

TRANSCOLONIALISM AND THE POLITICS OF KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION IN AFRICA: A PHILOSOPHICAL INQUIRY

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ABSTRACT

This article undertakes a critical philosophical examination of transcolonialism and its implications for knowledge production in Africa. Transcolonialism, as a theoretical framework interrogates the enduring impact of colonial legacies on epistemological structures while also addressing contemporary forms of global interconnectedness that perpetuate asymmetrical power dynamics. The study critically examines how coloniality persists in shaping African intellectual traditions, methodologies, and institutions, often marginalizing indigenous knowledge systems. By interrogating the complex power dynamics and epistemological hierarchies that underpin transcolonial relations, this inquiry uncovers the ways in which colonial and neoliberal forces have shaped the production, dissemination and validation of knowledge on the continent. The analysis underscores the importance of reclaiming African epistemic agency by fostering trans-disciplinary approaches that bridge indigenous and global knowledge systems. Thus, drawing on African philosophical perspectives and critical theory, and using the descriptive and the analytic methods of inquiry, this study challenges Western epistemologies and highlights the urgency of decolonizing knowledge production in Africa. Through a nuanced analysis of transcolonialism's cultural, economic, and political manifestations, this research demonstrates the need for African-centered knowledge systems and epistemological diversity. Ultimately, this article contends that reclaiming Africa's intellectual sovereignty is crucial for reconfiguring the politics of knowledge production and fostering inclusive and equitable knowledge ecosystems. This article therefore, advocates for a paradigm shift towards inclusive and context-sensitive frameworks that can contribute to sustainable intellectual and social-political transformation in Africa.

Keywords: Transcolonialism, knowledge production, African philosophy, decolonization, epistemological diversity.

INTRODUCTION

The politics of knowledge production in Africa has long been shaped with the historical and structural forces or legacies of colonialism and the continued epistemic dominance of Western paradigms. This issue persists in contemporary discourse through the phenomenon of transcolonialism, a conceptual framework that interrogates the lingering colonial and neo-colonial influences shaping African intellectual traditions, institutions, and epistemologies. However, the concept of transcolonialism, which is a term that transcends the temporal and spatial boundaries of traditional colonial frameworks, offers a new lens through which to examine the on-going politics of knowledge production on the continent. Philosophically, transcolonialism highlights the contested terrain of African knowledge systems and the struggle for epistemic sovereignty in the face of hegemonic global knowledge structures. Transcolonialism refers not merely to the persistence of colonial power structures but to the dynamic, cross-temporal, and cross-spatial interactions that continue to influence how knowledge is created, validated, and disseminated in Africa. This philosophical inquiry delves into the intersections of transcolonialism and knowledge production, drawing on African philosophical traditions, postcolonial theory, and critical epistemology to interrogate the power dynamics at play. This article will explore the concept of transcolonialism and how it shapes the politics of knowledge production in Africa. It will analyze the historical contexts, contemporary structures of knowledge domination, and efforts by African scholars to reclaim and reimagine indigenous knowledge systems.

Methodology

To unravel the complexities of transcolonialism and knowledge production in Africa, this study employs a multi-faceted research approach. The methodology encompasses a thorough review of existing literature on decolonial theory, postcolonial studies, and African epistemologies. By triangulating diverse sources of information, this research seeks to construct a nuanced understanding of how power operates in knowledge systems across Africa.

