

# From Methodological Authoritarianism to Epistemic Realism: Multidisciplinary Research Paradigms and the Post-modern Turn



Kizito Michael George<sup>1</sup> 

<sup>1</sup> Department of Religious Studies and Philosophy, Kyambogo University, Uganda, East Africa.

## ABSTRACT

The 20<sup>th</sup> century was characterized by a radical paradigm shift from modernism to postmodernism. Postmodernism rejected the stances of objectivism, universalism and the construction of meta-narratives that were evident in the modern epoch. Postmodernism re-affirms subjectivism, perspectivism and particularism in knowledge attribution, acquisition and justification. Postmodernism therefore dethrones positivism, radical empiricism and all their objectivistic scientific edifices. Post-modernism has its roots in post-colonialism, de-colonialism and the agitations for racial and gender justice. This academic masterpiece used critical historical analysis, critical hermeneutics, decolonial and postcolonial criticism to situate postmodernism as an emancipatory philosophy of method that safeguards marginalized modes of knowledge in the South from the epistemicide of Western Positivism. The paper analytically illuminated that postmodern epistemological ethos leads to the emergence of post-positivism in the natural sciences and interpretivism in the humanities and social sciences by propagating deconstructionist and emancipatory multi-disciplinary methodologies such as critical discourse analysis, phenomenological interpretation, critical race theory and critical gender theory. This paper further argued that multi-disciplinarity and trans-disciplinarity are inevitable constellations of the eminent emergency of the postmodern epoch. The paper adds to knowledge by painstakingly contending that postmodernism entrenches situated knowledge and multidisciplinary methodologies that are equally valid, reliable, cogent and credible.

## Correspondence

Kizito Michael George  
Email: [gkizito@kyu.ac.ug](mailto:gkizito@kyu.ac.ug);  
[kizitomg@gmail.com](mailto:kizitomg@gmail.com)

## Publication History

Received: 18<sup>th</sup> September, 2024  
Accepted: 12<sup>th</sup> November, 2024  
Published online:  
4<sup>th</sup> December, 2024

**Keywords:** *Methodology, Realism, Authoritarianism, Multidisciplinary, Postmodernism*

## INTRODUCTION

The term “Modernity” etymologically derives from the Latin word “modo,” which mean “just now.” The concept Postmodernism on the other hand comes from the Latin words “post-modo” which means “after just now.”<sup>1</sup> Postmodernism is a critique of the illusions embedded in the positivist constellations of modernism.<sup>2</sup> These illusions include the universalisation or phallogocentrism of reality as well as the objectification of the same. Lyotard defines postmodernism as “incredulity towards meta-narratives.”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> R. Appignanesi and C. Garratt, *Introducing Postmodernism* (New York: Totem Books, 1995).

<sup>2</sup> Z. Bauman, *Liquid Times: Living in an Age of Uncertainty* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007).

<sup>3</sup> J. Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), xxiv.

These meta-narratives are grandiose universalistic theories such as modernism and neo-liberalism. According to postmodernists, reality is not scientific and concrete as illuminated by modernism but rather fluid or liquidified.<sup>4</sup> This simply means that it is subjective, particular, specific, and contextual.<sup>5</sup> Postmodernism traces its origins in aesthetics, art, architecture, and philosophy.<sup>6</sup> In architecture for example, “postmodernism originated as a reaction against abstraction in painting and the international style in architecture.”<sup>7</sup>

Postmodernists reject the deceptive binary categorization of reality that is characteristic of modernism. This binary outlook to reality involves *inter alia* classifications such as white/black, male/female, right/wrong, true/false, and moral/immoral to mention but a few. To begin with, it is a modernistic fallacy to categorise people as either white or black because there is no human being who is white. The people who are called white are actually pale and pink. Secondly, several people who are called black are brown and pale. Therefore, the white/black modernistic binary needs to be rejected because it is imbued with racist undertones. Secondly, the categorization of human persons as either male or female discriminates against intersex persons who have both male and female sexes.

The fluidity of postmodernism is vividly pronounced in the fashion industry. During the modern Victorian age, ‘hole’ infested trousers or damages were a sign of poverty and backwardness. However, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, damaged trousers are a sign of class, wealth, and prestige. In addition, during the modern epoch, male postmodern hairstyles like locs and duke were a sign of insanity and madness but today they are a sign of class and fashion literacy.<sup>8</sup> More so, during the modern Victorian era, a lady of fashion was expected to have one hearing ring on every ear and men were strictly forbidden from wearing earrings. However, a postmodern man and woman of today can have ten earrings on every ear. Further still, contrary to the modern fashion taste, today, a lady can have green hair, a red handbag, yellow shoes, black lipstick and purple trousers and still be called elegant.

Therefore, the liquidity of postmodernism as opposed to the solidity of modernism requires fluid epistemologies and multidisciplinary methodologies and philosophies of method.<sup>9</sup> These should be premised on interpretive philosophies instead of positivistic paradigms. Interpretative methodologies and philosophies of method are pertinent in a postmodern era because they emphasize epistemic realism instead of epistemic authoritarianism. Postmodernism therefore not only liquidizes the humanities and social sciences but also fluidizes the physical and biological sciences through what is known as post-positivism.<sup>10</sup> In a postmodern era, there are no canonical interpretations of truth.<sup>11</sup> This implies that the search for objective knowledge in science is “an arrogant cultural conceit.”<sup>12</sup>

The fundamental rationale of this paper therefore is to re-construct a new archeology of knowledge in the South that situates both the knower and the known. The paper also elucidates how the interpretivist philosophy of method reinforced by postmodernism gives rise to multi-disciplinary and trans-disciplinary critiques of knowledge distortions and the ontic injustices embedded in modern epistemologies and modes of knowledge.

