

# Coloniality, Epistemic Imbalance, and Africa's Emigration Crisis

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Donald Mark C. Ude 

KU Leuven

## Abstract

The paper has two complementary objectives. First, it sustains an analysis of the concept of ‘coloniality’ that accounts for the epistemic imbalance in the modern world, demonstrating precisely how Africa is adversely affected, having been caught up in the throes of coloniality and its epistemic implications. Second – and complementarily – the paper attempts to bring this very concept of ‘coloniality’ into the discourse on Africa’s emigration crisis, arguing that Africa’s emigration crisis is traceable, inter alia, to the epistemic imbalance in the very structure of modernity. This imbalance results from the stifling of Africa’s epistemic resources under Western epistemic hegemony. Epistemic coloniality, of course interacting with some material factors, creates a sufficient condition for emigration. It is further theorized that the apparent lack of epistemic will on the part of Africans to mobilize some surviving epistemic resources to address some problems on their own is also a function of coloniality.

## Keywords

Africa, coloniality, epistemic imbalance, migration crisis, modernity, subaltern epistemologies, Ubuntu

## Introduction

The paper has two complementary objectives. First, it sustains an analysis of the concept of ‘coloniality’ that accounts for the epistemic imbalance in the modern world, showing precisely how Africa is caught up in the throes of the modern mechanisms of coloniality and its epistemic implications. Second – and complementarily – the paper attempts to bring this very concept of ‘coloniality’ into the discourse on Africa’s emigration crisis, arguing that Africa’s current emigration crisis is traceable, inter alia, to the epistemic

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**Corresponding author:** Donald Mark C. Ude. Email: [donaldchinonso.ude@kuleuven.be](mailto:donaldchinonso.ude@kuleuven.be)

**TCS Online Forum:** <https://www.theoryculturesociety.org/>

imbalance in the very structure of modernity, an imbalance resulting from the stifling of Africa's epistemic resources.

Invariably, it will be shown that the modern capitalist world-system reproduces and sustains itself on an epistemic imbalance, produced by the systemic destitution and stifling of knowledges emanating from Africa (and indeed the Global South) and the exclusive valorization and promotion of Western knowledge systems. This stifling of Africa's epistemic resources under Western epistemic hegemony, of course interacting with other factors, constitutes a sufficient, though not necessary, condition for emigration. Furthermore, the apparent lack of epistemic will on the part of Africans to mobilize their surviving epistemic resources (indeed they still exist, albeit in subjugated forms) to address some problems on their own is likewise a function of coloniality. Since the problem is basically epistemic, it follows that the effective way to address it would also take on an epistemic tinge. Hence, I propose and explore the resuscitation of Ubuntu and elements of African subjugated knowledges as a potential remedy.

Before I proceed, a number of clarifications are in order. First, though I use coloniality as a theoretical framework, I do not wish to make it a 'grand theory' of a sort that presumably explains everything. Indeed, in stating one of the two complementary objectives of the paper, I have used 'inter alia' in recognition of the fact that coloniality might operate alongside or, better, interact with such material factors as economic crisis, wars, sociopolitical turmoil, religious and political persecution, equally theorized by scholars (Castle, 2004; cf. Lewer and Van den Berg, 2008; cf. Ortega and Peri, 2013). Second, the focus on coloniality is not intended to provide an alibi for the political irresponsibility, deeds and omissions of Africans, especially their leaders. Third – and as will be properly explained – 'coloniality' is a much more complex reality than 'colonialism', for it not only predates the latter but also outlives it. For all practical purposes, it functions today in the form of 'neocolonialism'. Finally, the paper focuses only on emigration from Africa in order to narrow down the scope of analysis and make it more manageable. Hence, it recognizes that such related phenomena as diaspora return and intra-Africa migration might have interesting epistemic implications that are beyond the scope of the present paper.

The paper proceeds as follows. I first analyze the concept of 'coloniality', drawing on Anibal Quijano, the originator of the concept, and the other members of the Coloniality/Modernity Collective. Next, I show how the epistemic imbalance resulting from the destitution, dispossession and subjugation of knowledges emanating from the Global South constitutes the epistemic character of modernity – again drawing largely on the scholars of the Coloniality/Modernity Collective. But I shall reinforce their ideas with those of Boaventura de Sousa Santos who, though not historically a member of the Coloniality/Modernity Collective, has insights on subalternized epistemologies I find relevant for the analysis. Afterwards, I then focus on Africa proper, as I analyze this process of knowledge destitution, drawing on relevant (African) scholars. This then allows me to demonstrate how Africa's emigration crisis could be traceable to coloniality. Finally, since the paper as a whole has a particularly epistemic tinge, I propose some remedies along these same epistemic lines. I do so by briefly exploring the epistemic potentials in the notion of Ubuntu and cognate elements of Africa's destituted knowledges.

## Understanding ‘Coloniality’ and Its Link with Modernity

The concept of ‘coloniality of power’ (or simply ‘coloniality’) was coined by the Peruvian philosopher and sociologist Anibal Quijano. Quijano uses it to denote the new global power model or structure that took shape around the 16th century with the emergence of the capitalist world-system.