THE CONCEPT OF TRANSCOLONIALISM

Transcolonialism, unlike postcolonialism which often assumes a linear progression beyond colonial rule, emphasizes the fluidity and continuity of colonial influences across time and geographies. Scholars like Ngugi WaThiong'o argue that colonialism was not a singular event but a process that embedded itself into the epistemic fabric of colonized societies (WaThiong'o, 1986). Mignolo (2012) emphasizes the "decolonial turn" and the need to move beyond Eurocentric knowledge production. Quijano (2000) highlights the concept of "coloniality of power" as a structure that continues to shape global hierarchies. Burawoy et al (2000), examines the "ethnography of modernity" and how colonial categories continue to operate in the postcolonial world. Spivak (1999) studies the subaltern voice and the challenges of representation in the postcolonial world. Chakrabarty (2000) investigates the concept of "provincializing Europe" and the need to decenter Eurocentric narratives. McClintock (1992) explores the concept of imperial nostalgia and the ways in which colonial legacies continue to be imagined and redeployed. Mbembe (2017) analyzes the concept of "postcolonial condition" and the enduring violence and inequalities in the postcolonial world. Transcolonialism extends this idea, suggesting that contemporary global systems, economic, cultural, and intellectual, perpetuate colonial hierarchies in ways that are not immediately visible. In Africa, this

manifests in the dominance of Western epistemologies, the marginalization of indigenous knowledge systems, and the unequal power relations between African scholars and their counterparts in the Global North.

The term “transcolonialism” goes beyond a simple notion of “after colonialism” and it highlights the continuities, predicaments, and reconfigurations of power relations established during colonial periods. The term transcoloniality is composed of two words *Trans* and *Coloniality*. The prefix “trans” signifies “across,” “beyond,” or “through.” In the context of transcoloniality, it emphasizes the ongoing and evolving nature of colonial power structures that extend beyond the formal end of colonial rule (Okeke & Dimonye, 2024). Okeke and Diomonye, citing Agbakoba, opined that “trans” here precisely implies moving beyond pre-colonial and colonial phases in Africa. Coloniality, on the other hand, refers to the broader system of domination established by European empires, encompassing political, economic, cultural, and epistemological dimensions (Okeke & Dimonye, 2024); thus encapsulates both the historical weight of colonial domination and the modern mechanisms such as globalization, neoliberalism, and academic gatekeeping that sustain epistemic inequality. Philosophically, it raises questions about agency, authenticity, and the possibility of decolonizing knowledge in a world where coloniality remains pervasive.

Transcolonialism, as a theoretical construct, extends beyond postcolonial critiques by addressing the ongoing transnational and cross-temporal influences that colonial histories exert on contemporary African knowledge systems. Unlike postcolonialism which focuses primarily on the aftermath of colonial rule, transcolonialism accounts for the fluid and evolving dynamics of epistemic control in a globalized world. This framework critiques the ways in which African knowledge production remains subordinated to Eurocentric epistemologies, thereby maintaining a knowledge dependency that undermines indigenous intellectual agency.

COLONIAL LEGACIES AND EPISTEMIC HEGEMONY

The colonial project in Africa was not merely an economic or political enterprise but also an epistemological one. Colonial powers systematically marginalized indigenous African knowledge systems while privileging Western modes of inquiry. Walter Rodney (1972) argues that colonialism deliberately underdeveloped Africa, not only in material terms but also intellectually by eroding local epistemic traditions and replacing them with alien frameworks of thought. The consequences of this epistemic violence persist in contemporary academia, where African scholars often have to engage with knowledge structures defined by Western institutions, methodologies, and theoretical paradigms.

THE POLITICS OF KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION IN AFRICA

In Africa, colonialism brought with it not only written forms of knowledge, but also brought a perspective, its imported ideas. For instance, the well-rehearsed idea of colonialism is that African systems are archaic and have to be replaced by colonial notions of innovation and advancement (Zegeye & Vambe, 2006). Knowledge production in Africa has been a contested terrain since the advent of colonial rule. European colonizers imposed their intellectual frameworks, dismissing African ways of knowing as primitive or unscientific. This epistemic violence, as articulated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, sought to erase indigenous ontologies and epistemologies, replacing them with Eurocentric paradigms (Spivak, 1988). The legacy of this imposition is evident in the structure of African universities, where Western languages (English, French, Portuguese) are prioritized in scholarship, and the reliance on foreign publishing industries to legitimize African research, as it is in most of our Nigerian

Universities, where emphasis is laid on publishing in “high impact journals” (as so-called), journals indexed in SCOPUS, Web of Science, Thompson Reuters, etc.