## Modernism and the Age of Reason or Enlightenment

The Age of Enlightenment was a victory over medieval epistemological subjugation. This epoch signaled a return to the natural laws discovered by the pre-Socratic philosopher scientists. These philosophers

<sup>4</sup> Z. Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000).

<sup>5</sup> Karyn Cooper, Robert E White, and Robert E White, *Qualitative Research in the Post-Modern Era: Contexts of Qualitative Research*, vol. 1 (Springer, 2012), 86-98.

<sup>6</sup> R. Bishop, “Postmodernism,” in *Encyclopedia of Cultural Anthropology*, ed. D. Levinson and E. Ember (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1996).

<sup>7</sup> A. Callinicos, “Reactionary Postmodernism?,” in *Postmodernism and Society*, ed. R. Boyne and A. Rattansi (London: MacMillan Education LTD, 1990), 101.

<sup>8</sup> L. Tirhakah, “The Undisputed Ranking of Black Hair Styles,” 2020, <https://level.medium.com/the-undisputed-ranking-of-black-hair-styles-f337040606f8>.

<sup>9</sup> Z. Bauman, *Liquid Life* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005).

<sup>10</sup> Pauline Marie Rosenau, *Post-Modernism and the Social Sciences: Insights, Inroads, and Intrusions* (Princeton University Press, 1991).

<sup>11</sup> Peter Holtz, “Does Postmodernism Really Entail a Disregard for the Truth? Similarities and Differences in Postmodern and Critical Rationalist Conceptualizations of Truth, Progress, and Empirical Research Methods,” *Frontiers in Psychology* 11 (September 17, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.545959>.

<sup>12</sup> David Deutsch, *The Beginning of Infinity: Explanations That Transform the World*, (Penguin UK, 2011), 314.

discovered that the universe is a cosmos governed by natural laws. This led to the demythologization of the universe or the rejection of mythical explanations of the universe.

The Age of Reason led to enormous advancements in some natural science disciplines, such as mathematics, chemistry, physics and biology among others. It also led to the birth of social science disciplines such as economics, politics, sociology, psychology, social administration and public administration among others. These social science disciplines sought to use the positivist methodology of the natural sciences to study society.

The Enlightenment Age is characterized by the blossoming of the industrial revolution.<sup>13</sup> Modernists argued that humanity could only advance by dismantling the traditional primitive subsistence sector in every society. According to modernists, societies in Africa, Latin America and other third-world countries are backward because they have not embraced scientific technology and an industrial ethic.

Modernization was thought to be a universal and irreversible process. Western European nations such as Britain, Germany, Belgium, France, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, and Switzerland have all gone through the modernization process and therefore all underdeveloped nations must follow suit. North American nations such as Canada and the United States of America (USA) have also gone through all modernization stages. These five stages have been articulated by Walt Rostow as follows: The traditional society, the pre-take-off society, take-off, drive to maturity and the mass consumption society.<sup>14</sup>

Modernity therefore implies universalisation, rationalization, objectivisation and scientification of truth, knowledge, development and social progress.<sup>15</sup> The belief in the universal modernization of all societies was a catalyst for the propagation of slavery, racism, imperialism and colonialism. Modernity reinforced and propagated binary notions such as primitive versus modern, slave versus master, black versus white, colonized versus colonizer and satellite versus metropole.

These binary nuances were premised on an inferior versus superior relationship. Superiority is determined by rational disposition and inferiority is determined by emotional disposition. Therefore, the master is superior to the slave who is considered more or less as a mere emotional biological substance. In addition, colonialism is 'rationally' justified as a scientific process for modernizing primitive societies. Similarly, slavery is justified as a positivistic process for dismantling the traditional sector which is a major obstacle to modernization. More so, racism is also justified because it is analogous to reason expressing its superiority over emotions.

### **The Emergency of Postmodern Truths and Methods**

Postmodernism dethrones the objectivist conception of truth that is evident in positivistic modernism. This conception looks at TRUTH in a capitalized sense. The capitalized perspective of TRUTH is premised on the *Parmenidesian* dictum that reality is ONE.<sup>16</sup> This means that it is objective, unbreakable into parts(atomic) and unchanging. The atomic conception of TRUTH was articulated by the pre-Socratic Greek philosopher Parmenides, who later influenced the scientific positivist perspective in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

According to the positivists, matter is objective, unchanging and was never created *ex nihilo*. This empirical reality can only be studied through the positivistic methodology which privileges experiential knowledge from sense experience. Positivist-oriented scientists therefore advocate for the correspondence theory of truth. According to this theory, truth corresponds to concrete material realities that are ascertained through sense perception. For instance, the statement that a car is in the garage must correspond to a concretely verified material car otherwise it is nonsensical (non-sensible).

Postmodernists reject the modernistic capitalized conception of truth. According to them, there is no single objective truth but rather multiple or pluralistic conceptions of truth.<sup>17</sup> These truths exist as small *letterised* truths. They include inter alia: mathematical truths, geometrical truths, archeological truths, biological truths, epistemological truths, metaphysical truths, astronomical truths, political truths, and

<sup>13</sup> M. Sarup, *An Introductory Guide to Post-Structuralism and Postmodernism*. (Atlanta: University of Georgia Press, 1993).

