



Epistemic Freedom: Itineraries of a Concept

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Abstract

The concept of epistemic freedom, which I introduced in *Epistemic Freedom in Africa: Deprovincialization and Decolonization* (2018), is elaborated in this article to give it context and to highlight its itineraries. This reflective article provides five problematic epistemes that necessitates struggles for epistemic freedom. These are racist, (en)slave, colonial/imperial, endocentric/patriarchal, and capitalist/neoliberal epistemes. These inextricably intertwined epistemes are constitutive of Eurocentric epistemologies and its reproductions at a world scale and make it difficult for alternative epistemologies from the Global South to flourish. They also underpin contemporary global economy and its asymmetrical power dynamics, which continues to marginalise decolonial ways of thinking, seeing, and praxes.

Introduction

Dominant ways of knowing cascading from empires, modern nation-states and ruling capitalist bourgeois elites invade the universe of others to impose themselves as the only legitimate, objective, scientific, and universally truthful epistemology. It is this imperialism of knowledge that is confronted by epistemic freedom as a multifaceted insurgent and

aspirational liberatory concept. Epistemic freedom encapsulates struggles and visions for freedom in the domain of knowledge. It unsettles genealogies, structures, economies, colonialities, and hegemonies of modern knowledge. As an essential pre-requisite for all other forms and dimensions of freedom, epistemic freedom emerges within the broader discursive context of anti-racism, anti-

enslavement, anti-imperialism, anti-colonialism, anti-capitalism, anti-heteropatriarchal sexism, and anti-neoliberalism.

While colonialism/coloniality works within the paradigm of difference resulting in binaries, classifications, and hierarchization; decolonization/decoloniality as the framework of the combative concept of epistemic freedom which emerged from battles fields of history, is connected to the anti/decolonial interventions which embraces what Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986) depicted as "decolonizing the mind." Decolonizing the mind emerges from the realization that a cognitive empire invaded the mental universe of the colonized and imposed coloniality of knowledge so deep that the dismantling of the physical empire left the cognitive empire intact. It resonates with what Walter D. Mignolo (2009) termed "epistemic disobedience." Epistemic disobedience is a revolutionary call for delinking with coloniality of knowledge and to produce another knowledge from the underside of modernity. Kwesi K. Prah (2017) posited the need to construct "intellectual sovereignty" as a basis for all other freedoms. Therefore, struggles for epistemic freedom are driven and propelled by what Amber Murray and Patricia Delay (2022) named as "defiant scholarship." This means that the concept of epistemic freedom is expansive. It is necessary to delve into its itineraries.

To realise epistemic freedom, three decolonial actions and epistemic positions have to be undertaken. The first is what Cathrine Odora Hoppers and Howard Richards (2012) termed "rethinking thinking". This concept states that the epistemic instruments we employ to make sense of the world have become outdated, on the one hand, and, on the other, it entails recovery of subjugated and indeed museumized knowledges. The second is what Immanuel Wallerstein (1991) described as an act of "unthinking thinking". This is a far more radical epistemic action which involves decolonizing, depatriarchising, dehierarchization,

deracializing, deparochializing, and decanonizing of thinking and knowledge (see Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2021). All these actions seek to re-make knowledge to be for life, thinking to be of service to humanity, and to pluralise and democratize knowledge into its ecologies. In this "unthinking thinking", one confronts a decrypted knowledge and the cognitive empire driven by the hegemonic desire to control, repress, dominate, and exploit others (see Ricardo 2016).