In his multi-volume *The Modern World-System*, Immanuel Wallerstein pinpoints that the 16th century was the decisive moment when capitalism developed from medieval feudalism to become the new world-system that must at the same time be properly called ‘modern’. Once it emerged, this modern capitalist world-system became the new monolithic global order, founded on economic principles, in which countries of the world compete with one another to reap the economic benefits of this monolithic system. Naturally, some nations would outcompete others and, although there are shifting fortunes, some nations or parts of the world have such peculiar advantages or maneuvering skills that they have managed to establish a greater control over the system. Hence, nations of the world are classified respectively as ‘core’, ‘semiperipheral’, and ‘peripheral’, according to their varying abilities to take advantage of the system – the ‘First World’ enjoying disproportionate benefits while what is now known as the ‘Third World’ holds the shorter end of the stick (Wallerstein, 1989, 2000, 2011). As can be seen, Wallerstein’s world-system analysis is a species of ‘dependency theory’ which essentially attributes the good fortunes of the Global North to economic and other forms of exploitation of the Global South, occasioning the impoverishment of the latter.

Now, Quijano’s starting-point resonates with the above world-system analysis, but he moves beyond the analysis of economic powers, as he identifies a structure/model of power he discerns to be ‘constitutively colonial’ – where ‘colonial’ represents relations of oppression, destitution, subjugation, control of labor and rewards thereof (Quijano, 2000a: 539). Europe, or more precisely, Western Europe, which established an early economic leverage in the modern capitalist system, became ipso facto dominant in the new global power structure – the ‘coloniality of power’. As Quijano puts it, “The coloniality of power is tied up with the concentration in Europe of capital, wages, the market of capital . . . In this sense, modernity was also colonial from its point of departure. This helps explain why the global process of modernization had a much more direct and immediate impact in Europe” (Quijano, 2000a: 548).

Coloniality is inextricably linked to the origins of ‘race’ as a classificatory category. As Quijano suggests, the people at the ‘center’, who gained leverage in the modern capitalist world-system, came to likewise imagine themselves as ‘superior’ to peoples at the peripheries of the modern world-system. He argues that the conquest and incorporation of the Americas played a pivotal role not only in the inauguration of the modern capitalist world market but also in the production of the ‘race’ concept. From time immemorial, he notes, the relationship between conquering peoples and conquered peoples has always been conceived in terms of ‘superiority/inferiority’, but it was not until the conquest of the Americas that this relation took on a particularly ‘racial’ tinge, suggesting biological and all-round ‘superiority’ (Quijano, 2007: 171; see also Quijano, 1989: 149). The pattern of distribution of labor and its rewards in the global capitalist economy followed and continues to follow along certain ‘geocultural’ identities that came to be codified in terms

of 'race'. Coloniality is so much entrenched in 'race' or 'racist' classification of the world population that the latter 'has been the most visible expression of the coloniality of power during the last 500 years' (Quijano, 2000b: 218). To Quijano, therefore, modernity, coloniality and race are inseparable.

Basing his analysis on the foundation laid by Quijano, Walter D. Mignolo addresses the subject of coloniality under the concept of the 'colonial matrix of power'. Like Quijano, Mignolo maintains that the 16th century was a crucial moment in the production of the modern/colonial world, whose basic feature is the new power matrix. And, like Quijano, Mignolo insists that 'there is no modernity without coloniality' (Mignolo, 2011: 85). Mignolo refers to coloniality as the 'darker side of Western modernity', a notion highlighted in the very title of his 2011 work.

To say that coloniality defines the modern world is to recognize what Mignolo calls the 'colonial difference'. He suggests that it would be a grave mistake for anyone to deny the 'colonial difference'. It is alive and active in the modern world, in that it explains a whole range of economic, political and epistemic advantages the Western world has over the 'developing countries'. In concrete terms, the claim that modernity and coloniality are one and the same thing points to a world that reproduces a colonial/imperial structure which places some parts of the world at an advantage over others.

Through a mechanism Mignolo identifies as 'coloniality of knowledge', the capitalist modernity manages or controls knowledges by ensuring that knowledges and knowledge-productions from the Global South are systemically destituted while those of the North are exclusively valorized. This is so because there is a 'complicity between the structure of knowledge and the modern world system' (Mignolo, 2000: 276). In turn, 'coloniality of being' is the mechanism by which modernity manages subjectivities; that is, modernity decides which bodies may be considered 'human' or 'subhuman', 'superior' or 'inferior', 'subjects' or mere 'objects' (Mignolo, 2011: 85).

A point that must not be missed regarding this very concept of coloniality is that it runs deeper than colonialism. The two must be distinguished. While colonialism represents the direct administrative and exploitative presence of a foreign power that is usually ended or at least attenuated with the achievement of political independence, coloniality is, on the contrary, a structure with its own logic and dynamics, which not only predates colonialism but also outlives it. To be sure, capitalism has created the world after its own image, to employ a Marxian parlance. And coloniality is an enduring attribute of this capitalist world.

Scholars of the Modernity/Coloniality Collective, on whom I draw in this analysis, are unanimous on the view that coloniality is an enduring phenomenon. For instance, Quijano refers to coloniality as 'the most general form of domination in the world today' (Quijano, 2007: 170). Ramón Grosfoguel makes a distinction between colonialism and coloniality, insisting that, in the wake of 'juridical-political decolonization we have moved from a period of global colonialism to the current period of global coloniality' (Grosfoguel, 2009: 22). Similarly, Mignolo sees coloniality as something 'much more than colonialism' in the sense that it operates as a power matrix 'through which world order has been created and managed' (Mignolo, 2011: 171). Enrique Dussel holds an analogous position in his attempt to expose the 'underside of modernity' and construct a

‘philosophy of liberation’ for all that are oppressed by structures of coloniality (Dussel, 1985, 1995, 1996).