<sup>14</sup> T. Binns, "Dualistic and Unlinear Concepts of Development," in *The Companion to Development Studies*, ed. V. Desai and R.B. Potter (London: Arnold, 2002), 78.

<sup>15</sup> R. Boyne, and A. Rattansi, (eds). *Postmodernism and Society*. (London: MacMillan Education LTD); Sarup, *An Introductory Guide to Post-Structuralism and Postmodernism*.

<sup>16</sup> J. A. Palmer, *Parmenides and Presocratic Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

<sup>17</sup> Callinicos, "Reactionary Postmodernism?"

medical truths, anthropological truths, historical truths, economic truths, psychological truths and sociological truths. According to Nietzsche, truth is simply a mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms, which have been enhanced, transposed, and embellished poetically and rhetorically.<sup>18</sup> After a long use, these truths appear to be firm, canonical, and obligatory to a people yet they are mere illusions.

The above truths arise as perspectives of different subjects in society. Hence, they are not objectively out there waiting to be discovered; rather, they are subjective constructs of human persons in various social spaces and spectrums. Postmodernists, therefore, reject the positivistic correspondence theory of truth as untenable. Accordingly, they subscribe to a variety of theories of truth, such as the pragmatic theory of truth and the coherence theory of truth. According to the pragmatic theory of truth, for instance, truth is that which is practical, workable and has a cash value. Truth, however, according to the coherence theory of truth, is that which logically aligns with reality.

Postmodernism rejects the *Parmenidesian* conception of reality and truth as misleading. They opine that truth and reality are fluid and therefore always changing. This perspective is in line with the *Heraclitian* dictum that one cannot step in the same river twice.<sup>19</sup> This implies that change is a fact in knowledge production and justification. Therefore, in order to have a thorough glimpse of this liquid reality that is in a state of flux(change), it is imperative to embrace interpretive methodologies and philosophies of method such as feminist deconstruction, critical race theory and critical discourse analysis.

Postmodernism also rejects the modernistic dichotomy between knowledge (*episteme*) and opinion (*doxa*) as vague and ambiguous. In addition, the binary juxtaposition between reality and non-reality is rendered null and void. Accordingly, social, political, legal and economic fluidities have led to a paradigmatic transition from reality to hyperreality.<sup>20</sup> For instance, a watch according to the postmodern schema is not valued because it is intrinsically golden but because former president Barack Obama and pop star Beyonce wear the same watch. Therefore reality and truth are not intrinsic properties of objects rather, they are extrinsic subjective constructions of properties.<sup>21</sup>

### Postmodern Gender Criticisms of Androcentric Methodology

Postmodernists reiterate that knowledge and power are intimately and inextricably connected. This implies that knowledge cannot be separated from the dialectics of power. Smith opines that “All power requires knowledge and all knowledge relies on and reinforces existing power relations. Thus, there is no such thing as ‘truth’, existing outside of power.”<sup>22</sup> This power is reinforced and entrenched by meta-narratives that subordinate and subjugate human beings according to sex, gender, race, class and disability among other trajectories.

Postmodern feminists, for instance, regard modernity as a patriarchal project that entrenches androcentric social structures, masculine modes of knowledge and patriarchal philosophies.<sup>23</sup> The purpose of the trio is to legitimize male dominance against women and female subordination in society. According to feminists, modernity exalted masculine modes of knowing while inferiorising and denigrating female modes of knowing.<sup>24</sup> Modern masculine modes of knowing include reason, logic, universality, independence, monism and binarism while post-modern feminine ways of knowing include: emotion, particularism, interdependence, pluralism and *non-binarism*.<sup>25</sup>

Therefore, the ascendance of postmodernism led to the prominence of gender and feminist criticism of methodology. Feminists have exposed the research methodologies and philosophies of methods that are employed in knowledge acquisition and attribution as androcentric. This is because they are advanced and articulated to reinforce male patriarchal hegemony by subordinating the female

<sup>18</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* (New York: Penguin, 1990), 46-47.

<sup>19</sup> D.W. Graham, “Heraclitus. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy,” 2019, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/heraclitus/#Flu>.

<sup>20</sup> J. Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, ed. Ian Hamilton Grant (London: Sage Publications, 1976), 6.

<sup>21</sup> Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, 7,73.

<sup>22</sup> Steve Smith, “New Approaches to International Theory,” *The Globalization of World Politics* 1 (1997), 181.

<sup>23</sup> Jane Flax, “Postmodernism and Gender Relations in Feminist Theory,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 12, no. 4 (1987): 621-43.

<sup>24</sup> Rita Felski, “Feminism, Postmodernism, and the Critique of Modernity,” *Cultural Critique*, no. 13 (1989): 38.

<sup>25</sup> M. F. Belenky et al., *Women’s Ways of Knowing* (New York: Basic Books, 1986).

perspectives. In other words, these methodologies and philosophies are gender-blind and hence discriminate against women.