The third is the painstaking process of "learning to unlearn in order to relearn" (see Tlostanova and Mignolo 2012). This entails shifting from what Carter G. Woodson (1933) termed the "mis-education of the Negro" to a relearned knowledge for liberation, freedom, and life. This is necessary because modern subjects have been subjected to coloniality of knowledge predicated on Eurocentrism with its scientific racism, classism, and sexism. In the opening chapter of *Epistemic Freedom in Africa: Deprovincialization and Decolonization* (2018) there is a plea to "seek epistemic freedom first" as an essential pre-condition for other freedoms. This plea arose from a realisation that even though the physical empire was dismantled in the 20th century across most parts of the world and colonialism was condemned at the level of the United Nations, the modern world remained epistemically colonized. Eurocentrism, with its hidden scientific racism, did not suddenly evaporate. This is why "the definitive entry of descendants of the enslaved, displaced, colonized, and racialised peoples into existing academies across the world" was accompanied by them "proclaiming loudly that they are human beings, their lives matter, and that they were born into valid and legitimate knowledge systems" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018:3).

While academic freedom is more about rights, epistemic freedom is about both rights and justice:

Thus, epistemic freedom speaks to cognitive justice. Epistemic freedom is fundamental about the right think, theorise, interpret the world, develop own methodologies and write from where one is located and unencumbered by Eurocentrism

(Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018:3).

The concept of epistemic freedom does not seek to replace the concept of academic freedom. Rather, it seeks to deepen it by bringing the demands for

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... “learning to unlearn

in order to relearn” ...

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epistemic rights and cognitive justice together into the centre of contemporary resurgent and insurgent struggles for epistemological decolonization. To elaborate on epistemic freedom, I introduced the concepts of “provincialising Europe” (deuniversalising and decanonizing that knowledge which has assumed a hegemonic status in the modern world). In Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’s (1993) terms, this entails moving the centre in three ways. Moving it from the hegemonic Europe and North America to other geospatial spaces of knowledge generation. Moving it from the minority male bourgeois to the majority of peoples. Moving the centre from androcentrism to embrace knowledge generated by women.

The concept of “deprovincializing Africa” entails deparochializing and demarginalizing those African knowledges that have been subjugated (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018: 3-4). Africa has to be a legitimate centre of knowledge generation and dissemination. The fundamental issue being what value is gained if we think from Africa into the world and reverse the colonial gaze where thinking was from Europe and North America. This question becomes urgent at the present moment of uncertainties of knowledge and whereby basic epistemological questions have been re-opened (see Wallerstein 2014: 58).

Building a strong case for epistemic freedom begins by asserting that all knowledges have a particularistic genealogy which make them partial and incomplete. This reality links well with what Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2007) termed “ecologies of knowledges” or epistemic pluralism. The result is a shift from old colonial conception of knowledge in the singular to the new decolonial understanding of knowledges in the plural. It becomes possible in a context where decolonization is deployed to unsettle and interrupt the racist, colonialist, imperialist, sexist, capitalist, and neoliberal structures of hegemonic knowledge.

There are also scholars, like Miranda Fricker (2007), who come from analytic philosophy who contributed to the question of epistemic freedom. Fricker thought of epistemic injustice and epistemic oppression in terms of limitations of choice of epistemic endeavours of others who are not powerful, lack means to exercise epistemic freedom, and experience exclusion from participation in epistemic communities, and

ethics (see also Landstrom 2024). Fricker (2007) coined two widely used concepts of hermeneutic and testimonial injustices which speak more to prejudices of individuals rather than structures, systems, institutions, and epistemes that constrain epistemic freedom.

Fricker was not thinking from a decolonial perspective but from an analytical philosophical paradigm. The context was that of what became known as “republican epistemology” and “neo-republican philosophy” (see Landstrom 2024: 17). The legacies and indeed the afterlives of racism, enslavement, imperialism, colonialism, capitalism, heteropatriarchal sexism, and neoliberalism, as they impinge on cognitive injustices and epistemic oppression, resulting in the production of what Veli Mitova (2020: 3) termed an “epistemically colonized world” is not the focus of Fricker.

