



Book Review

Epistemic Justice and the Postcolonial University

Edited by Amrita Pande, Ruchi Chaturvedi, and Shari Daya

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Our radical imagination is a tool for decolonisation, for reclaiming our right to shape our lived reality (Brown, 2019. p. 10).

Addressing Epistemic Injustice

Epistemic Justice and the Postcolonial University (2023) is an essential read for anyone who is interested in what it means to decolonise teaching, learning, and research. The text provides a comprehensive and nuanced exploration of the ways in which the University of Cape Town (UCT) in post-apartheid South Africa is grappling with the deeply entrenched legacies of colonialism and seeking to create more just, inclusive, and transformative spaces for knowledge production in teaching and research.

The book's interdisciplinary approach, combined with its focus on both theory and lived experience, makes it a valuable resource for activists, scholars, educators, and therapists alike. Meaningful change requires not just curriculum reform but also a radical rethinking of what constitutes legitimate knowledge.

The book's discussion of Eurocentric knowledge systems also resonates deeply with Nigeria's historical experience. Having been shaped by British colonial rule, Nigeria's higher education system has long prioritised Western intellectual traditions, often at the expense of indigenous knowledge. The contributors advocate for a shift in this paradigm, calling for universities to embrace approaches that reflect and honour local realities. For readers in the West, the book critiques how Western academic traditions dominate global knowledge structures, encouraging institutions to rethink their complicity in perpetuating epistemic inequalities.

The authors advocate for *delinking* (Pande, Chaturvedi, & Daya, p. 10) imagination from Western knowledge systems and a focus on reciprocal, ethical knowledge exchanges that honour diverse epistemologies. This challenge to the status quo is particularly urgent in the face of neocolonial and economically controlled spaces within academic institutions. The book critiques Western-centric models of knowledge production and research paradigms, 'where dialogue too easily equals consensual conversations as opposed to critical deliberation' (Sitas, 2023a, p. 56). The authors argue for a paradigm shift that embraces an ethical framework which recognises hurt and hope in the search for an ethic of reciprocity and 'humanitude' (Sitas, 2023b, p. 226). A system that explores experience in an interdisciplinary pedagogical space, prioritising human dignity central to the decolonisation process, paying attention to, what Shari Daya describes as 'fullness as human beings' (2023, p. 66).

Rethinking Teaching and Learning

A key theme of the book is the role educators play in addressing epistemic injustice. For African educators, this means integrating traditional approaches, such as oral storytelling and community-based learning, into modern academic practice. These methods can help bridge the gap between local knowledge systems and institutionalised education. Western institutions are criticised for tokenistic attempts to include perspectives from the Global South. The book underscores the importance of fostering

genuine partnerships rather than extracting knowledge from postcolonial contexts without offering meaningful reciprocity. By rethinking their teaching methods, Western educators can contribute to more equitable academic environments.

For those involved in creative writing for therapeutic purposes (CWTP) and the Lapidus Research Community (LRC), this book offers important insights into the role of storytelling, imagination, and creative expression in rethinking traditional Western models of knowledge, expression, and healing. The book's advocacy for non-hierarchical, collaborative, participatory, and reciprocal exchanges of knowledge mirrors the principles of CWTP. Practitioners and researchers are well placed to play a significant role in imagining new realities and 're-storying' colonised spaces. Creative writing engages with stories and histories in profound and transformative ways. As a discipline, we have some tools at our fingertips to address the task with honesty, self-reflection, love, and the isiXhosa concept, *ukuzilanda*, meaning 'to fetch oneself and connect to the past in the present moment' (Masola, 2023, p. 93).

It is no secret that Britain was/is at the forefront of the colonisation project and has significant histories to unpack.

This book, although particularly focused on UCT, offers broad implications for universities across the globe in the current political climate. Higher education in the UK is facing a significant financial crisis due to declining international student registrations. In *Development Education and Decolonising International Partnerships in Higher Education: Insights from the 'Cultures of Decolonisation at UCL' Research Project*, Simon Eten Angyagre observes that, 'while there are many innovations to decolonise teaching and research in universities in the UK, these are mostly the initiative of individual academics, without any structural efforts to embed decolonisation in an institutional ethos'. Whatever plans Western governments put in place to encourage registrations to rise, they would be advised to scrutinise the tendency to prioritise economic survival over genuine institutional transformation. This necessitates a need to 'interrogate historical inequalities and their persistence' in order to 'reshape our institutions of higher learning into spaces of justice' (Pande, Chaturvedi, & Daya, 2023, p. 3).

Building Global Solidarity

One of the book's most compelling arguments is its emphasis on solidarity across the Global South. There are connections between challenges faced in countries such as Nigeria, South Africa, India, and Latin America, and the editors demonstrate how the struggle for epistemic justice is a shared global effort. For African academics, this perspective offers both a sense of unity and a broader context for their work. The book calls on Western institutions to engage meaningfully in this shared mission. By viewing epistemic justice as a collective responsibility, it encourages collaboration between Northern and Southern universities, moving beyond the gatekeeping role often played by Western academia.

Identity and Belonging

The book also examines the complex questions of identity and belonging for academics in both African and Western contexts. Non-Western scholars often face the challenge of balancing cultural authenticity with the demands of Western academic standards, particularly those who work or study abroad. This struggle is central to the book's exploration of the pressures faced by Global South academics. For their Western counterparts, the essays encourage a deeper examination of the privileges embedded within their positions in academia. Rather than treating diverse epistemologies as a checkbox exercise, the book calls on Western academics to approach them as opportunities for meaningful transformation.

Sources and Methodologies

The book examines a mix of qualitative methodologies well-suited for the subject matter, as it allows for a deep engagement with the lived experiences of those involved in decolonisation efforts at UCT. The use of some personal narratives, such as those of students and faculty members, adds an emotional and human dimension to the academic discussions, making the theoretical concepts accessible and relatable.

The sources used in the book draw on a wide range of scholarly traditions, including postcolonial theory, critical race theory, decolonial thought, and feminist epistemology. The editors and contributors engage with the work of prominent thinkers such as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Achille Mbembe, and Frantz Fanon, as well as South African intellectuals

who have been central to the country's ongoing struggles with colonial legacies.

Conclusion

Epistemic Justice and the Postcolonial University is an essential contribution to discussions on decolonising higher education. It offers non-Western readers a pathway for reclaiming and validating indigenous knowledge systems while promoting inclusive teaching practices. For Western readers, it serves as both a critique of entrenched inequities and an invitation to collaborate in creating a more just academic landscape. The book reminds us that epistemic justice cannot be achieved through isolated efforts. Instead, it requires local action in the Global South, coupled with genuine partnership from the Global North. By valuing diverse ways of knowing and fostering equity, it underscores the moral imperative of decolonising academia—a collective endeavour that demands courage, commitment, and collaboration.

We need radical honesty – learning to speak from our root systems about how we feel and what we want. Speak our needs and listen to others' needs ... The result of this kind of speech is that our lives begin to align with our longings, and our lives become a building block for authentic community and ultimately a society that is built around true need and real people, not fake news and bullshit norms. (Brown, 2019, pp. 61–62)

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