in Asia* (Elsevier, 2018), 57–76.
[88] Philip G Altbach, "Empires of Knowledge and Development," *World Class Worldwide: Transforming Research Universities in Asia and Latin America*, 2007, 1–28; Lo, "Soft Power, University Rankings and Knowledge Production: Distinctions between Hegemony and Self-determination in Higher Education."
[89] Leandro Rodriguez Medina, *Centers and Peripheries in Knowledge Production* (Routledge, 2013).

Outcome 2: Knowledge Creation and Dissemination without Validation

Within the decolonisation agenda, it is paramount for African universities to embark on autonomous knowledge creation and dissemination tailored to the intricate tapestry of local challenges and cultural nuances. By generating knowledge firmly rooted in their unique context, these institutions can proactively address issues often sidelined by external narratives. This initiative fosters a sense of ownership, cultural relevance, and an assertive role in the global intellectual discourse, thus reinforcing the decolonisation movement and contributing to sustainable development.[90] However, surrendering control over knowledge validation within this framework bears inherent risks. Entrusting external validation processes exposes African universities to potential misinterpretation, misrepresentation, and distortion of their distinct insights. This might perpetuate an inherited narrative that sidelines indigenous perspectives, undermining the credibility and contextual applicability of the knowledge produced.[91] Furthermore, this vulnerability can exacerbate the dependency syndrome on foreign institutions, undermining the growth of independent intellectual paradigms and hindering the emergence of region-specific expertise.[92] In ceding validation authority, African universities may inadvertently perpetuate a cycle where local pieces of knowledge remain subservient to externally endorsed ideas, contradicting the very essence of the decolonisation movement.

Outcome 3: Knowledge Dissemination and Validation without Creation

Within the framework of the decolonisation agenda, the imperative for African universities to disseminate and validate their knowledge is significantly profound. This endeavour represents a pivotal step towards reclaiming intellectual sovereignty and rectifying historical injustices ingrained in the global knowledge ecosystem. Through disseminating knowledge, these institutions can effectively address region-specific challenges, champion local narratives, and counteract the historical biases perpetuated by colonial influences.[93] This act empowers them to become active contributors to the global discourse, reinforces their cultural relevance, and amplifies their influence on shaping a more equitable and inclusive representation of Africa. However, the risk of not assuming control over knowledge creation within this decolonisation context is considerable. Outsourcing the creation of knowledge about Africa to external sources can perpetuate distorted perceptions, perpetuate Eurocentric biases, and sidestep the nuanced realities of the continent.[94] This undermines the authenticity of local perspectives and perpetuates a dependency cycle that hinders the emergence of indigenous solutions and stifles the development of autonomous intellectual frameworks.

Outcome 4: An Intersection of Knowledge Creation, Validation, and Dissemination

The inadequacies of the previous three outcomes lead to the conclusion that decolonising higher education in Africa demands a comprehensive approach encompassing knowledge creation, validation, and dissemination, with Africa and its diverse societies firmly at the core. This integrated model is indispensable as it addresses the multifaceted challenges of colonial legacies, fosters a genuine shift in power dynamics, and ensures that Africa's perspectives and narratives take precedence. The researchers are of the view that the integration of knowledge creation, validation, and dissemination ensures that genuine decolonisation is achieved. When all three aspects are delivered in a manner that places Africa and her people at the centre, it dismantles the asymmetrical power structures that have perpetuated colonial imbalances. This article opines that this comprehensive approach empowers African universities to participate actively in the global academic arena while safeguarding cultural authenticity. It acknowledges the agency of African scholars to shape the trajectory of their disciplines, challenge inherited norms, and lead in the production of knowledge that resonates with their contexts.

Knowledge creation that entails the development of insights rooted in Africa's cultural, social, and historical contexts forms the basis of decolonisation.[95] True decolonisation requires generating knowledge that acknowledges the roles of African thinkers, scholars, and traditions, countering the historical dominance of

[90] Altbach, "Empires of Knowledge and Development"; Koye Kassa Getahun, Nigusse Weldemariam Reda, and Abeba Seyoum Wube, "Becoming a Research University as a Strategic Choice in Bahir Dar University: A Resource Dependency Perspective," *Bahir Dar Journal of Education* 23, no. 2 (2023): 76–95.

[91] Medina, *Centers and Peripheries in Knowledge Production*.

[92] Lo, "Soft Power, University Rankings and Knowledge Production: Distinctions between Hegemony and Self-determination in Higher Education"; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, "The Dynamics of Epistemological Decolonisation in the 21st Century: Towards Epistemic Freedom."

[93] Getahun, Reda, and Wube, "Becoming a Research University as a Strategic Choice in Bahir Dar University: A Resource Dependency Perspective"; Medina, *Centers and Peripheries in Knowledge Production*.

[94] Guimarães et al., "Cultural Biases in Knowledge Organization Systems: A Discussion Regarding International University Rankings."

[95] Heleta, "Decolonisation of Higher Education: Dismantling Epistemic Violence and Eurocentrism in South Africa"; Sunnemark and Thörn, "Decolonizing Higher Education in a Global Post-Colonial Era:# RhodesMustFall from Cape Town to Oxford."

Western epistemologies that have influenced academic curricula and research agendas. As argued by Matsiliza, African scholars' involvement in knowledge creation has the potential to bridge the gap between global scholarship and indigenous wisdom, yielding inherently African perspectives.[96] Validating knowledge entailing recognition of local experiences, struggles, and contributions within the African context is pivotal for the decolonisation process. When African universities possess the authority to validate their knowledge, it reinforces the legitimacy of their insights, enhancing the credibility of African scholarship within and beyond the continent.[97] This shift is critical to ensure that knowledge assessment is not moulded by external biases but rather by understanding Africa's unique realities. Dissemination serves as the conduit for decolonised knowledge to reach wider audiences. African universities must actively shape how their knowledge is shared globally. Authentic decolonisation involves departing from the historical pattern of knowledge dissemination, often presenting indigenous peoples with a distorted view.[98] By controlling the dissemination process, African institutions can ensure accurate portrayal and contextualisation of their perspectives. This empowers them to challenge stereotypes, dispel misconceptions, and contribute to the global discourse in a way that reflects the richness and complexity of African societies.

CONCLUSION

The time has come for African academia to take charge and challenge the undermining of Africa – her traditions, ways of knowing, values, ethics, standards, and diverse peoples – to benefit Western ones. This study explored the possibilities of employing an Afrocentric lens to dismantle the hideous academic ancestral worship and epistemic violence in African universities. The paper revealed areas that need urgent decolonisation if Africa is to be treated as an equal in the global academic landscape, and from there, the authors proposed a model for decolonising higher education by targeting to create, validate, and disseminate African knowledge in Africa-sensitive ways. The study invites like-minded African academics to actively seek localised strategies for creating, validating, and disseminating their bits of knowledge. Finally, the authors believe academic ancestral worship will not disappear magically because it benefits the Western hegemony in higher education. Instead, it is the duty of the African academic and their allies to demonstrate, at every given instance, that Africa is an equal, and African pieces of knowledge are equally significant in the quest for sustainable global development.

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