DECOLONIZING THE KNOWLEDGE CANON:
REFLECTIVE CASE STUDIES ACROSS FOUR AFRICAN UNIVERSITIES

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In this paper, we think about the University in Africa relative to four different institutional contexts. Using reflexive case studies, we reflect on our experiences as teachers, researchers, community practitioners on our respective decolonial practice. Our individual experiential accounts elaborate on our concern with knowledge epistemology, pedagogical practice and research, and the western knowledge canon. We plot a path for how this canon can be disrupted by drawing attention to some strategies, alternate epistemologies that we have encountered/adopted in our own practice. Our contexts are different: post-apartheid South African academic context and its grappling with neo-liberal influences that have surfaced a critical interest in decolonization; Ethiopian context characterized by drive toward internationalization goals has surfaced contradictory paradoxes on the role and practice of the university and community service; and Ugandan context, grappling with a colonial legacy that permeates academic research practice that seep into the research supervision practice and relationship. We are part of a network of scholars decolonizing the publishing ecosystem by building networks that produce alternate knowledge and create supportive fellowship. We engage our different contexts of navigating the academy in Africa as part of learning about our respective challenges and sharing strategies for how we navigate and disrupt the western-centric knowledge canon. We provide first-person accounts of our own pedagogical and academic experiences. We then explicate our experiential accounts with theoretical arguments rooted in decolonial approaches. Finally, we introduce the concept of decolonial hesitation as part of a strategic approach to care and community.

Keywords: *decolonisation, knowledge canon, reflexivity, decolonial hesitation, successes and challenges, Ethiopia, Uganda and South Africa*

1.   Introduction

We frame this paper in line with the Ugandan scholar Sylvia Tamale's (2020, p.2) conceptualization of "decolonization of the mind [as] really about returning to the annals of history to find ourselves, to become fluent in our cultural knowledge systems, to cultivate critical

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consciousness and to reclaim our humanity". This connects to our shared interest in exploring alternate cultural knowledge systems as an aspect of epistemic reclamation in the knowledge canon. Scobie, Lee, and Smyth (2021) further lay out two foundational and generally agreed-upon features of epistemic decolonization: challenging the assumption of Western centrality to African consciousness and cultural heritage, and acknowledging decolonization as an *ongoing*, rather than a one-time, process. Kessi (2017) further argues that higher education is not just about skill development, it is also about core sites of knowledge production that shape society itself, and hence decolonizing knowledge canons is a transformative process in both thought and action, deeply connected to universities as centers of knowledge creation. We do not argue for the uncritical erasure of established canons but rather seek to interrogate their failures and shortcomings in contributing to understanding local challenges and enabling transformative interventions that restore the dignity and humanity of communities and individuals. We thus explore four thematic sites for decolonization as part of our teaching, research, and community service practice within higher education. Speaking from three national contexts and four distinct institutional contexts: Ethiopia, South Africa, and Uganda (background on our institutional contexts is provided in the glossary), we adopt personal reflective approaches to explore four sites for decolonialization that include *1)* exploring the role of indigenous knowledge systems in education via Tewahedo Epistemology); *2)* critical pedagogy; *3)* cultural knowledge systems; and *4)* micro-politics of power. We conclude with a reflection on what we call decolonial hesitation as a way forward.

2.   On collaborative method of writing

We endeavour to engage decolonized African-centred knowledge canons that take as imperative intersecting concerns of "subjectivity, relationships, community, and the world" (Ratele et al., 2018, p.2). We reflect on levels of subjectivity, knowledge and curriculum, social structures and relations and in line with Ratele et al. (2018), employ the notion of decolonizing as both verb and adjective, such that we present reflections on practices that we have adopted in our respective contexts as well as our own imaginations for what a decolonized psychology in Africa might entail.