Relatedly, Dastile and Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013), basing their analysis on the works of the Coloniality/Modernity Collective from Latin America, draw attention to the ever-present but invisible hand of coloniality on Africa, especially as it militates against the pan-African project. While they are primarily concerned with recommending the combative epistemic approach of the Latin America counterparts for the pan-African project, the present work, however, aims to show how Africa is caught up in this web of coloniality and how coloniality might account for Africa’s emigration crisis.

Having furnished the basic contours of coloniality as a concept, I shall now pay more attention to its epistemic dimension.

## **The Epistemic Dimension of Coloniality**

In this section, I show how the epistemic imbalance that has become a hallmark of the modern world is a function of coloniality. The main claim in this respect is that this imbalance results from a systemic destitution of the epistemic resources of the Global South. In other words, there is a sustained mechanism of attrition – indeed a dispossession.

The subjugation of knowledges and knowledge-productions from ‘peripheral’ areas of the modern world-system is a function of coloniality. It is on this account that Quijano traces this process back to the 16th century, when the modern capitalist world took shape. Peoples and nations at the margins of this capitalist world were taken to be of ‘inferior’ rationality or intelligence. This is how coloniality, anchored in capitalism, became at the same time the birth of epistemic determinism. From this atmosphere of epistemic determinism emerged what Quijano refers to as ‘Eurocentric knowledge/epistemology’. ‘Eurocentric knowledge’ is that supposedly ‘superior’ rationality of the ‘conqueror’ people. The key attributes of Eurocentric knowledge/epistemology could be summarized as follows: first, it is avowedly capitalistic since it is produced to sustain the capitalist order; second, it is dualistic, as it reproduces the binary/dichotomy between rational/irrational, civilized/primitive, etc.; third, it is hierarchical and is founded on the hierarchization of knowledges for the purpose of validating some and marginalizing others (Quijano, 2000a: 542; 2007: 174).

Mignolo complements the above insights on the epistemic dimensions of coloniality. Prominent in his theorization on the subject is the notion of ‘zero-point epistemology’. He observes the ‘hubris’, on the part of the Eurocentric knowledge tradition, of assuming itself to be the unsupported ‘ground-zero’ that supports other forms of knowledge. It arrogates absolute objectivity to itself, an Archimedean point or ‘God’s-eyeview’ of sorts, secure and apodictic (Mignolo, 2000, 2011). It is rooted in the idea of a disembodied Cartesian ‘cogito’ which takes no cognizance of the fact that all knowledge is embodied and located. Ramón Grosfoguel makes a similar observation with respect to the Western knowledge tradition. ‘Unlike other knowledge traditions’, he says, ‘the western is a point of view that does not assume itself a point of view. In this way, it hides its epistemic location, paving the ground for its claims about universality, neutrality and objectivity’ (Grosfoguel, 2009: 11).

The epistemic dimension of coloniality also finds expression in the whole question of language and linguistic politics. Thought is expressed in language; therefore, the coloniality of language is the coloniality of thought. Mignolo sees a strong relationship between linguistic geographies (or ‘cartographies’, as he calls it) and the coloniality of knowledge/thought, as he argues that changing linguistic cartographies ‘implies a reordering of epistemology’ (Mignolo, 2000: 247). He refers here to the dynamics by which languages of the world gain or lose power. It follows the pattern of the production and distribution of capitalist knowledge, steeped in coloniality. The preponderance of English, French, German and other European languages has nothing to do with any inherent superiority in terms of grammar and syntax; it is all about their position in the capitalist knowledge market (Mignolo, 2000: 210).

Though belonging to a different scholarly tradition, the insights of the Portuguese scholar Boaventura de Sousa Santos are relevant for analyzing the epistemic dimension of coloniality. The temperaments and sentiments of the Latin American Modernity/Coloniality Collective are clearly present in his works (Sousa Santos, 2014, 2018). Boaventura de Sousa Santos theorizes coloniality from the analytical device of the ‘abysal line’. Now, it has to be spelt out that this ‘abysal line’ is decidedly epistemic. It is no surprise, then, that Sousa Santos refers to it as the ‘most fundamental epistemological fiat of the Western-centric modernity’ (Sousa Santos, 2018: 20). The term ‘epistemological fiat’ is indeed instructive, and points to the fact that the subjugation of knowledges to the ‘South’ of the line is real. It is a defining feature of the modern world.

Sousa Santos tries to avoid the essentialization of ‘North’ or ‘South’. He likewise refuses to give it any geographical character, though he admits that they ‘partially overlap’ with the geographical North and South on the grounds that the geographical South is almost always at a disadvantage (Sousa Santos, 2018: 3). But he speaks primarily of the ‘epistemic/epistemological’ South or North – the South corresponding to those knowledges that are marginalized by the unholy alliance of capitalism, colonialism and patriarchy and the North corresponding to privileged knowledges.

From the foregoing, there is no gainsaying that coloniality produces and reproduces a world of epistemic lopsidedness resulting from the destitution of epistemic resources from certain parts of the world in a process analogous to an epistemic war of attrition. Africa is perhaps the worst hit in this process, as I show in what follows.

## **The Dynamics of Epistemic Coloniality in Africa**

This section serves a dual purpose. First, it tailors the foregoing analysis on global coloniality to Africa, indicating the specific ways Africa experiences this phenomenon. Second, it prepares the ground for the next section where I make a case that the emigration crisis in Africa has its roots in coloniality. Some of the points made in a general or sketchy fashion in this section will be taken up in the next section and elaborated upon as they relate to the emigration crisis.