Fricker (2013) acknowledges that epistemic justice is an essential pre-condition for political freedom. There is liberal and if not neoliberal thinking in Fricker’s otherwise useful work. My own interventions are from the vantage points of the Global South in general and global Africa in particular, where racism, colonialism, racial capitalism, heteropatriarchal sexism, and neoliberalism as well as the afterlives of racial enslavement continue to wreak havoc on epistemic communities and knowledge domains. This article builds on this decolonial perspective to further elaborate on the itineraries of the concept of epistemic freedom.

Context

As a concept, epistemic freedom has a context within which it emerges. It is a modern global historical context, which Ramon Grosfoguel (2013) depicted as characterised by racist/sexist/colonial/Eurocentric epistemology. It is a context dominated by epistemic theft, expropriation, encryption, and monopolization of knowledge by enslavers, racists, colonialists, capitalists, patriarchs, and sexists who turned it into expertise to rule-by, to control, dominate, and exploit the world and other peoples.

The concept of epistemic freedom confronts the cognitive empire which thrives on the invasion of mental universes of its targets and victims (Ngugi wa Thiong’o 1986). This invasion began with ontological extractivism known as “coloniality of being” (see Wynter 2003; Maldonado-Torres 2007).

Ontological extractivism is a foundation of coloniality of knowledge. Coloniality of knowledge names the processes of imposition of knowledge from provincial Europe and North America into the rest of the world. It also confronts cognitive/epistemic injustices entangled with other colonially induced injustices. In the process, epistemicides were committed concurrently with genocides. Colonial conquests were justified epistemically as civilizing missions and the spreading of enlightenment and development. Dispossession was preceded by epistemic denial of the humanity of the targets and victims. All this gives credence to the thesis that the “colour line” (see Dubois (1903), the “epistemic line” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018) and “extraverted accumulation” (see Amin 1974) are inextricably intertwined in how they impinge on the global economy of knowledge and how they constrain epistemic freedom. This means that the existential, epistemic, and material problems are entangled.

The current global economy of knowledge with its uneven intellectual and academic divisions of labour continues to reproduce epistemic inequalities and asymmetries of epistemic capital and power. Forget about liberal feel-good concepts of network society, commonwealth of knowledge, partnerships, and collaborations. They hide the resilient and invisible power dynamics and imperialism of modern hegemonic knowledge (see Ake 1979; Hountondji 1990; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2024b). For example, what Maria Lugones (2008) termed as the “modern colonial gender system” and “coloniality of gender” continues to sustain epistemic androcentrism and epistemic sexism. Consequently, gender analysis, feminist science, and the general contributions of women scholars to knowledge remain marginalised in the global economy of knowledge.

What is underscored here is that the concept of epistemic freedom is not about epistemic liberalism which is limited to inclusion of the excluded, diversification and equality. No, it is about challenging and dismantling the structures and epistemes of hegemonic knowledge systems (Go 2020).

Five problematic epistemes

Epistemic structures shaped discursive fields, disciplines, and mainstream schools of thought. The concept of epistemic freedom confronts five resilient and invisible epistemes. These are: racist

episteme; (en)slave episteme; imperial/colonial episteme; capitalist episteme/neoliberal episteme; and androcentric/sexist episteme. These epistemes are entangled and intersecting. They institute, inscribe, inaugurate, underpin, and sustain epistemic hierarchies. They dictate what counts as legitimate and scientific knowledge and define who can produce it. They are constituent elements of Eurocentrism as an epistemology and a power structure (see Amin 1989; Blaut 1993). Eurocentrism impinges on knowledge and academic cultures at a world scale. Ali A. Mazrui explained the impact of Eurocentrism this way:

It is the Eurocentrism of academic cultures as we know it today—the degree to which the whole tradition of universities is so thoroughly saturated with European values, perspectives, and orientations. The very institution of the university became in our type of situation virtually a mechanism for transmission of European culture to non-European parts of the world (1975: 393).