Transcolonialism complicates this narrative by highlighting how contemporary knowledge production remains tethered to global power structures. For instance, African scholars often face pressure to publish in Western journals, which are gate-kept by editorial boards unfamiliar with African contexts. This dynamic reinforces a hierarchy where knowledge produced in the Global North is deemed universal, while African knowledge is relegated to the status of the particular or untrustworthy. As Valentin-Yves Mudimbe notes, the “invention of Africa” by Western discourse continues to shape how African intellectual contributions are perceived and valued (Mudimbe, 1988).

Moreover, funding for research in Africa frequently comes from international donors, whose agendas may prioritize Western interests over local needs. This creates an absurdity as African scholars are compelled to align their work with external frameworks, undermining the autonomy of indigenous knowledge production. Transcolonialism, in this sense, is not just a historical residue but an active process that sustains epistemic dependency.

NEOCOLONIALISM AND THE REPRODUCTION OF EPISTEMIC INEQUALITIES

While political independence was achieved in the mid-20th century, the decolonization of knowledge remains an ongoing struggle. The persistence of neocolonial influences manifests in various ways, including the dominance of Western academic publishing, the marginalization of African intellectuals in global research networks, and the preference for Western theories to interpret African realities remains. WaThiong’o’s concept of “Decolonizing the Mind” underscores the need for epistemic liberation, arguing that knowledge systems should be reclaimed and centered on African realities and languages (WaThiong’o, 1986).

In addition, the structural inequalities within global academia reinforce epistemic hierarchies. Taking a look at our educational system in Africa and Nigeria in particular, you discover that our universities continue to operate within frameworks established by former colonial powers, with academic curricula predominantly shaped by Western intellectual traditions. Very recently, the National Universities Commission (NUC) introduced what is called Core Curriculum and Minimum Academic Standard (CCMAS), a new curriculum for all Nigerian Universities to follow, of which 70% of the curricula is modeled according to the Western frame work, and only 30% reflects what could be added, referred to as local content. As Mahmood Mamdani critiques, African higher education remains trapped in a colonial epistemic framework that prioritizes Western validation over indigenous knowledge production (Mamdani, 1996).

TRANSCOLONIALISM AND GLOBAL KNOWLEDGE NETWORKS

In the contemporary era of globalization, transcolonialism examines how epistemic control is maintained through global knowledge networks that dictate what counts as legitimate knowledge. The dominance of Western academic publishing houses, funding agencies, and ranking systems perpetuates an asymmetry in knowledge production. African scholars often face the challenge of engaging with research that is valued based on Western academic standards rather than indigenous knowledge validation.

Moreover, research agendas in Africa are frequently influenced by foreign donors and institutions, leading to a form of intellectual outsourcing where African scholars produce knowledge that aligns with external interests rather than local needs. The politics of research

funding further exacerbates these disparities, as African academics rely heavily on Western grants that often come with predefined thematic and methodological frameworks (Mkandawire, 2005).

AFRICAN PERSPECTIVES OF PHILOSOPHICAL PATHWAYS TO EPISTEMIC LIBERATION

To grapple with the implications of transcolonialism, a philosophical approach rooted in African thought is essential. African philosophy, as articulated by thinkers like Kwasi Wiredu and Paulin Hountondji, emphasizes the importance of indigenous conceptual frameworks while engaging critically with Universalist claims (Wiredu, 1980). Wiredu (1980), for instance, advocates for “conceptual decolonization,” a process of rethinking African intellectual traditions outside the distortions of colonial categories. This involves reclaiming oral traditions, communal epistemologies, and non-Western modes of reasoning as valid sources of knowledge.

Hountondji (1997), on the other hand, critiques the romanticisation of indigenous knowledge, arguing that it must be subjected to rigorous scientific scrutiny to remain relevant in a globalized world. This tension between preserving authenticity and embracing modernity lies at the heart of the transcolonial dilemma. How can African knowledge systems assert their legitimacy without being subsumed by the very structures they seek to resist?