I begin by suggesting that Africa is perhaps worse off among the victims of global coloniality. As a result, African knowledges belong to the most destituted among all others suffering similar fates. While other peoples of the Global South suffer varying degrees

of epistemic emasculation, African knowledges seem to be particularly disadvantaged in this respect, given Africa's peculiar history and experiences.

For instance, Frantz Fanon articulates the condition of the African in his writings, observing a certain 'inferiority complex' on the part of the African/Black, a complex that has immense epistemological implications (Fanon, 1967; see also Fanon, 2004). The unmistakable point one gets from Fanon is that the overall low self-perception, feeling of impotence, emasculation and a sense of inability to solve one's problems on the part of the African is not just psychological but indeed epistemological. This is a function of coloniality for, as Quijano has earlier established, the 'race' category took shape with coloniality (Quijano, 2000b: 218).

Furthermore, I think it is vital to consider that Africa was a late entrant in the modern capitalist world-system, a fact that came with dire epistemic consequences. Immanuel Wallerstein elaborately documents the incorporation and 'peripherization' of African kingdoms and principalities in the third volume of his *The Modern World-System*. Though this process started in the late 18th century, it was not until the middle of the 19th century that it effectively took place (Wallerstein, 1989, 2000: 61–3). No doubt, there had existed trade relations, precisely the trans-Atlantic slave trafficking between Africa and the West, long before the 18th century. But, as Wallerstein insists, African principalities involved in such early trade relations were not as yet incorporated in the modern world-system. Now, if modernity, in the Wallersteinian sense, is nothing over and above incorporation into the monolithic capitalist world-system, it means that Africa is a late-comer in a system already dominated by more experienced and aggressive competitors, especially those of Europe. Worse still, Africa eventually entered as a mere 'peripheral' region, almost condemned to holding the shorter end of the stick.

The epistemic disadvantage thereof is that the capitalist system, which sustains itself on knowledge and knowledge production, is tilted against peripheral regions. Being shortchanged in the capitalist knowledge market by a sustained mechanism of epistemic destitution, Africa is ipso facto shortchanged in the gains of capitalist knowledge. The distribution of the gains of scientific knowledge and other forms of capitalist knowledge follows a pattern that sees Africa get but a meagre ration.

Another area in which the dynamics of coloniality work against Africa is the whole question of language. Since thought is expressed in language, to undermine a people's language is to undermine their epistemology and whole civilization. As Fanon puts it, 'To speak means to be in a position to use a certain syntax, to grasp the morphology of this or that language, but it means above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilization' (Fanon, 1967: 72). Corroborating this view, the Kenyan literary icon Ngugi wa Thiong'o maintains that 'language, any language has a dual character: it is both a means of communication and a career of civilization' (Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1986: 13). The point being made here is that the subjugation of African local languages through mechanisms of coloniality is an exercise in epistemic destitution.

Ngugi laments that the preponderance of colonial languages in Africa is as alienating as it is epistemologically destructive. In his musings, he regrets that 'the language of my education was no longer the language of my culture' (Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1986: 11). I consider this remark important for our present purposes because it points to the epistemicide at play. The reality in Africa is that colonial languages have been adopted as lingua

franca, while indigenous languages play merely subsidiary roles, consigned to a mere subaltern status. How could scientific knowledge and other forms of knowledge grow in Africa when they are only communicated in elitist, colonial languages? This makes it particularly challenging for Africans to share and communicate indigenous knowledges in the capitalist knowledge-market. The consequences of this are far-reaching.

Beyond the question of language, coloniality has destituted and continued to stifle an entire corpus of cultural knowledge that used to underpin the corporate existence of African communities. Such knowledges, which held sway in premodern African communities, maintaining overall order and balance in society, are threatened with extinction. If we understand ‘epistemology’ not as academic hair-splitting regarding the nature of knowledge and criteria of belief but as modes of perception and lived experiences that undergird society, then we would easily trace the present socio-political crises in Africa to the stifling of cultural sensibilities – i.e. epistemology – by mechanisms of coloniality. It is not without reason that the renowned Igbo scholar Chinua Achebe approached the problem of colonial disruption in Igboland from a predominantly epistemic perspective. His writings are shot through with such expressions as ‘the white man’s knowledge’ (Achebe, 2017: 179), ‘what the white man knew’, ‘the knowledge of the white man’s ways’ (Achebe, 2016: 189, see also pp. 84 and 215) – all pointing to the threat the imposition of Western knowledge, steeped in coloniality, poses to Igbo cultural knowledges.

Let us cite just one example of the disruption caused by the imposition of Western knowledge on indigenous African peoples. I refer here to the Western political and legal system, a product of Western thought-pattern, that has been transplanted to the African soil with little or no consideration of local political and legal sensibilities. To this day, African peoples are still trying to cope with a system that has remained foreign to them. Worse still, sufficient efforts have not been made in the direction of allowing ‘impulses from the lifeworld’ (Habermas, 1987: 364) – i.e. the lifeworld and imaginaries of African peoples – to penetrate modern political and legal systems, as Habermas would recommend. In the Igbo case, Achebe painstakingly narrates the torturous challenges and struggles the Igbo experienced and are still experiencing with the new system (Achebe, 2017: 174ff; 2016: 102ff). The experience of the Igbo people is no different from that of other African peoples. It accounts for many of the problems in which Africa is mired today. Put simply, it is a clash of epistemologies.

With the above background, the task I broach in what follows is to show how coloniality and its epistemic implications might, *inter alia*, account for Africa’s emigration crisis.