Feminists advocate for the regeneration of all research methodologies and philosophies of method so that they equally and equitably reflect the perspectives of women. Postmodern feminists are very critical of the masculinity embedded in positivism which has overshadowed the generation of research in the humanities and social sciences.<sup>26</sup> The hegemony of positivism in the natural and social sciences has been falsely attributed to the existence of a superior methodology on which these sciences are based.<sup>27</sup>

Feminists provide a reminder that the research process itself is not gender-neutral. It comprises situated subjects and gendered knowledge. This implies that if gender is not put into consideration in the process of research, this might lead to the solicitation of only masculine views on issues. This implies that female views will not only be obscured but also totally excluded as irrelevant or less important.

To ameliorate the problem of gender exclusion in the research process, it is imperative to inculcate gender considerations right at the research proposal stage. The research proposal should clearly articulate the number of male and female respondents in the research. Engendered research methodologies such as focus group discussions, focus group interviews, feminist deconstruction, emancipatory criticism and intersectionality analysis should be clearly explicated to make gender perspectives explicit.

Post-colonial feminists accuse colonialism of enflaming patriarchy, gender oppression and masculine modes of knowledge. It must be noted that colonialism justified slavery, racism and imperialism as inevitable scientific processes in the modernization of societies. In Africa, Latin America and Asia, among others, the imperialists instituted a capitalist education system that demarcated between the public sphere of employment and the private sphere of the household.

The public sphere was monopolised by men while women were relegated to the private sphere of domesticity as mothers, wives and caretakers of husbands, children, the sick and the elderly. The so-called domestic science education offered to women simply enabled them to fit perfectly into the household sphere. The purpose of post-colonial feminism is to empower women to overcome asymmetrical power relations between females and males in society. Post-colonial feminism deconstructs knowledge, methodologies and philosophies that subjugate and oppress women in both the public and private spheres.

### **Post-Modern Paradigm Shifts in Development Philosophies and Methodologies**

Development philosophies and epistemologies have been an arena for colonial and imperial hegemony for centuries. The embracement of the positivistic methodology aimed at creating natural social sciences that would discover social laws that determine social behavior and action. Accordingly, political science would aid the prediction of political behavior such as voting patterns whereas Sociology would aid the prediction of moral and cultural patterns. Economics on the other hand would enable the prediction of market behavior, development and poverty patterns.

The hegemony of positivism in the discipline of economics led to the entrenchment of development economics as the only credible science of development. The law of economic growth was advanced by development economics as a universal law for all countries. Development was mathematically analyzed in terms of Gross National Product(GDP) and Gross Domestic Product(GDP) and a poor person was defined as one living on less than a dollar a day. Development was envisaged as synonymous with modernization. It meant the embracement of scientific ethos such as technological innovation and industrialization. Modernization was perceived as an irreversible process that all countries must go through. Development, therefore, is a westernization of the world and basically, a one-size-fits-all.

Feminists have criticized the economic growth conception of development propagated by the modernization theory of development. They accuse this model of ignoring local and global structures that reinforce poverty, especially in the third world. Feminists argue that poverty is not caused by a lack of income or low economic growth. The duo are simply symptoms of poverty and not fundamental causes. Poverty is structural and is caused by patriarchal structures of inequality.

---

<sup>26</sup> Britta Wigginton and Michelle N Lafrance, "Learning Critical Feminist Research: A Brief Introduction to Feminist Epistemologies and Methodologies," *Feminism & Psychology*, 2019, 0959353519866058.

<sup>27</sup> Judith Stacey and Barrie Thorne, "The Missing Feminist Revolution in Sociology," *Social Problems* 32, no. 4 (1985): 301–16.

Post-colonial and post-development criticisms of western development are postmodern interpretive rebuttals of positivist-oriented western neo-colonial development.<sup>28</sup> This positivistic conception of development is unethical because it prioritizes economic growth at the expense of development ethics, ecological values and environmental health. Development ought to be ethical in the sense that it is centered on promoting human wellbeing and the human rights of all persons on the planet without discrimination.

Development should be endogenic and not exogenic because it must derive from the internal resources and epistemologies of its beneficiaries. In addition, authentic development must be sustainable in the sense that it ought to take into consideration the interests of the present and future generations. *Postmodernically* speaking, there are different perspectives on sustainability. These include ethical sustainability, economic sustainability, ecological and environmental sustainability and human rights sustainability.

Post-developmentalists advocate for research methodologies and epistemologies that aim at constructing alternatives to western positivistic development. These alternatives must entail post-development indicators such as happiness, wellbeing, social solidarity, social cohesion, human empowerment, social progress, human rights, human dignity and gender emancipation.

### **Postmodernism and the Dethronement of Ontological Injustice and the White Savior Complex in Development**

Fountain, Bush and Feener, argue that development is a political project where political and economic elites from the North design and impose economic regimes that benefit the wealthy, especially in the North, and pay minimal attention to poverty in the South.<sup>29</sup> Brittany Aronson articulates the hypocrisy of white saviorism in international development by surmising that “The white savior supports brutal policies in the morning, founds charities in the afternoon, and receives awards in the evening.”<sup>30</sup>

The White Saviour Complex (WSC) in international development is therefore characterized by both epistemological (cognitive) and ontological injustice. The former subordinates alternative views of the world<sup>31</sup> that are not in tandem with the western positivistic development perspective, and the latter “subordinates and excludes not just ‘alternative views of the world’, but ‘views of alternative worlds.’”<sup>32</sup> Ontological justice is premised on the postmodern dictum that, “it is not just that the worlds are different, but that they are differently and unequally valued... It is not simply that we must acknowledge that different people view the world differently, but rather that we must be open to the possibility that different people inhabit different worlds.”<sup>33</sup>

International Non-Government Organisations(INGOs) and Local National Non-governmental Organizations(NGOs) are challenging the economic growth approach to development in Africa and elsewhere because it is an authoritarian top-down approach that treats people as objects and patients of development. These organizations are also challenging the White Savior Complex (WSC) embedded in the development theory and practice of donors and workers in humanitarian assistance. This is because the WSC projects whites as development experts and people in third-world countries as development recipients or specimens for development experiments. Various INGOs and NGOs are therefore prioritizing postmodern, post-development, and postcolonial approaches to development that empower development beneficiaries through a bottom-top *modus operandi*.