From a metaphysical standpoint, transcolonialism prompts questions about the nature of knowledge itself. If knowledge is inherently tied to power, as Michel Foucault contends, then the transcolonial framework reveals how African epistemologies are doubly marginalized, first by colonial domination and then by the global knowledge economy (Foucault, 1980). Yet, African philosophers like Mogobe Ramose offer a counterpoint through the concept of ubuntu, which posits a relational ontology where knowledge emerges from communal interdependence rather than individual mastery (Ramose, 1999).

Philosophy therefore offers critical tools for challenging transcolonial epistemic hegemony and fostering intellectual sovereignty in Africa. The resurgence of indigenous African philosophies such as Ubuntu, Igwebuike, and ethno-philosophy, demonstrates a growing recognition of African epistemic agency. These philosophical traditions emphasize communal knowledge production, holistic reasoning, and the integration of indigenous methodologies in academic discourse (Kanu, 2017).

Furthermore, the rise of Afrocentric and decolonial perspectives seeks to reposition African knowledge production within its rightful intellectual traditions, thereby challenging the asymmetries imposed by transcolonial structures (Hountondji, 1997).

RECLAIMING INTELLECTUAL AUTONOMY (DECOLONIZING KNOWLEDGE)

The project of decolonizing knowledge production in Africa is both a practical and philosophical endeavour. Practically, it requires dismantling the structural inequalities embedded in global academia, reforming publishing practices, prioritizing African languages, and fostering South-South intellectual collaborations. Philosophically, it demands a reimagining of what constitutes knowledge, moving beyond the binaries of Western versus indigenous to embrace hybridity and multiplicity.

Many African scholars, along with those of African descent in the Diaspora, have undertaken extensive research to highlight Africa’s contributions to human civilization. A remarkable collection of African intellectuals, both within the continent and abroad, has significantly

enriched knowledge production and played a crucial role in advancing African Studies on a global scale (Owoahene-Acheampong & Gordon, 2015).

However, transcolonialism underscores the limits of decolonization in a world where power remains asymmetrically distributed. As Achille Mbembe (2001) argues, the “post-colony” is not a clean break from the colonial but a space of entanglement where old and new forms of domination coexist. The rise of digital technologies, for instance, offers opportunities for African scholars to bypass traditional gatekeepers, yet it also exposes them to new forms of surveillance and commodification by global tech corporations.

Hence, a concerted effort toward reclaiming intellectual autonomy necessitates structural and institutional reforms. African universities should prioritize the development of curricula that reflect indigenous knowledge systems while promoting multi-lingual scholarship to challenge the linguistic dominance of colonial languages. Additionally, the establishment of African-centered academic journals and publishing platforms is crucial for breaking the monopoly of Western academic gatekeeping.

Collaborative knowledge production through intra-African scholarly networks can also serve as a countermeasure to transcolonial epistemic dominance. By fostering South-South intellectual exchanges, African scholars can create independent spaces for theoretical innovation and critical discourse that align with African realities rather than Western paradigms (Zeleza, 2009).

CONCLUSION

Transcolonialism reveals the persistent epistemic challenges faced by African knowledge producers in a world where colonial legacies continue to shape intellectual landscapes. Addressing these challenges requires a philosophical commitment to decolonizing knowledge production, advocating for methodological pluralism, and fostering indigenous intellectual agency. Transcolonialism reveals the complex interplay between history, power, and knowledge production in Africa. It challenges us to move beyond simplistic narratives of colonial legacy and toward a deeper understanding of how epistemic inequalities are reproduced in the present. Philosophically, it invites a dialogue between African thought and global discourses, seeking not just to resist but to reimagine the terms of knowledge itself. While the path to epistemic liberation remains fraught, the inquiry into transcolonialism offers a vital starting point for rethinking Africa’s place in the world of ideas. Africa’s experience of transcoloniality calls for breaking free from past constraints and embracing a future driven by self-determination, cooperation, and cultural renewal. As the continent moves beyond its colonial legacy, it is positioned to emerge as a strong global force, actively contributing to the creation of a more just and equitable world. By reclaiming epistemic sovereignty, African scholars can disrupt the politics of knowledge production and establish a more equitable global intellectual order.

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