

TOWARDS EPISTEMIC JUSTICE: DECONSTRUCTING GLOBAL KNOWLEDGE FROM A SOUTHERN PERSPECTIVE

Syamsiah Badruddin¹, Paisal Halim², Suci Ayu Kurniah P³

¹ Master of Sociology, Universitas Nasional, Jakarta, Indonesia

² Master of Public Administration, Universitas Nasional, Jakarta, Indonesia

³ Nursing Study Program, Universitas Indonesia Timur

Corresponding Author ; syamsiah.badruddin@civitas.unas.ac.id

Abstract:

This article critically examines the dominance of Western epistemology in global knowledge production and its impact on the marginalization of local knowledge in the Global South. Using the frameworks of decolonizing knowledge and epistemic justice, it investigates how global academic structures perpetuate inequalities in the validation, distribution, and legitimization of knowledge. The research identifies several key challenges to epistemic independence, including intellectual dependency, the marginalization of indigenous knowledge, language barriers, infrastructure limitations, and internal fragmentation. In response, the article proposes decolonial strategies such as curriculum reform, strengthening local research institutions, fostering South-South collaboration, and advocating for policies that recognize diverse epistemologies. The objective is to create a more equitable, inclusive global knowledge ecosystem that reflects the social realities of the Global South.

Keywords: *epistemic justice, decolonization of knowledge, Global South, local knowledge, Western domination, academic inequality*

Submission : Feb, 13th 2025

Revision : March 24th 2025

Publication : May 28th 2025

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, the discourse on inequality in global knowledge production has gained significant attention, accompanied by growing criticism of the dominance of Western epistemology within the international academic system. Knowledge production is increasingly recognized as a contested arena where colonial structures, political economies, and cultural hierarchies influence who has the authority to define scientific truth (Harding, 1991; Santos, 2007). The Global South, both as a geopolitical and epistemic entity, has historically faced

marginalization within a global scientific framework still grounded in the coloniality of power and knowledge (Quijano, 2007).

In response to this systemic inequality, numerous decolonial movements have emerged across Latin America, Africa, and Asia, challenging dominant narratives by advocating for alternative epistemologies rooted in historical experience, local cultures, and non-Western cosmologies (Mignolo, 2011; de Sousa Santos, 2014). However, the obstacles extend beyond the recognition of these alternative epistemologies, encompassing the institutional structures that perpetuate the dominance of Western knowledge. These structures include publication systems, research funding, and international scientific collaboration, which sustain the marginalization of local knowledge.

The educational systems in many countries tend to present knowledge as universal and neutral (Werquin, 2010). Yet, as several studies indicate, this epistemological construction is deeply tied to colonial histories and the prevailing dominance of Western scholarship. De Sousa Santos (2014) introduces the term *epistemicide*, which describes the systematic erasure of local knowledge systems in favor of Western epistemology. This hegemony is reflected in global scientific publication, where over 90% of leading journals indexed in Scopus and Web of Science originate from the Global North, thus determining global academic standards of methodology, topics, and language (UNESCO, 2021).

Alternative knowledge systems, developed in the Global South and based on local wisdom, communal practices, and spirituality, are often dismissed as irrational, non-scientific, or mythological, despite their practical relevance in addressing global challenges such as climate change, public health, and food security (Nhémachena, Mawere, & Mubaya, 2016). This undermines the intellectual sovereignty of the South and reinforces structural intellectual dependency. Furthermore, the reliance on Western publication standards forces academics in the Global South to conform to a system that perpetuates this inequity (Demeter, 2020). The World Higher Education Database reports that more than 70% of research funding in developing countries comes from donor agencies or Global North institutions, often dictating the focus and direction of research (International Association of Universities, 2022).

Thus, the dominance of Western epistemology has contributed to systemic inequality, stifled intellectual independence, and limited the legitimacy of local knowledge systems in the global knowledge economy (Noda, 2020). Addressing these issues is not merely an academic exercise but a critical pursuit of epistemic

justice and the reaffirmation of the Global South's intellectual sovereignty (Shome, 2019).

While existing studies critique the dominance of Western epistemologies, many focus primarily on theoretical perspectives and fail to explore the structural mechanisms that perpetuate inequalities within institutional contexts and public policies of the Global South. Moreover, there is a gap in research that comprehensively examines locally-driven resistance strategies and knowledge decolonization efforts. There is a pressing need for a cross-disciplinary approach that not only dismantles dominant structures but also highlights transformative initiatives for epistemic solidarity within the Global South.