For instance, from 2008-2011, the author of this paper was employed as a program coordinator of a non-governmental Organisation called Makerere Centre for Applied Ethics (MACAE). During this time, an International Non-government organization called TIRI (Making Integrity Work) funded MACAE to implement a Pro-poor Integrity Project in the Ugandan Districts of Bushenyi, Sembabule, Mityana, Iganga

<sup>28</sup> R. Kothari, *Re-Thinking Development : In Search of More Humane Alternatives* (Delhi: Ajanta, 1988), 143; S. Latouche, *In the Wake of the Affluent Society: An Exploration of Post Development* (London: Zed, 1993), 160.

<sup>29</sup> P. Fountain, R. Bush and M. Feener, (Eds). *Religion and the Politics of Development*. (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

<sup>30</sup> Brittany A Aronson, “The White Savior Industrial Complex: A Cultural Studies Analysis of a Teacher Educator, Savior Film, and Future Teachers,” *Journal of Critical Thought and Praxis* 6, no. 3 (2017), 37.

<sup>31</sup> Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *Epistemologies of the South: Justice against Epistemicide* (London: Routledge, 2015).

<sup>32</sup> Erin K. Wilson, “‘Power Differences’ and ‘the Power of Difference’: The Dominance of Secularism as Ontological Injustice,” *Globalizations* 14, no. 7 (November 10, 2017): 1077, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14747731.2017.1308062>.

<sup>33</sup> Wilson, “‘Power Differences’ and ‘the Power of Difference’: The Dominance of Secularism as Ontological Injustice.”

and Bugiri. The project aimed to improve pro-poor perspectives in poverty eradication. It advocated for placing the poor at the centre of their development through a bottom-top model of participation. According to MACAE and TIRI:

*There are different levels of participation. The **first and lowest** level of participation is called **information** (we will keep you informed). The second level is **consultation** (We will inform you, listen to you, and provide feedback on how your inputs have influenced **our decisions**). The third level is called **involvement** (We will work with you to ensure your concerns are considered and reflected in **our final decisions**). The **fourth** level and **highest level** of participation is called **collaboration** (We will incorporate your advice and recommendations to the maximum extent possible) and the last but highest level is **empowerment** (We will implement **what you decide** to the maximum extent possible).<sup>34</sup>*

The above definitions of participation help to decipher participations based on the White Savior Complex (WSC) and participations that prioritize the perspectives of the development beneficiaries. Information, consultation, involvement and collaboration models of participation are typical examples of WSC-oriented models. Here, a number of development and humanitarian assistance organizations conduct semblances of dialogues with development beneficiaries. However, the final decision on what development should be is a prerogative of the consulters and not the consulted.

In other words, the views of the poor people, at the bottom of the social ladder are solicited but the final decision about whether to include them or not rests on the WSC-ridden top brass who are usually the funders of the development projects or initiatives. Olivia Alaso echoes the consultative dimension of participation in international development by opining, “We want African voices to be listened to. People who come to the African continent should be able to listen to the people who live here. They should listen to us and know what we want and not what they want from us.”<sup>35</sup>

Empowerment simply means “We will implement your decision and not our decision. This implies that the final decision is not ours (funders of development) but yours (beneficiaries of development).” Development donors(funders) can advise development beneficiaries on what development should look like but the final say on what development should constitute ultimately rests on the development beneficiaries. The burden on what development ought to be, should not be a white person’s burden (donor) but rather a black or brown person’s burden.

In order to further illustrate the difference between WSC-ridden development and empowerment-based development, it is important to look at the following case that we frequently made reference to during the Pro-Poor Integrity Training Initiatives at MACAE. The case goes as follows: A certain International Development organization went to a certain rural African community where women had the role of collecting water five kilometers away from home daily.

Every day, the women left their households at 2:00 pm only to return at 7:00 p.m. The organization sat with the women and elders of the community to discuss the prospects of constructing boreholes adjacent to the different households so that the women would be spared the burden of walking long distances every day to fetch water. During the meeting, the women unanimously rejected the prospect of bringing water closer to their households. The International Development Organization was shocked by the decision of the women. However, after a comprehensive dialogue with the women, they discovered that the activity of fetching water was a ‘social space’ where women conversed, enjoyed each other’s company, and entertained one another. Every day, the women looked forward to meeting fellow women to talk, discuss, sing, dance, and play. Before 2:00 p.m. every woman was pre-occupied with chores in the household or private sphere. Therefore, they hardly had time to interact with other women in the village including their immediate neighbors. This is the reason why fetching water five kilometers away excited these women. After long deliberation, the women allowed the International organization to construct boreholes close to their households on the condition that the community would provide another ‘social space’ where women would fellowship with each other. The boreholes were constructed and the

<sup>34</sup> Kizito Michael George, “The Ethics of Pro-Poor Poverty Policy: A Critique of the Neo-Liberal Imperative and the Epistemology of Poverty Eradication in Uganda,” 2013, 5.