Wallerstein highlighted that even some celebrated efforts and struggles against Eurocentrism tend to degenerate into “anti-Eurocentric Eurocentrism” (1997: 32). This speaks to how entrenched, hegemonic, ubiquitous, and resilient Eurocentrism interpellated its nemeses. This makes it necessary to examine the five epistemes that underpin Eurocentrism and propel its reproduction today. The foundational one is the racist episteme.

The racist episteme

At the centre of the racist episteme is racist reason. Humans according to racist reason are nothing but races. White race is superior. Black race is inferior. Rationality and reason are embodied by the White race. In the racist episteme there is “the presumed illegitimacy of non-Euromodern knowledge” and “epistemic enclosure” (Gordon 2021:24). Knowledges and knowers from the majority world (Global South) are denied, muted and pushed to the margins of the academy as well as society. The epistemic mike is taken and monopolized by a minority of men from the Global North (Europe and North America). It is this epistemic reality that provoked Ramon Grosfoguel to pose four soul searching questions:

- How is it possible than men from five countries (Italy, France, Germany, Britain, and the USA) achieved such an epistemic privilege to the point

- that their knowledge today is considered superior over the knowledge of the rest of the world?
- How did they come to monopolise the authority of knowledge in the world?
 - Why is it that what we know today as the social, historical, philosophical, or critical theory is based on the socio-historical experience and world views of men from five countries?
 - How did they come to monopolise the authority of knowledge of the world?

(2013: 74-75)

It was the response to the operations of the racist episteme that provoked Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze (1997) to pose the question of “the colour of reason” and trace it to Kantian philosophy. The racist episteme is resilient and has the quality of hiding in social theory, in methodology, in paradigms, in schools of thought, and in pedagogy. Reflecting on epistemic struggles, Francoise Verges (2021: 13) posited that: “We are fighting against a system that has dismissed scientific knowledge, aesthetics, and entire categories of human beings as non-existent.”

The key point is that over centuries the racist episteme has been able to penetrate modern institutions, structures and agencies to embed itself and hide from the naked eye. The westernized modern university is a site within which the racist episteme is hiding. It has a quality of naturalising and routinizing itself. Worse still, the racist episteme invades the psyches of its victims (colonize the minds) and then lives like a parasite—indeed, what Ashis Nandy (1983) termed “the intimate enemy.” This is why decolonization of institutions, structures, agencies and minds is so difficult. The racist episteme works together with the (en)slave episteme to deliver devastation.

The (en)slave episteme

Alys Eve Weinbaum (2022: 4) described the (en) slave episteme as “the thought system, brewed up and distilled over the course of four centuries, that initially enabled and continues to subtend the racialization of (re)production.” It is also an episteme of brutality. Achille Mbembe (2024 xiv-xv) explained brutality as “the practice and experience of power as an exercise in the demolition of beings, things, dreams, and life” as well as “a vast enterprise of occupying territories, of seizing hold

of bodies and imaginaries” that produces “states of emergency” and “states of exception.”

Weinbaum calls it “the slave episteme” and I prefer to term it the (en)slave episteme to underscore that it was not an episteme of enslaved people but that of enslavers. Epistemic efforts were expended in justifying enslavement as a structure of power, as an industry and indeed a “scene of subjection” (see Hartman 2007). Enslavement laid a foundation not only for the exploitative modern capitalist economic system but also for antiblack politics within which Black lives were denied and made to not matter (see Hartman 2007).

Enslavement was a terrain of dehumanization. Murder, rape, and thingification ceased to be exceptions. In the words of Mbembe (2024:16): “brutalism is about naturalising social war.” Dehumanization is the signature of brutality. The contemporary form of domination and deprivation is rooted in the (en)slave episteme. Currently, the (en)slave episteme is pulsating and reverberating within racial capitalism.

The (en)slave episteme began with the kidnapping and chaining of African people, their enclosure in the dark dungeons/stockages at the coast of Africa, their being sold as commodities, their packing like sardines and as cargo into the ships, their suffering in the Middle Passage, and their labouring in plantation and mines. For over four centuries there was the intensification in racism, violence, hyper-exploitation, physical killing, and the rape of enslaved peoples.