This article aims to fill this gap by offering an analytical framework for understanding the structures of injustice in global knowledge production. Through a combination of theoretical analysis and empirical studies, it explores the dynamics of knowledge coloniality, identifies forms of epistemic resistance in the Global South, and proposes pathways toward epistemic justice. The goal is to contribute both to theoretical discourse and to the practical relevance of policy reforms, academic institutions, and scientific communities engaged in transforming global knowledge production.

The dominance of Western epistemology in the global knowledge production system has resulted in structural inequalities that hinder the intellectual independence of countries in the Global South. This study seeks to understand how the dominance of Western epistemology shapes the structures of knowledge production and validation within the global academic system. It aims to investigate the forms of marginalization that local and indigenous knowledge systems face in the Global South, where such knowledge is often dismissed as irrational or unscientific compared to knowledge from the Global North.

Furthermore, this research will examine the extent to which intellectual dependency on Western frameworks affects the epistemic autonomy of countries in the Global South. The study also explores the structural challenges that Southern countries encounter in developing alternative knowledge systems grounded in local histories, cultures, and non-Western cosmologies. In addition, this article proposes decolonial strategies that can be implemented to transform the global knowledge ecosystem into one that is more equitable and inclusive.

By combining theoretical analysis with empirical studies, this article aims to provide a comprehensive framework for understanding the dynamics of knowledge coloniality. It seeks to map out forms of epistemic resistance within the

Global South and propose pathways for achieving epistemic justice, with the objective of offering both theoretical insights and practical guidance for policymakers, academic institutions, and the broader scientific community engaged in reforming global knowledge production.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The discourse on decolonizing knowledge has emerged in response to the recognition that the global scientific system is not neutral, but rather shaped by a long history of colonialism and ongoing unequal power relations. Quijano (2007) introduced the concept of *coloniality of knowledge*, which describes how colonial power structures continue to influence the classification and hierarchy of knowledge, even after the formal colonial period ended. In this framework, modern Western science is often regarded as the only legitimate epistemology, while local, spiritual, and contextual knowledge from the Global South is marginalized or erased.

Santos (2014) further developed the concept of *epistemologies of the South*, which promotes alternative forms of knowledge rooted in the social and historical experiences of Southern communities. Santos warns of the danger of *epistemicide*, which he defines as the systematic destruction of knowledge systems that do not conform to the logic of Eurocentric modernity. His work calls for *cognitive justice*, which advocates for the equal recognition of epistemic plurality and challenges the assumption of Western scientific universality. Cognitive justice, in this context, seeks to dismantle the dominance of Western knowledge and promote the inclusion of diverse knowledge systems.

Fricker (2007) introduced the concept of *epistemic injustice*, which sheds light on the injustices occurring in knowledge production. This framework consists of two main forms: *testimonial injustice*, where knowledge is dismissed or undervalued due to the social identity of its source, and *hermeneutical injustice*, where certain groups are unable to articulate their experiences because of a lack of appropriate conceptual tools. This framework is particularly relevant when examining how the voices of researchers from the Global South are often excluded from mainstream academic discourse, both in publications and research design.

Standpoint theory, introduced by Harding (1991) and Hartsock (1983), further adds to this conversation by explaining how social position influences how individuals experience and interpret the world. Standpoint theory suggests that marginalized groups can offer valuable critical perspectives on dominant systems,

and thus knowledge produced by these groups should be recognized as legitimate. In this light, the Global South is not merely an object of study but a producer of knowledge with a valid and critical epistemology.

Despite a growing body of literature critiquing the dominance of Western epistemologies, much of the existing research primarily focuses on theoretical critiques, leaving a gap in understanding how these concepts manifest within the institutional structures that sustain epistemic inequalities. While scholars have explored ideas such as *epistemicide* and *epistemic injustice*, there remains limited research on how these concepts are operationalized within global knowledge systems. Moreover, the practical application of these theories, particularly in the context of decolonization efforts in the Global South, has not been sufficiently addressed in the literature.

There is also a notable gap in research examining locally-based resistance strategies and knowledge decolonization efforts that are being undertaken in different regions of the Global South. While some studies highlight the existence of alternative epistemologies and challenges to Western hegemony, there is a lack of empirical research that offers practical solutions for reforming global knowledge systems in ways that integrate these alternative knowledge forms.