<sup>35</sup> Good Agency (UK), “In Conversation with No White Saviors,” n.d., <https://www.goodagency.co.uk/in-conversation-with-no-white-saviors/>.

community provided different Village Squares with Mango tree shades close to the households where women would meet every day from 4:00 pm to 6:00 p.m. to enjoy each other's company. The above case is indicative of what ethical development should look like. Unlike development that is premised on the WSC, ethical development is democratic, and dialogic and empowers human beings to be and to do in accordance with their needs, interests, and priorities.

### **Post-Modernism and the Defense of Indigenous Knowledge**

One of the major casualties of positivistic hegemony in knowledge attribution and justification was indigenous knowledge. This kind of knowledge which is traditional and passed on from generation to generation was rendered primitive and inefficacious because some of it is attained through revelation and intuition. Indigenous knowledge includes: traditional medicine and pharmacology, indigenous manufacturing and processing techniques, indigenous farming techniques, indigenous construction technologies, indigenous music and indigenous environmental conservation techniques.

Postmodernism led to the birth of 'post' related nuances such as poststructuralism, post-colonialism, and post-processualism which are vital in our analysis of indigenous knowledge. Postprocessualism-oriented archaeologists for instance use the deconstructionist methodology to contend that there is no objective past and that our representations of the past are only texts that we produce on the basis of our socio-political perspectives.<sup>36</sup>

Postmodernism not only nullifies the positivistic objectified mono-perspective to knowledge acquisition but also promotes multi-disciplinary and trans-disciplinary methodologies and philosophies of method. Postmodernists opine that there are endless interpretations of reality and none of these interpretations command superiority over others.<sup>37</sup> Therefore according to postmodernism, all knowledge is subjective and equally credible. In his famous work *Orientalism*, Edward Said categorically argues that modernism and modernity are part of the colonial project of domination.<sup>38</sup> He reiterates that colonialism is a discourse that is used by Westerners to analyse other societies in order to produce knowledge that can be used as a form of power deployed against the very subjects of inquiry.

Postmodernism renders some scientific approaches primitive and irrational compared to indigenous approaches. A certain tribe in the Amazon forest has been using a rational environment conservation technique of fishing since time immemorial. This tribe uses the bark of certain trees as fishing bait. When this bark is poured into the river or stream, the fish in the spot become numb and easy to catch. The person fishing catches all that is required for consumption on a particular day and leaves the rest for another day. After about 20 minutes, the paralyzed fish that have not been caught regain their consciousness and flee to safety. This method of fishing is ecologically friendly compared to modern fishermen who use poison to catch large numbers of fish. This poison not only kills fish but also other marine life such as amphibians and reptiles. Other fishermen use modern vessels to fish large amounts of fish from the sea bed. This method is primitive, irrational, and unethical because it not only leads to overfishing but also culminates in the killing of other marine life.

The global climate change debacle challenges humans worldwide to re-think their opportunism in scientific innovations. These include: industries that emit dangerous carbons into the atmosphere, vehicles that pollute the atmosphere, Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) that are produced through biotechnological engineering, extensive use of pesticides and destruction of forests to promote industrialization and large-scale agriculture. Postmodernism advocates for indigenous knowledge because it promotes a green economy, de-growth, post-growth, and post-colonial approaches to development. The COVID-19 lockdown of 2020 not only demonstrated the inevitability of indigenous medicines and pharmacology but also the limitations of modern medicine. This lured several people in Africa to revert to indigenous medicines and treatments to save their lives. These comprised steaming of bodies using bark and leaves from various trees and drinking the same.

---

<sup>36</sup> Marvin Harris, *Theories of Culture in Postmodern Times* (Rowman Altamira, 1998).

<sup>37</sup> H. L. Dreyfus and P. Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*. (Chicago: Routledge, 1983); B. Latour, *The Pasteurization of France*. Translated by Alan Sheridan and John Law. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1988).

<sup>38</sup> Edward Said, "1995. Orientalism," *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader* (New York and London: Harvester Wheatsheaf), 1978, 132-49.

Therefore, research in traditional or indigenous medicine should not be approached using the so-called objective superior scientific methodology. Indigenous medicine needs to be engaged with subjective interpretive methodologies that regard different subjects as credible in the process of knowledge acquisition and justification. In order to coherently interpret indigenous knowledge and indigenous peoples, it is imperative to use discourse analysis, ethnography, and participant observation as key methodological frameworks in the attainment of knowledge. These methods closely align the interpreter with the interpreted. In his work **Culture and Imperialism**, Edward Said uses discourse analysis and postcolonial theory as philosophical tools for rethinking forms of knowledge and the social identities of postcolonial systems.<sup>39</sup> For instance, a researcher from a distance might interpret the reason for lighting a fire on a hill as a technique of burning rubbish and refuse. Other researchers from a distance might think that this fire was lit to roast the meat of wild animals. However, an ethnographer using participant observation might be shocked to discover that the fire on the top of the hill is a traditional mechanism of an indigenous community to alert members of the community that a member of the royal family has died.