Weinbaum (2019) alerts us to how reproductive labour was extracted during the four centuries of enslavement where enslaved women became reduced to breeders of other enslaved labour as well as how this logic feeds into present day biocapitalism. The (en)slave episteme enables contemporary devaluation and extraction of women’s reproduction under biocapitalism. Such phenomena as surrogacy and marketing of biological life (stem cells, sperm, oocytes, babies, and human organs) is enabled by the (en)slave episteme (Weinbaum 2019).

Also, the (en)slave episteme is the base from which contemporary exploitative capitalist labour regimes and contracts are founded. How can one explain the contemporary realities of owners of

means of production across the modern world being predominantly male and white and the labouring forces being largely people of colour? The roots are in the (en)slave episteme. Verges (2021: vi) grappled with the question of “who cleans the world” and her answer was that it lies within “the racialization and feminization of underpaid and undervalued cleaning and care work” where women of colour are dominant.

It is a combination of racist and (en)slave epistemes, which is driving Donald Trump, the president of the United States, to launch an attack on Black history and Black Studies in universities, defunding them, and caricaturing them as nothing but identity and woke politics. At the centre of his agenda of “Making America Great Again” (MAGA) is a racist episteme and nostalgia for the pre-civil rights movements—specifically the Jim Crow period. MAGA is a product of a tragic racist thinking predicated on the idea of United States of America without others, especially migrants, as if whites are not the largest migrants to America who turned it into a colony.

The Imperial/colonial episteme

The Imperial/colonial episteme generated imperial and colonial ways of seeing and knowing. At the centre was a paradigm of difference as a driver of what James Blaut (1993: 10) termed the “colonizer’s model of the world.” Besides the paradigm of difference, there was the paradigm of “discovery” lurking within the imperial/colonial episteme. The paradigm of “discovery” is a dirty one propelled by a mythology of terra nullius (empty spaces) which was a way of denying the existence of other people. It also fed into the practices of reduction of the planet earth itself into something to be discovered, conquered, mapped, colonized, named, owned, and exploited. Colonialism in its grandiose terms became a struggle about who owns the planet earth together with the beings and selves inhabiting it.

Modern social theory emerged within the context of imperialism and colonialism. There is an in-built imperial, colonial, and indeed a white gaze inside the imperial/colonial episteme (Go 2016). The imperial/colonial episteme entrenched itself in the modern disciplines and in the epistemic cultures of institutions of research, learning and teaching. Valentin Y. Mudimbe (1988) introduced the concept

of the “colonial library” to name an imperial and colonial order of knowledge. Like Wallerstein who highlighted how Eurocentrism interpellated even the efforts to subvert and transcend it, Mudimbe also underscores that even the best efforts to decolonize knowledge and delink from the imperial/colonial epistemological order tend to be shaped by it.

He explains how difficult it is to subvert dominant social theory as theory itself is failing to delink with mooring in a context and a history of imperialism and colonialism. This reality led Gurminder K. Bhambra and John Holmwood (2021: 1) to posit that “Modern social theory is a product of the very history it seeks to interpret and explain.” Binaries, dichotomies, and oppositions that characterise modern theorising are an inevitable sign of its modernist, imperial and colonial genealogy constituted by an “overriding anxiety about alterity” (Go 2020: 83).