## **Coloniality and Africa’s Emigration Crisis**

In Africa today, the enormous consequences of mass emigration, among which is the much-acknowledged ‘brain drain’, are being felt. This section is not meant to be an exercise in self-pity and endless lamentations about African bodies washed ashore in the Mediterranean, backed up with United Nations common-knowledge statistics – the same UN that has been discredited as one of the most visible symbols of coloniality in our era. Nor is it intended to exculpate Africans and their leaders of their contribution to the crisis through bad policies and overall irresponsible politics. The essence is simply to forge a



link between coloniality (with its epistemic implications) and the emigration crisis, with no pretensions to make coloniality serve as a 'grand theory' that presumably encompasses all other competing theories and occludes the very agency of Africans.

Therefore, coloniality only serves as my theoretical framework for making sense of the emigration crisis, a framework that may operate alongside or even interact with other explanations. In what follows, we shall see how coloniality actually interacts with such material factors as bad leadership, poverty and conflicts to create the conditions for emigration. So, I do not wish to downplay these material factors; rather I recognize them in their own right as interacting factors in the emigration dynamics.

From our discussions so far, it has become clear that the modern world is structured on a coloniality of knowledge that effectively dispossesses Africa of her epistemic resources, thus placing her at a disadvantage. Now, the modern world accords a privileged status to what it calls 'science'. At the same time, it offhandedly disqualifies 'whatever does not fit the epistemological canon of modern science' (Sousa Santos, 2014: 190). Since scientific knowledge (i.e. 'science' as defined by the West) exercises a hegemonic control of the modern world, it follows that its originators are already placed at an advantage. As Boaventura de Sousa Santos notes, 'Since scientific knowledge is not distributed in a socially equitable way, its interventions in the real world tend to serve the social groups having more access to such knowledge' (2014: 189).

If African sciences have been shortchanged in the capitalist knowledge market through a process of knowledge destitution, then Africa would get but a meagre share of the overall benefits accruing from the 'approved' capitalist science. Since Western science almost exclusively defines success in the modern world as we know it, an 'osmotic' mechanism would set in, whereby the disadvantaged (in this case Africans) gravitate (i.e. emigrate) towards the part of the world whose type of knowledge rules the modern world. Seen from this perspective, the lopsided distribution of the real-life interventions of capitalist science makes life more worthwhile in the West, less attractive in Africa, and generates the osmotic urge to emigrate.

More tellingly, in designating African knowledges as 'inferior', mechanisms of coloniality have succeeded in instilling self-distrust and low self-esteem in the African. Fanon has adequately described this self-distrust and low self-esteem in the preceding section. I only wish to add that this is perhaps a more insidious dimension of coloniality, for it undermines the power of the mind. After centuries of being repeatedly told that they are epistemically inferior, Africans inadvertently buy into this narrative, a narrative that makes them distrust their very capacity to solve their own problems. The link between this false narrative of epistemic inferiority reproduced by coloniality and Africa's emigration crisis is that the African would rather choose to seek 'refuge' (i.e. emigrate) than stay to confront and resolve the problems back home. This sense of epistemic impotence, the lack of will to solve one's problems and not flee from them, is nurtured by coloniality. Therefore, any hope of reversing the emigration trend must be hinged on countering the narrative of epistemic inferiority. The narrative of epistemic inferiority must be exposed and called by its proper name – a piece of ideology.

The stifling of African indigenous medical knowledges also has a part to play in the emigration crisis. African medicine is a potentially rich aspect of African science that has come under the stifling influence of coloniality (Abdullahi, 2011; Afolabi, 2011; Konadu,

2008; Paul, 1977). African traditional societies had developed some time-honored techniques of curing a number of illnesses, made possible through their experience of nature and its healing powers in herbs, roots and natural substances. While some of these techniques are quite unreliable and even superstitious, a great many of them are reliable, efficacious and time-tested, even by standards of Western science. Unfortunately, colonial administrations in Africa were suspicious of all 'local' medicinal knowledges, cast aspersions on them and actually discouraged them. Afolabi (2011: 230) avers that the West, which drew upon a vast array of traditions of medicinal knowledges and worldviews to improve Western medicine, regrettably discouraged their colonial subjects from incorporating African knowledges for the development of medicine in Africa. The process of suppression was facilitated by defining medical 'orthodoxy' only in terms of what was acceptable in the Western 'medical faith' (Afolabi, 2011: 237, see also 233). Even after the 'official' independence of African states, the instruments of coloniality have continued to work against the development of African indigenous medical practices and knowledges. This has been rightly referred to as 'medico-neocolonialism' (Afolabi, 2011: 240).

Medical neocolonialism subjects the practice of medicine to the dictates of capitalist accumulation. For instance, pharmaceutical companies and funding agencies, guided by capitalist interests, would find it extremely difficult to invest resources on a type of medicine that is already stigmatized as 'inferior'. African indigenous medicine has suffered greatly from this capitalist and imperialistic stranglehold on the practice of medicine. Taking Morocco as a case study in a paper titled 'Medicine and Imperialism in Morocco', Jim Paul (1977: 3) asserts that the 'most striking contrast and the clearest evidence of medicine as a capitalist enterprise are found in the Third World. Here medicine is absolutely inseparable from imperialism'. But the most unfortunate thing is that, when the capitalist enterprise has shortchanged and indeed failed Africans, what should have been their last resort, namely, the epistemic will to take their destiny in their own hands, is again absent. In other words, the sense of epistemic impotence continues to work against Africa, even when all has failed. Therefore, African indigenous medicine has remained stunted and the potentials thereof have remained unexplored.