Similarly, from a distance an old hag who chooses to continue living in her old 'ramshackle' mud house despite the fact that her rich son who lives in the capital city has constructed for her a posh bungalow with elegant corrugated iron sheets; appears primitive, uncivilized and even idiotic. However, phenomenological interpretation and close participant observation of the conduct of this old lady reveal that a house is not just a mud-thatched object but a museum of experiences. According to the old hag, the abandonment of her mud house is analogous to the annihilation of decades of experiences. These experiences include; giving birth to two sets of twins inside one of the rooms in the hut, the initiation ceremonies of children and grandchildren that have taken place in the hut, and the placentas of her children that were buried inside the hut, among others.

### **Post-positivism as a Postmodernism Critique of Scientific Hegemony**

Post-positivism is a philosophy of method that deconstructs the opportunism in the objectivity and certainty of science.<sup>40</sup> It traces its roots to David Hume's rebuttal of the inductive methodology on which the objectivity of science was based. Hume logically articulates that induction is not based on reason but on habit.<sup>41</sup> This implies that science is not based on rational dispositions but rather on emotional constructions. Karl Popper's numerous works on the philosophy of science were also fundamental precursors of the post-modernity of science in general and post-positivism in particular.

Popper renders the search for certainty in science a futile endeavor. He argues categorically that science is based on intelligent guesses which he calls conjectures and refutations. Popper refutes the inductive foundation of science and argues profoundly that science is premised on deduction.<sup>42</sup> Popper's criticisms situate the objective foundations of science in disarray. This creates a formidable ground for the centrality of post-positivism in the attribution and justification of scientific knowledge.

Thomas Kuhn further crystallizes the postmodernity of science in his post-positivistic defense of the paradigm shifts in science. According to him, science is neither founded on induction nor deduction. Kuhn opines that science is founded on paradigms that are neither objective nor static.<sup>43</sup> He argues painstakingly that science progresses from pre-science, science, crisis, revolution, and then back to the pre-science stage. The pre-science stage is characterized by the lack of a central paradigm under which all scientists work. This is preceded by the science stage which is characterized by a central paradigm under which all scientists work such as the Newtonian Paradigm and Einsteinian paradigm.

A crisis situation and a revolution or rejection of the central paradigm arise when scientists accumulate so many anomalous results which cannot be solved by the central paradigm under which scientists are working. The revolution leads to a return to pre-science or the search for another central paradigm.<sup>44</sup> Kuhn argues that in scientific knowledge acquisition and justification is a sociological question. Paul Fereyabend further fossilizes the post-modernisation of science in his *magnum opus*.

<sup>39</sup> E. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993).

<sup>40</sup> Rosenau, *Post-Modernism and the Social Sciences: Insights, Inroads, and Intrusions*, 117.

<sup>41</sup> David Hume, *Philosophical Essays Concerning Human Understanding* (London: A. Millar, 1948).

<sup>42</sup> Karl Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* (Routledge, 2005).

<sup>43</sup> T. S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962).

<sup>44</sup> T. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972).

According to him, the existence of a superior scientific methodology is premised on utter fiction. Feyerabend opines that there is no difference between science and voodoo or witchcraft in terms of methodology.<sup>45</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Postmodernism is a strand of modernity that is extricated from illusions. These illusions include, *inter alia*, the search for universal knowledge, objective truth, absolute certainty, proof beyond reasonable doubt and universal laws in the natural and social sciences. Postmodernism creates fundamental paradigm shifts in our conceptualization of knowledge, truth, and methodology. It deconstructs the objectivistic and universalistic pre-suppositions of modernity in general and positivistic science in particular. Postmodernism not only renders knowledge acquisition and justification subjective endeavors but also exposes the veil of racism, sexism, colonialism and imperialism that is disguised as modern science. Postmodernism also nullifies the binary distinction between truth/error, knowledge and opinion, primitive/civilized and universals and particulars among others. The clear demarcation between binary-related nuances like morality/immorality, information/misinformation, genocider/freedom fighter and literate/illiterate is illusory. These nuances are intertwined in power discourses that situate their meaning. For instance, western imperialistic hegemony has led to the construction of pink and pale persons as white and brown and pale Africans as black. Therefore, interpretive philosophies of method as well as multi-disciplinary and trans-disciplinary methodologies are pertinent in unearthing the different illusions of modernity. These methods include: phenomenological interpretation, discourse analysis, post-colonial criticism, de-colonial analysis, emancipatory criticism and ethnographic interpretation. The major contribution of postmodernism is the subjectivisation of knowledge and methodology. This has safeguarded the epistemological credibility of oppressed and marginalized people, such as women, indigenous people, colonized people, gay persons, genderqueer persons and intersex persons, among others.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The publication of this article was sponsored by Kyambogo University Research Grants and Publications Committee.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Appignanesi, R., and C. Garratt. *Introducing Postmodernism*. New York: Totem Books, 1995.
- Aronson, Brittany A. "The White Savior Industrial Complex: A Cultural Studies Analysis of a Teacher Educator, Savior Film, and Future Teachers." *Journal of Critical Thought and Praxis* 6, no. 3 (2017).
- Baudrillard, J. *Symbolic Exchange and Death*. Edited by Ian Hamilton Grant. London: Sage Publications, 1976.
- Bauman, Z. *Liquid Life*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005.
- . *Liquid Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000.
- . *Liquid Times: Living in an Age of Uncertainty*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007.
- Belenky, M. F., Clinchy B.M., Goldberg N.R., and J.M. Tarule. *Women's Ways of Knowing*. New York: Basic Books, 1986.
- Binns, T. "Dualistic and Unlinear Concepts of Development." In *The Companion to Development Studies*, edited by V. Desai and R.B. Potter. London: Arnold, 2002.
- Bishop, R. "Postmodernism." In *Encyclopedia of Cultural Anthropology*, edited by D. Levinson and E. Ember. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1996.
- Boyne, R. and Rattansi, A. (eds). *Postmodernism and Society*. London: MacMillan Education LTD, 1990.
- Callinicos, A. "Reactionary Postmodernism?" In *Postmodernism and Society*, edited by R. Boyne and A. Rattansi. London: MacMillan Education LTD, 1990.