The key point is that modern social theory, modern social science, and indeed modern scientific thinking emerged within the empire as racialised, androcentric and geographically confined enterprise that was universalised together with its hidden logics of difference. The contemporary demographic profiles of faculties reflect this genealogy. What is read and written by who tells a racist/colonial/imperial/sexist epistemic story. Who is acknowledged and privileged as theorists, who is undermined and silenced, and from which part of the world is a sign of how beholden the modern world of knowledge is to a contextual and historical emergence of social theory. Even the themes and the topics chosen for research and the units of analysis are a tale of the hidden imperial/colonial episteme. Currently, the racist, (en)slave, and imperial/colonial epistemes feed into the capitalist/neoliberal episteme

The capitalist/neoliberal episteme

The modern world is subjected to what Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o (2016) depicted as the journeys of capital. The journeys are from mercantile capital, industrial capital, monopoly capital, financial capital/neoliberal capital to computational capital (see Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2024a). Across all this, the capitalist/neoliberal episteme justifies all sorts of extractivism. Its quadruple refrains are: I

conquer, therefore I am. I exploit, therefore I am. I accumulate, therefore I am. I consume, therefore I am. The dollar is the signature of the capitalist/neoliberal episteme. Cathrine Odora Hoppers and Howard Richards (2012: 24) captured very well the implications of the capitalist/neoliberal episteme for the wider world:

Thinking is calculating. Calculating is economics. Economics is development. Sell yourself, sell yourself, they utter night and day, buzzing with their mercantile message from ear to ear like bees seeking not honey in flowers but salt in wounds.

Maria Lugones (2008: 8) explained the key cognitive interests of capitalism:

The cognitive needs of capitalism include measurement, quantification, externalization (or objectification) of what is knowable with respect to the knower so as to control the relation among the people and nature and among them with respect to it, in particular the property in means of production. This way of knowing was imposed on the whole capitalist world as the only valid rationality and as emblematic of modernity.

The capitalist/neoliberal episteme is fundamentally extractivist. While Linda Martin Alcoff (2022) posited that extractivist epistemologies are generated by extractivist projects. The reality is that they operate in a two-fold manner. First, it is the capitalist/neoliberal extractivist epistemologies that enable and justify extractivist projects. Second, it is the extractivist projects that deploy capitalist/neoliberal episteme to justify extractivism. It is possible to distill the key aspects of the capitalist/neoliberal episteme:

- Nature is redefined as natural resource available for ceaseless exploitation.
- Planet earth as a habitat is objectified as that which has to be discovered, controlled mastered, and owned.
- Knowledge to live-by/knowledge for life is decrypted and transformed into expertise to dominate, control, exploit and rule-by.
- Everything of importance is assigned a monetary value and seen from the eye of monetary profits.
- Knowers are hierarchized and ranked with a view to dismiss or ignore others while giving authority and legitimacy to some.
- Use of intellectual property regimes and law to

turn the commons into private property.

- Corporatization, commodification, and commercialization of everything is promoted.

The capitalist/neoliberal episteme drives what are called market forces. They assign monetary and profit value to nature and being in the first instance. Bio-imperialism (taking control and exploitation of biodiversity for commercial purposes) and biopiracy (patenting and deployment of intellectual property legal regimes) are the contemporary consequence. It started with colonial habits of botanization and museumization of nature. Currently, the capitalist/neoliberal episteme has successfully invaded universities and Jonathan Jansen (2023: 27) summarised the consequences this way:

Students are clients. Teaching is inputs. Publications are outputs. Curriculum is (unit) standards. Measurement is accountability. Assessment is performance. Scholarship is metrics. Graduates (oven-ready) are for the labour market. Leadership is management.

Increasingly, the previous titles of leaders of the universities, such as Vice-Chancellor and Pro-Vice-Chancellor, are being replaced by new ones from the private sector, such as CEO and COO. Instead of the top leadership of the universities being decorated academics (men and women of letters), there is preference for those who have experience in fund-raising and in turning institutions of higher education into full-fledged business corporations. Peers and colleagues which were part of languages of collegiality are being replaced by bosses and subordinates. The professoriate is now the proletariat. Education is now a commodity. It is no longer a public good. Quality of research is replaced by quantity. Love for knowledge is replaced by love for certificates, diplomas, degrees, and titles. The last is the androcentric/sexist episteme, which cuts across the other problematic epistemes.