The point of the foregoing revelations on medical colonialism as it relates to the emigration crisis is that the employment opportunities that would have been generated by the industry of African traditional medicine are missed. All things being equal, there would have been little or no need for thousands of jobless Africans to knock on the doors of Europe and America for economic asylum if there were flourishing industries of traditional medicine in Africa. The revenue this could accrue to African nations might improve the overall quality of life in the Continent, *ceteris paribus*. Even the millions of dollars the elite class spends on overseas 'medical tourism' (as it is now being fashionably called) would have recycled back into the system and not into foreign banks.

From the arguments advanced so far in this section, I wish to sum up the causal connection between coloniality and Africa's emigration crisis in the following propositions in a sequential order: a) coloniality and capitalism mutually reinforce each other in the modern world; b) in a world where they hold sway, African knowledges are destituted, while Western knowledge systems are validated and promoted; c) this systemic stifling of African knowledges through the dynamics of coloniality and capitalism has an overall negative impact on life in Africa; d) the instinct for survival would have led Africans to

mobilize some residual epistemic resources (since they are only destituted and not completely eradicated) to improve their conditions, but the epistemic will seems to be lacking – again, due largely to a defeatist disposition created by coloniality; e) this apparent lack of epistemic will to address one's problems explains why the African would prefer the easy way out, namely, to emigrate in search of perceived greener and safer pastures.

To deepen this discussion, let us consider another vital area, the sphere of knowledge-production. Here, the university comes to mind. By its very character and definition, the role of the university in every society is that of knowledge-production. It is an institution where the local knowledge of a given society is harnessed, nourished and utilized for the benefit of society. For instance, the growth of Western scientific knowledge in Europe and its practical use in technological inventions owes largely to research activities in European universities right from the Medieval era. But the university system has not played a similar role in Africa, not only due to its colonial history but also the overall atmosphere of coloniality under which it operates. For instance, rather than produce and promote local knowledges, the curriculum alienates and even stifles them. Knowledge is power, as Francis Bacon famously asserts – and we might add that knowledge is wealth. That Africa possesses rich forms of knowledge is not in doubt. Sadly, they have been shortchanged by modern structures of coloniality, a situation that leaves Africa poor and handicapped. The relationship between the impact of coloniality on the university system and Africa's emigration crisis is this: any society where 'home-grown' knowledges are not re-produced, developed and consumed would be handicapped (the economy being the most obvious symptomatic sphere), and this constitutes a sufficient condition for emigration in the long or short run.

I also think that this wholesale adoption of colonial institutional structures has another disastrous outcome – the crisis of the African nation-state, which impacts hugely on the emigration patterns. This is because the ethnic clashes and wars that result from 'purely artificial' and 'positively harmful frontiers', in the words of Basil Davidson (1992: 163), are one of the major factors that create humanitarian crises and, consequently, emigration. A great deal of scholarship supports the claim that the most frequent cause of forced migration in Africa is conflict (Adepoju, 2008; Naudé, 2009; Oucho, 2009). Therefore, the title of Davidson's work, *The Black Man's Burden: Africa and the Curse of the Nation-State*, is indeed *ad rem* and eloquently summarizes the point that the 'transplant' of the Europe-modelled nation-state structure to Africa has become such a 'burden' and a 'curse'. Davidson thus wonders why Africa has stuck to the Western model: 'But why then adopt models from those very countries or systems that have oppressed and despised you? Why not modernize from the models of your own history, or invent new models?' (Davidson, 1992: 19). The reason for Africa's failure to incorporate local elements into the modernization of institutional structures harkens back to the lack of epistemic will I have earlier posited – again a function of coloniality.

The problem of the African nation-state, which has been shown above to be quite a piece of colonial contraption and an added 'burden' of modernity on Africans, is intrinsically linked to the question of Africa's elite class. This is most relevant for our present discourse because many of the conditions that force Africans to emigrate are created by the actions and inactions of Africa's elite, who are basically products of coloniality. It is not without reason that Fanon devotes a whole section of his now classical text, *The*

*Wretched of the Earth*, to the problem of Africa's 'petit bourgeois elite' (as he calls them), who in mentality and disposition 'mimics the Western bourgeoisie in its negative and decadent aspects' (Fanon, 2004: 101). Fanon insists that Africa's elite are a chip off the old colonialist block. The deplorable situation in Africa which fuels emigration results from their 'petit-mindedness', their chronic inability to 'enlighten the people' and consequent recourse to tribalism, as 'we watch with a raging heart as tribalism triumphs' (Fanon, 2004: 106).

The preponderance of colonial institutional forms in today's Africa is also evident in the justice system. This is important in the present discussion on emigration insofar as a causal thread runs through the failure of a 'transplanted' and alien justice system (Achebe, 2016, 2017; see Okafor, 1984), mismanagement of conflicts and forced emigration. Without intending to paint a romanticized picture of Africa's past (which undeniably had its fair share of sociopolitical issues), intra-community disagreements used to be settled by direct sessions of arbitration of the parties involved, guided by the wisdom and experience of elders. In turn, inter-community problems were settled through delegations and representations who would continue to dialogue until some form of agreement was reached. No doubt wars were fought. But they were the last resort when all other options had been exhausted (Achebe, 2016: 17–18), usually when parties defaulted on stipulated fines, compensations and appeasements.