This article seeks to fill these gaps by drawing on key theoretical concepts such as *epistemic injustice*, *epistemicide*, and *cognitive justice* to critically analyze the structures of global knowledge production. These theories provide a framework for understanding the inequities within the global academic system, particularly the marginalization of knowledge from the Global South. The article aims to explore how the institutional structures of knowledge production reinforce these imbalances and to identify strategies for promoting epistemic justice.

To bridge the gap between theory and practice, the article operationalizes these theories into key indicators of epistemic marginalization. These indicators focus on areas such as representation in academic publications, access to knowledge infrastructure and resources, and participation in international collaborative networks. The article also looks at the recognition of local and alternative epistemologies, as well as the role of the Global South in research design and narrative construction. These indicators provide a framework for analyzing both the quantitative and qualitative dimensions of epistemic inequality, enabling the article to not only trace the patterns of marginalization but also uncover the underlying structures that sustain these disparities.

Through this comprehensive approach, the article contributes to the broader discourse on knowledge decolonization, offering both a theoretical critique and a practical examination of how global knowledge systems can be reformed to ensure greater inclusivity and justice. By proposing actionable strategies for decolonizing knowledge production, the article seeks to promote the recognition of diverse epistemologies and support the transformation of the global knowledge ecosystem into one that is more equitable and reflective of the social realities of the Global South.

METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative approach within the critical-decolonial paradigm, aimed at exploring, understanding, and deconstructing the dominance of Western epistemology in global knowledge production. The focus is on identifying alternative strategies developed by Global South countries to build epistemic independence and challenge the hegemonic structures that marginalize local knowledge systems. This approach is well-suited to the study's objective of analyzing the social and political dimensions of knowledge, as it emphasizes the critique of power dynamics and the epistemic justice movements emerging from the Global South.

Data collection was conducted through library research, which included a comprehensive critical analysis of relevant academic literature, international agency reports, policy documents, and works by prominent Global South theorists in the field of decolonizing knowledge. The secondary data were gathered from established sources such as books, peer-reviewed journal articles, UNESCO reports, and other scholarly materials related to decolonial theory, epistemic justice, and the geopolitics of knowledge. These sources were selected for their direct relevance to the research theme, providing insights into both the theoretical critiques and practical solutions being developed to address epistemic inequalities.

For data analysis, the study employed a critical discourse analysis (CDA) approach, which is particularly effective for examining how language, ideology, and power relations shape the global knowledge production system. CDA was applied to systematically identify patterns of domination, resistance, and epistemic reconstruction strategies within the selected texts. This method allowed the researcher to deconstruct the ways in which Western epistemology is embedded in academic discourses and institutions, while also highlighting alternative epistemologies that challenge the status quo.

To ensure methodological rigor and enhance the reliability of the findings, data triangulation was employed by cross-referencing a wide range of literature sources. This triangulation process involved comparing and contrasting perspectives from both the Global South and Global North, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of the epistemic relations at play. In addition, critical reflection was applied throughout the analysis to minimize interpretive bias, ensuring that the research outcomes accurately reflect the complexity and diversity of the epistemic struggles being examined.

Ethical considerations were a key component of this study, particularly in terms of ensuring transparency and intellectual honesty in the representation of the diverse perspectives found in the literature. The research adhered to ethical standards by acknowledging the authorship and viewpoints of all sources, while also ensuring the fair representation of both Global South and Global North epistemologies. Furthermore, the study avoided overgeneralizing or oversimplifying the diverse and often conflicting viewpoints within the literature, ensuring that each perspective was given the appropriate weight.

By utilizing this method, the study aims to provide a comprehensive, critical, and balanced analysis of the ongoing decolonization of knowledge production, with a particular focus on the practical strategies that have emerged in the Global South. The findings are expected to contribute both to theoretical discussions on epistemic justice and to policy-level recommendations for creating a more equitable and inclusive global knowledge ecosystem.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study provides a thorough analysis of the dominance of Western epistemology, the marginalization of local knowledge systems, and the ongoing intellectual dependency of the Global South. The findings offer a critical understanding of how these systemic issues play out in academic and policy contexts, highlighting the concrete consequences of epistemic injustice and the challenges faced by Global South countries in the global knowledge production system. The study is supported by both qualitative analysis and case studies that illustrate the practical impact of these issues.