Androcentric/sexist episteme

The modern dominant order of knowledge is constitutively patriarchal and sexist. Her-story is overshadowed by his-tory. This is the reality across all the major modern disciplines and fields of study. Conceptually, class analysis and analysis of race tend to overshadow gender analysis. Such indices of economy as GDP and GNP ignores “subsistence and reproductive labour” (see Imam and Mama

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1994: 82). This derives from the fact that economics as a discipline, in its models and theories, excludes women epistemically. This has resulted in what Ayesha M. Imam and Amina Mama (1994: 87) termed “housewification” of women.

One of the seminal works that directly confronts the androcentric/sexist episteme is *Engendering African Social Sciences in Africa* (1997) edited by Ayesha M. Imam, Amina Mama, and Fatou Sow. It reveals that the androcentric/sexist episteme has given birth to such problems as gender-bias, gender-neutrality, and gender-blindness that characterise knowledge in general, disciplines, and scholarship. Ayesha M. Imam (1997: 6) specifically interrogates the issue of hostility to engendering knowledge and refusal to embrace feminism, making it clear that “engendering African social sciences is not a simple development of knowledge, but also necessarily and simultaneously profoundly a political struggle over power and resources.”

In a modern world where “at least half of humanity is of feminine genders,” “a social science which does not acknowledge gender as an analytic category is an impoverished and distorted science, and cannot accurately explain social realities and hence cannot provide a way out of the present crisis in Africa” (Imam 1997: 2). What is called for by feminist

scholars is a new scholarship that responds to Sylvia Tamale’s (2020: 9) prescient question: “Who will connect the ideological dots of racism, colonization, capitalism, sexism and heterosexism in ways that our children understand?” This dovetails with Imam’s (1997:21) argument that intersectionality of issues—“class, gender, race, imperialism” are seen as “simultaneous social forces” that are both interwoven and recursive upon each other” and must be put at the centre of the knowledge project.

What emerges clearly from this analysis of the problematic epistemes is that there would never be epistemic freedom without the depatriarchization of knowledge. The struggle for decolonization of knowledge which ignores depatriarchization is an impoverished one. The knowledge project in its entirety which ignores over 52% of the population and is satisfied with what Claude Ake (1997) termed “knowledge of equilibrium” which marginalises the contributions of women to society and normalises the inferiorisation and subordination of women is itself impoverished.

Conclusion:

Seek ye epistemic freedom first

Epistemic freedom and academic freedom are in danger currently across the world. Those scholars and students who have actively condemned the genocide taking place in Gaza have suffered from expulsions from universities, especially in the United States of America. Their academic and epistemic freedom has suffered. Their lives have been made precarious. The flag of antisemitism is constantly being raised as a silencing method. These realities provoked me to delve into the five problematic epistemes as they are part of the itinerary that makes the concept of epistemic freedom central to struggles for decolonization of knowledge. Epistemic freedom is an essential pre-requisite for liberation and freedom in all their dimensions. It is not a metaphor as it has a potential to confront powerful structures, institutions, and agencies of dominant knowledge—the hegemonic epistemes—that underpin, sustain, and reproduce epistemic inequalities, epistemic exclusions, and indeed epistemicides. Epistemic inequalities and exclusions produce social, economic, and other exclusions at the empirical level.

The call of this article is for confronting the five problematic epistemes directly as part of decolonization. A recognition of the fact that knowledge is always partial, incomplete, and perspectival opens the path for possibilities of ecologies of knowledges, which banishes scientific racism and sexism. Epistemic freedom gestures beyond epistemic binaries, dichotomies,

hierarchies, and inequalities. Epistemic freedom is a central part of what Verges (2022: 98) posited as: “Daring to make the leap in time, daring to imagine a world in which humanity is not divided into lives that matter and lives that do not,” and is premised on: “Imagining a *post*(slavery, racist, capitalist, imperialist, patriarchal) future [that] is nonetheless a powerful weapon in the hands of the oppressed.”

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