But with the marginalization of Africa's legal epistemologies, we behold an astronomical spiraling of intra-community and inter-community clashes. These largely occur as a result of the failure of the available legal framework to address them at the incipient stages. These conflicts lead to refugee crises and cases of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). As Oucho (2009: 16) reports, 'Sudan topped the whole world with 4.4 million IDPs, DR Congo came fourth with 1.4 million, followed by Uganda (1.3 million), Somalia (1.1 million) . . . implying that the region remains a persistent producer of IDPs'. Host governments within Africa try to set up IDP camps to take care of these displaced persons, but the living conditions in such camps are often unbearable. Under such deplorable conditions, the IDPs are inclined to take all sorts of risks, especially crossing the Sahara and the Mediterranean, to escape to Europe and other places. In the scenario just described, there is a discernible trajectory that culminates in emigration, a trajectory from the failure of an alien legal system through conflict escalation to refugee/IDP crises and finally to forced emigration.

This paper would perhaps remain incomplete if I do not propose some 'home-grown' epistemic resources that might potentially remedy the emigration crisis. It is critical that the proposed remedy explores the epistemic sphere, since the paper itself has a discernably epistemic bent. In what follows, I explore the epistemic potential in Ubuntu and a few cognate African epistemic resources.

## **Potential Remedy: Ubuntu and the Resuscitation of Africa's Destituted Knowledges**

There is no gainsaying that Ubuntu is one of the most celebrated philosophical ideas emanating from Africa, an idea that has been theorized and put to use in diverse ways.

Hence, it would be of little benefit to render an elaborate account of Ubuntu here. Rather, I treat Ubuntu only to the extent that it serves as an epistemic resource that could potentially ameliorate the emigration crisis under discussion. And I do not take it to be a magic wand or the only potential remedy available.

Ubuntu represents a belief in the bond of humanity that binds all persons. It is a version of Africa humanism, as it were, a notion that inspires the virtues of solidarity and solicitude towards others. The Ubuntu understanding of personhood vis-à-vis the community is such that individuals do not view themselves in isolation; rather, they understand that their joys, hopes, aspirations and general wellbeing are inseparable from those of other members of the community.

It must be asserted that Ubuntu is an epistemology in its own right. It is an epistemological attitude that disposes the African to view realities not as atomic individuals but rather in their interconnectedness. Ubuntu is a mode of perceiving the world; this mode of perception makes the individual see and recognize that one's good or bad is tied with those of others. As an epistemology, Ubuntu belongs to the species Sousa Santos refers to as 'lived epistemologies' (Sousa Santos, 2018: 43; 2014: 158, 159). As 'lived epistemology', Ubuntu is an active way of seeing and knowing, the senses and sensibilities that inform life as actually lived in the community. A close reading of Mogobe Ramose, who has offered perhaps the most original philosophical elaboration of the notion of Ubuntu, points to the epistemological status of Ubuntu. It is indeed instructive that Ramose sees Ubuntu in epistemic terms (Ramose, 2005: 35–6; see also pp. 4 and 6).

Therefore, if we understand Ubuntu as a 'lived knowledge' we could easily make sense of the fact that Ubuntu had a practical social-ordering impact on African society before it was destituted by mechanisms of coloniality and modernity. Hence, in his *African Philosophy through Ubuntu*, Ramose (2005) outlines the various aspects of African contemporary life that could be animated by the principle of Ubuntu. In the sections 'Law through Ubuntu' and 'Politics through Ubuntu', Ramose makes a case for the application of the epistemological principles of Ubuntu to law and politics in Africa (Ramose, 2005: 72–101).

My main claim – and I think it is self-evident, at least theoretically – is that an idea premised on interconnectedness and mutual solidarity could support more responsible politics and promote peace in contemporary Africa, thus creating a more stable Africa. Without assuming that Ubuntu is a magic wand, it makes sense at least to imagine that an atmosphere animated by Ubuntu could promote solidarity and mutual solicitude and minimize greed and rivalry – and this is already an incentive for a more stable Africa. Since there is an obvious link between overall instability in Africa and the emigration crisis, an urgent task in African scholarship would then be that of deploying intellectual resources to resuscitate or reconstitute the spirit of Ubuntu.

In fact, if the founding fathers and elite of African nations had made some genuine efforts to judiciously modernize the spirit of Ubuntu by incorporating elements of Ubuntu legal and political knowledges into modern systems, the seemingly irreconcilable conflicts, bloodshed, poverty, hunger, etc. that have sadly come to define Africa would have been averted. Not intending to canonize Nyerere, we could see that the genuine efforts he made to entrench 'ujamaa' (Nyerere, 1968), an Ubuntu-like concept, has helped in the management of Tanzania's ethnic diversity and the establishment of a culture of peace

and tolerance (Tripp, 1999). Again, not supposing that Ubuntu provides all the answers, it can hardly be gainsaid that an epistemology that makes the individual recognize that his or her well-being is inextricably tied to those of others could minimize corruption, recklessness and irresponsibility in the corridors of power. Since corruption contributes in no small measure to economic woes, it logically follows that minimizing corruption would correspondingly stem the tide of poverty-induced emigration.