In terms of our collaborative writing method, we follow scholars such as Wyatt and Gale (2014) and Ratele et al. (2018), we engage a method that is deliberate in its collaborative approach. This too is a practice of decolonizing that challenges traditional practices of writing and thinking. As Ratele et al. (p.3) argue: "In gesturing towards a decolonizing psychology, it is necessary to deconstruct not only *what* we write but *how* we write as well" (our emphasis). Each author was asked to think and write about an aspect of decolonization of the academy that was important to them and to reflect on their practice and imagination of what this could look like. We then discussed and debated these contributions in a Zoom meeting and re-worked aspects of our contributions based on group feedback. Part of our process also involved sharing literature and personal challenges of working as decolonial scholars within our respective institutional contexts.

In the next sections, we identify and reflect on four key sites for decolonial engagement through our own experiences and reflections of practice with navigating entrenched knowledge canons.

3. Tewahedo epistemology: toward communal meaning-making and indigenizing knowledge

My (*Meseret*) position is that decolonizing of higher education involves considering the needs and challenges of the community and planning and executing approaches and interventions in teaching, research, and community service activities by providing alternative ways of addressing the dominance of Western-centered methodologies and approaches. Decoloniality entails exploring indigenous knowledge systems for creatively addressing contextual challenges and social realities, rather than simply transposing Euro-American methodologies that fail to fully understand the nuances of local contexts.

Ethiopia has a long-established tradition of teaching within the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church and mosque education within the Ethiopian community. In these long-standing educational systems, students passively reproduce lessons and are evaluated on their proficiency at specific educational levels, ultimately receiving certification from higher-level church and mosque education educators. There is opportunity for practice under the mentorship of senior church and mosque educators during public religious services. Tesema's (2025) recent historical overview of the integration and separation of Ethiopian indigenous religious-spiritual values and modern education, demonstrates a clear separation between the two. He argues that both secular and non-secular education systems in the country are imbued with different threats and prospects and thus require thoughtful consideration. While it is beyond the scope of this reflection to reflect on this debate, I agree with Tesema (2025, p. 1) that the role of education in "inculcating desirable socio-cultural values that are indigenous" is an important one that should be considered thoughtfully in a context of decolonization. This is because indigenous knowledge systems and practices that foster a sense of socio-cultural value are essential to a sense of community, belonging, and harmony of a people. More than this, Tesema makes the argument for taking seriously formal education's role in addressing a moral crisis of a nation.

Approaches to teaching and student-teacher interaction have since been designed and implemented that emphasize internationalization agendas. Policymakers and education reform have advocated for the direct replication of Western teaching methodologies, approaches, and curriculum at all levels of education, including universities, that has seen the complete erasure of indigenous knowledge explication of values and spirituality in education. It is in this vein that I think with Eybers' (2025) notion of *Tewahedo epistemology*, an Ethiopian knowledge system, as a decolonial orientation that makes space for indigenous knowledge systems within the academy. Eybers (2025) proposes that adopting a unified Tewahedo-based academic literacy framework can foster intellectual agency, decolonize educational spaces, and center Indigenous Knowledge Systems within Ethiopian higher education.

According to Eybers (2025), educational reforms are necessary to foster cultural diversity, validate Indigenous Knowledge Systems, and cultivate a sense of academic belonging for students in multilingual and multicultural settings. To achieve decolonization of educational spaces, Eybers specifically proposes Tewahedo epistemology as a decolonial framework for reimagining academic literacy in higher education. Eybers (2025) and Eybers and Dewa (2025) emphasize peer interaction, collaborative learning, and scholarly argumentation—central tenets of Tewahedo

epistemology. This ethic of teaching is in sharp contrast to instrumentalist models (see Freire, 1968/2005) that adopt top-down approaches to teaching and learning.

While Eybers engages with the context of academic literacy, it is my argument that the re-framing of education practice within the ethic of Tewahedo ontology can be extended more broadly to include teaching, research, and community service practice. In reflecting on the critical sites for *research* transformation in the Ethiopian context, I support Tuhiwai Smith's (2021) assertion that decolonization of research must entail critical examination of the assumptions, motivations, and values shaping research. She highlights the need for indigenous researchers to lead this process, reclaiming control over knowledge production about their lives and advocating for a fundamental shift in how research is approached with communities. Dutta (2018) similarly flags the Western research training paradigm as problematic for indigenous researchers and detrimental to communities due to a lack of cultural and contextual relevance, including a disconnect in practical application.