<sup>45</sup> Paul Feyerabend, *Against Method: Outline of an Anarchistic Theory of Knowledge*. (London: Verso, 1975).

- Cooper, Karyn, Robert E White, and Robert E White. *Qualitative Research in the Post-Modern Era: Contexts of Qualitative Research*. Vol. 1. Springer, 2012.
- Deutsch, David. *The Beginning of Infinity: Explanations That Transform the World*. Penguin UK, 2011.
- Dreyfus, H.L and Rabinow, P. *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*. Chicago: Routledge, 1983.
- Felski, Rita. "Feminism, Postmodernism, and the Critique of Modernity." *Cultural Critique*, no. 13 (1989): 33–56.
- Feyerabend, Paul, *Against Method: Outline of an Anarchistic Theory of Knowledge* London: Verso, 1975.
- Flax, Jane. "Postmodernism and Gender Relations in Feminist Theory." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 12, no. 4 (1987): 621–43.
- Fountain, P., Bush, R., & Feener, M. (Eds). *Religion and the Politics of Development*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.
- George, Kizito Michael. "The Ethics of Pro-Poor Poverty Policy: A Critique of the Neo-Liberal Imperative and the Epistemology of Poverty Eradication in Uganda," 2013.
- Good Agency (UK). "In Conversation with No White Saviors," n.d. <https://www.goodagency.co.uk/in-conversation-with-no-white-saviors/>.
- Graham, D.W. "Heraclitus. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy," 2019. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/heraclitus/#Flu>.
- Harris, Marvin. *Theories of Culture in Postmodern Times*. Rowman Altamira, 1998.
- Holtz, Peter. "Does Postmodernism Really Entail a Disregard for the Truth? Similarities and Differences in Postmodern and Critical Rationalist Conceptualizations of Truth, Progress, and Empirical Research Methods." *Frontiers in Psychology* 11 (September 17, 2020). <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.545959>.
- Hume, D. *Philosophical Essays Concerning Human Understanding*. London: A. Millar, 1948.
- Kothari, R. *Re-Thinking Development : In Search of More Humane Alternatives*. Delhi: Ajanta, 1988.
- Kuhn, T. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972.
- Kuhn, T. S. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962.
- Latouche, S. *In the Wake of the Affluent Society: An Exploration of Post Development*. London: Zed, 1993.
- Latour, B. *The Pasteurization of France*. Translated by Alan Sheridan and John Law. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1988.
- Liotard, J. *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1984.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Beyond Good and Evil*. New York: Penguin, 1990.
- Palmer, J. A. *Parmenides and Presocratic Philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Popper, Karl. *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*. Routledge, 2005.
- Rosenau, Pauline Marie. *Post-Modernism and the Social Sciences: Insights, Inroads, and Intrusions*. Princeton University Press, 1991.
- Said, E. *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Vintage Books, 1993.
- Said, Edward. "1995. Orientalism." *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader (New York and London: Harvester Wheatsheaf)*, 1978, 132–49.
- Sarup, M. *An Introductory Guide to Post-Structuralism and Postmodernism*. Atlanta: University of Georgia Press, 1993.
- Smith, Steve. "New Approaches to International Theory." *The Globalization of World Politics* 1 (1997).
- Sousa Santos, Boaventura de. *Epistemologies of the South: Justice against Epistemicide*. London: Routledge, 2015.
- Stacey, Judith, and Barrie Thorne. "The Missing Feminist Revolution in Sociology." *Social Problems* 32, no. 4 (1985): 301–16.
- Tirhakah, L. "The Undisputed Ranking of Black Hair Styles," 2020. <https://level.medium.com/the-undisputed-ranking-of-black-hair-styles-f337040606f8>.
- Wigginton, Britta, and Michelle N LaFrance. "Learning Critical Feminist Research: A Brief Introduction to Feminist Epistemologies and Methodologies." *Feminism & Psychology*, 2019,

0959353519866058.

Wilson, Erin K. “‘Power Differences’ and ‘the Power of Difference’: The Dominance of Secularism as Ontological Injustice.” *Globalizations* 14, no. 7 (November 10, 2017): 1076–93.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14747731.2017.1308062>.

#### **ABOUT AUTHOR**

Dr. Kizito Michael George is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Religious Studies and Philosophy at Kyambogo University. He holds a Master of Philosophy Degree in Gender and Development from the University of Bergen (Norway) and obtained a PhD in Philosophy from Makerere University. Dr. Kizito heads the Philosophy section at KYU and is a member of the American Philosophy Association (APA), African Philosophy Society (APS), and International Development Ethics Association (IDEA). His research interests include; the philosophy of method, human rights, jurisprudence, development ethics, Pan-Africanism, Poverty Eradication, gender, and African Philosophy.