It is important to note that the coloniality upon which the modern nation-state structure is founded may have laid the foundation for corruption in modern African nation-states. I find it useful once again to reference Fanon, who points his fingers at the 'acquired tastes' of the African political elite, whose little-minded goal in the postcolonial era is to reproduce the colonial situation by transferring 'into indigenous hands the privileges inherited from the colonial period' (Fanon, 2004: 100). I might add that coloniality achieves this by first undermining the Ubuntu-inspired solidarity. Coloniality blurs the Ubuntu-animated vision of interconnectedness – the same vision that would have sustained the pan-African project had coloniality not hampered it. Dastile and Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013) have made an interesting study on how the pan-African project is being undermined by coloniality. In light of this, it becomes easy to see the merit of resuscitating Ubuntu, for it would serve as a combative epistemology, indeed a counterpoint to the disruptive effects of coloniality on solidarity. Mungwini (2017, 2018) even recommends that the same intellectual doggedness that was deployed in the pan-African project to win political independence should now be channeled towards Africa's epistemic emancipation through the generation of 'alternative epistemologies'.

Thus, Ubuntu could most assuredly serve as an 'alternative epistemology', a form of 'border thinking', as Mignolo rightly calls it. Since what is at stake is basically epistemic, it would be of little or no benefit to anchor our remedy on the same Western hegemonic thinking that has kept Africa disadvantaged. As 'border thinking', Ubuntu is, ipso facto, a form of 'epistemic disobedience' (Mignolo, 2009). Africans cannot pretend that there are no 'borders' because the 'colonial difference' has already established the 'borders' – and this did not count in their favor (Mignolo, 2000: 388). Already at the margins, Africans should stop 'claiming recognition . . . or inclusion' in the same system that has banished them to the margins. Rather, they should start engaging in 'epistemic disobedience and delinking from the magic of the Western idea of modernity' (Mignolo, 2011: 119–20); they should start validating the margins as a site for production of knowledge. The knowledge being described here is a type of 'border epistemology' (Mignolo, 2011: 20). Africans only need to be careful not to box themselves into a tiny thinking corner. As Grosfoguel clarifies, it does not imply 'rejecting modernity to retreat to fundamentalist absolutism' (Grosfoguel, 2009: 26). So, what is being rejected is the hegemonic logic of coloniality or narrow Eurocentric thinking and not the potential benefits of all modern thought as such.

From the above theoretical standpoint, I now propose another element of African destituted knowledges – an instance of 'border thinking' – that could be resuscitated to attenuate the emigration crisis. I refer here to non-party democracy. Party politics as we know it is another colonial 'burden' on Africa. Non-party democracy could be considered a form of 'border thinking' insofar as it thinks outside the box of Western hegemonic knowledge that can hardly imagine contemporary democracy without political

parties. There is ample evidence that democratic principles and practices existed in a number of precolonial African societies, and that they took the shape of non-party democracies. For instance, the Igbo people of Nigeria are renowned for having developed a robust form of deliberative republicanism before the colonial invasion (Achebe, 2017: 148, 2016: 37, 59, 1976: 138–9; Ejizu, 1991: 243–5). Kwasi Wiredu also points this out about the Akan people of Ghana, and on that basis makes a similar case for a non-party democracy. People learnt to make their points, not by forming ‘cliques’ or ‘parties’, as they are now being fashionably called, but through the art of persuasive presentation. Wiredu clarifies that consensus does not necessarily mean unanimity, nor is it a winner-takes-all majoritarianism that silences the will of the minority (Wiredu, 1996: 182–90).

The unique thing about deliberation in such contexts was that they were motivated by a great sense of Ubuntu-inspired solidarity. The apparent winner-takes-all mindset that goes with party politics as we know it today has largely bred post-election crises, poor representation and an overall bad political climate. The connection between bad politics and high rate of emigration is all too obvious.

It would be rather naïve to suggest that non-party democracy might have all the answers to Africa’s political problems. An objection might even be raised that some African leaders, like Museveni of Uganda, have experimented on it and it failed woefully. But the failure of the Ugandan experiment owes to the fact that the whole project was staged in bad faith and political dishonesty; there was an ulterior motive to use it to perpetuate its initiator in power. So, my modest submission in this respect is this: if non-party democracy is properly theorized and the right epistemic resources deployed, if it is received on the political sphere with a modicum of good will, it could lay a foundation for more responsible politics in Africa – thus creating an atmosphere that might discourage emigration.

## Conclusion

In the foregoing analysis, I have attempted to demonstrate the deleterious effects of coloniality and its epistemic dynamics on Africa. Relatedly, I have also shown how coloniality could, among other things, account for Africa’s emigration crisis. These are the two complementary objectives the paper sets out to achieve. The motif that reinforces the arguments is that the systemic stifling of Africa’s epistemic resources under Western epistemic hegemony, of course interacting with other factors, constitutes a sufficient condition for emigration. And the apparent lack of epistemic will on the part of Africans to mobilize their surviving epistemic resources to address some problems on their own is also a function of coloniality. Since the problem is basically epistemic, as has been demonstrated, it implies that the effective way to address it would likewise follow along epistemic lines. Hence, the paper has proposed and explored the resuscitation of Ubuntu and cognate African subjugated knowledges as a potential remedy.

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**ORCID iD**

Donald Mark C. Ude  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6562-8515>

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**Donald Mark C. Ude** PhD is a Research Fellow of the Research Foundation Flanders (FWO), Belgium. He conducts his research at the RIPPLE research unit, Institute of Philosophy (HIW), KU Leuven, Belgium. He works in the areas of social/political philosophy, African philosophy, modernity, postcolonial theory, and the emerging field of Subaltern Epistemologies. He also has an interest in some strands of Critical Theory (especially those of Habermas) and tries to bring these to bear on his analysis of social phenomena. His works have been published in a number of reputable journals.