The Dominance of Western Epistemology

A central finding of this study is the overwhelming dominance of Western epistemology, especially within the positivistic paradigm, which continues to shape the global academic system. This dominance is evident in how scientific

knowledge is constructed, validated, and disseminated. In higher education, for instance, curricula are still largely based on Western intellectual traditions, while alternative forms of knowledge are often relegated to peripheral or "supplementary" roles. Western theories and methodologies, particularly those grounded in positivist and reductionist models, are considered the gold standard in academic research, and scholars in the Global South are expected to align their work with these frameworks in order to gain recognition. This dynamic results in the exclusion of epistemologies from the Global South, reducing them to merely local case studies rather than valid theoretical sources.

A striking example of this can be seen in the field of global health, where the Western biomedical model dominates, while indigenous health systems, such as traditional herbal medicine or community-based healthcare practices, are viewed as unscientific or inferior (Nhémachena et al., 2016). Despite the proven effectiveness of such local practices in addressing region-specific health issues, they are routinely ignored in favor of Western models, which are often not suited to local cultural and ecological contexts. The persistence of this epistemological hierarchy within global health policy exacerbates existing inequalities and limits the potential for contextually relevant solutions to pressing health challenges.

The dominance of Western epistemology is also apparent in the construction of global historical narratives. Eurocentric perspectives continue to shape how the past is understood, with the Global South frequently portrayed as passive subjects who were either discovered or civilized by Western powers. This erasure of historical agency and contributions from non-Western societies has profound implications for how local communities perceive their identity and intellectual heritage. It reinforces a collective sense of inferiority, undermining the confidence of researchers in the Global South to engage with their own histories and knowledge systems.

Marginalization of Local and Indigenous Knowledge

The marginalization of local and indigenous knowledge is a key finding in this research, particularly in how non-Western epistemologies are systematically excluded from formal academic and scientific discourse. Knowledge systems that have developed over centuries in the Global South, including indigenous agricultural techniques, traditional healing practices, and spiritual ecological wisdom, are often dismissed as unscientific or mythological in the context of modern Western science (Lam et al., 2020; Mustonen et al., 2022). For example, in many parts of the Global South, traditional agricultural knowledge has long supported sustainable farming practices that are well adapted to local climates and

ecosystems. Yet, this knowledge is often sidelined in favor of industrial agricultural models that are rooted in Western science, despite the ecological and social sustainability of indigenous practices (Berkes et al., 2000).

The marginalization of indigenous knowledge extends beyond epistemological dismissals; it is also embedded within legal and institutional systems. The global intellectual property rights framework, for instance, frequently fails to recognize indigenous knowledge as legitimate, leaving local communities vulnerable to exploitation by multinational corporations. A pertinent case study is the appropriation of traditional medicinal knowledge by pharmaceutical companies, which patent herbal remedies and sell them globally, while the communities that developed these remedies receive no compensation (da Silva et al., 2023). This legal disenfranchisement not only exacerbates economic inequalities but also perpetuates the perception that indigenous knowledge is of lesser value.

Moreover, the exclusion of indigenous knowledge systems from the global academic and policy-making sphere has tangible consequences for addressing global challenges like climate change, public health crises, and food security. In regions such as Sub-Saharan Africa, traditional ecological knowledge plays a crucial role in managing biodiversity and mitigating environmental degradation. However, when these practices are ignored or undervalued, the opportunity to create locally grounded solutions to these challenges is lost. This is particularly evident in the field of climate change, where indigenous knowledge of land management and conservation is essential for sustainable resource use, yet often overlooked by international climate agreements that prioritize Western scientific frameworks (Melash et al., 2023).

Intellectual Dependence and Its Consequences

Intellectual dependence remains a significant issue for countries in the Global South, and the study reveals how this dependence shapes research agendas, academic careers, and policy outcomes. Many scholars in the Global South are heavily reliant on research funding from Western institutions, which often dictate the direction of research based on donor interests rather than local needs. This dependency is evident in the way academic institutions in the Global South are structured to serve the interests of the Global North, rather than fostering the development of knowledge that addresses the specific challenges faced by local communities (Demeter, 2020; IAU, 2022).

A concrete example of this can be seen in the field of agricultural research in Africa, where most funding comes from Western donors or multinational corporations with specific agendas. Research priorities often focus on developing

high-yield crops for export, rather than addressing food security and sustainability issues faced by local farmers (Gaus & Hall, 2016). This misalignment between the goals of academic research and local needs reflects the ongoing intellectual dependency of the Global South on the intellectual frameworks and economic interests of the Global North.

Furthermore, this intellectual dependency is closely linked to the phenomenon of *brain drain*, where scholars from the Global South migrate to institutions in the Global North in search of greater academic recognition and career advancement. This migration is not solely driven by economic factors but by the need for scholars to gain legitimacy within an academic system that still prioritizes Western intellectual traditions. The brain drain further weakens the capacity of Global South countries to develop homegrown solutions to their own challenges, reinforcing the cycle of dependency (Marginson & Xu, 2022).

Reproduction of Inequality in Knowledge Production

The global academic system reproduces inequality through mechanisms such as citation networks and publication standards. The study found that scientific journals, considered the benchmark for academic legitimacy, are predominantly controlled by institutions in the Global North. As a result, scholars from the Global South often face immense pressure to publish in these journals, which require adherence to Western-centric methodologies and standards. This not only marginalizes locally relevant research but also reinforces the dominance of Western perspectives in global academic discourse (Gauttam et al., 2024).

Citation asymmetry is another key issue. The study reveals that works originating from institutions in the Global North are disproportionately cited, forming an exclusive citation network that perpetuates epistemic dominance. Despite the valuable contributions made by scholars in the Global South, their work often receives limited visibility and recognition in international academic forums. This systemic marginalization results in a vicious cycle where knowledge from the Global South is rendered invisible, further entrenching the dominance of Western perspectives (Lor, 2022).

The results of this study demonstrate that the dominance of Western epistemology, the marginalization of indigenous and local knowledge, and the intellectual dependency of the Global South are deeply entrenched in the global knowledge system. These issues are not abstract theoretical concerns but have real, practical implications for research, policy-making, and the cultural identity of communities in the Global South. The structural inequalities in global knowledge production continue to exclude valuable local knowledge systems, while

reinforcing a hegemonic cycle that limits intellectual autonomy and innovation in the Global South.

This empirical analysis underscores the need for transformative change in both institutional and policy frameworks to address these inequalities and create a more inclusive and equitable global knowledge ecosystem.

CONCLUSION

Reframing the understanding of knowledge production from the perspective of the Global South necessitates a critical reassessment of the dominance of Western epistemology, which has historically marginalized local knowledge systems. This imbalance has led to a structural intellectual dependency on the Global North, reinforcing inequality within the global scientific framework. As a result, the process of epistemic decolonization becomes not just an academic pursuit but a necessary movement aimed at achieving knowledge justice and restoring the intellectual sovereignty of the Global South.

The marginalization of indigenous knowledge and the reliance on Western frameworks for knowledge validation and dissemination remain deeply ingrained issues. For instance, traditional ecological practices, such as the communal land management systems used by indigenous communities in the Amazon, are often dismissed as unscientific in favor of industrial models based on Western scientific principles. This exclusion directly undermines the ability of local communities to address their own challenges in ways that align with their cultural and environmental realities. The struggle for epistemic justice, therefore, demands a comprehensive effort to dismantle these colonial structures that continue to dominate knowledge production.

While the challenges to epistemic decolonization are significant—ranging from institutional resistance and lack of resources to entrenched global inequalities—there are substantial opportunities for transformation. Strategies such as decolonizing curricula, strengthening local research institutions, and fostering South-South collaboration are pivotal to advancing this agenda. For example, countries like Brazil have made strides in integrating indigenous knowledge into policy-making, particularly in the context of environmental protection, by creating frameworks that recognize both scientific and traditional knowledge. Similarly, institutions like the University of Cape Town have initiated programs to develop research methodologies that are culturally relevant and context-specific, thus challenging the dominance of Western scientific norms. These examples demonstrate that transformative efforts are not only possible but already occurring, offering practical models for others to follow.

However, implementing these strategies requires addressing practical challenges, such as overcoming institutional resistance and securing sustainable funding. Many institutions in the Global South still operate within frameworks designed by the Global North, which can hinder the adoption of more localized, decolonial approaches. There is also a need for more robust support for local research infrastructure, particularly in terms of funding, technology, and human resources. This can be achieved through targeted investments in research and education that prioritize local needs and contexts over external pressures or donor interests.

The goal of these efforts is to build a global knowledge ecosystem that is not only equitable and inclusive but also mutually enriching. In such an ecosystem, diverse epistemic systems would no longer be ranked in hierarchical relationships but would be recognized as complementary, each contributing to a broader, more holistic understanding of the world. Knowledge would no longer function as a tool for domination but as a collective human legacy, capable of addressing the challenges of future civilizations in ways that are relevant, sustainable, and culturally resonant.

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