The research guideline from the University of Gondar highlights the importance of research in alleviating economic problems, addressing food security, preventing and controlling diseases, and introducing new knowledge (Gondar University Research and Technology Transfer Vice President Office, 2021). However, while the guideline indicates a commitment to achieving research excellence within the next 10 years of its strategic plan, it does not specify how these agendas would translate into community service. Most importantly, the guideline fails to engage how and why Ethiopia's contextual challenges interweave with research and community engagement projects that honor indigenous approaches. The latter, I would argue, is critical to how we may explore questions of relevance of social scientific research in our context. The disconnect in translation of research to engaging communities they claim to serve remains a critical issue that is part of the transformation of the knowledge canon.

The politics of research funding has also influenced the direction of research priorities that do not always address themselves to concerns of local communities at the grassroots and national levels in Ethiopia, preferring situating within global agendas.

In terms of *community service* projects, the latter are often developed from research outputs and thematic areas, often employing a top-down approach. That is, they are informed by predetermined priorities made at the top. This can fail to address the needs and challenges of grassroots communities, as research may not align with the community's actual needs, thus hindering the potential benefits of these projects. "The framework" [of *Tewahedo* epistemology] "fosters a unified integration of Indigenous epistemologies, resisting colonial ideological dominance, and promoting communal learning environments, reminiscent of Africa's pre-colonial era" (Eybers, 2025, p.2). Disruption of the knowledge canon and practice entails challenging what decolonial scholars refer to as the "coloniality of knowledge" in Africa (see Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018a; 2018b; Tesema, 2025), which has influenced a sense of alienation within the education space as well as cultural alienation. I agree with Eybers that "coloniality of knowledge tends to institutionalize a *single* framework of knowing, whereas decolonial approaches create spaces for integrating local epistemologies and community-based ways of learning" (p. 3, my emphasis). This is like the call for a pluriversal approach to knowledge canons that decolonial scholars have advocated (Escobar, 2023; Mbembe, 2016).

My own experiences in navigating these deeply entrenched systems and practices as a teacher, researcher, and community service provider funded by my university, involve *gently* incorporating

dimensions of decolonial practice that refuse the rigid pedagogical epistemes that emphasize linear sites of knowledge transmission (from the 'expert' researcher/teacher/service provider to the passive community). Nonetheless, the hegemonic entrenchment of Western-dominated knowledge epistemes and practices remains ever present.

4.   Decolonizing the curriculum

In a separate context, South African higher education (SAHE) has historically been characterized by deep-rooted inequalities, a lack of meaningful transformation, and chronic resource shortages. These have produced systemic injustices that manifest in various forms, including the persistence of a colonial curriculum (Cornell et al., 2016). While the transformation of SAHE has been a central concern since the advent of democracy in 1994, this imperative gained renewed urgency following student-led calls for decolonization. The Fees Must Fall movement (#FMF) and similar movements such as #RhodesMustFall, #Luister and #EndRapeCulture, compelled the South African academy to reflect on its role in sustaining and reproducing anti-poor and masculinist hegemonic values. These movements prompted efforts to decolonise higher education. Although diversifying the demographics of both students and academic staff is an important aspect of transformation, such changes often remain largely superficial unless they are reflected in the lived experiences of those within the academy.

My (*Thandokazi*) discomfort and frustration with the pace and substance of transformation in higher education began during my undergraduate studies in psychology at a South African university with a legacy of colonialism and apartheid. The invisibility of Black women in both the explicit and implicit curriculum- including the content we studied and the identities of those who taught us- made it clear that I was positioned as an outsider within both the academy and the discipline of psychology. As an undergraduate student, I lacked the time and perhaps the language to interrogate the unease I felt whenever Black people were depicted exclusively as impoverished and in need of '(white) saving 'within course materials. While my studies in sociology and gender studies encouraged critical reflection, psychology as a discipline seemed to discourage and even penalize such critique. Psychology's refusal to transform is particularly troubling, given the discipline's history in South Africa. During apartheid, it was psychologists who maintained white supremacy and legitimized the oppression of black people (Gobodo-Madikizela, 2003; Kessi, 2016; Pillay, 2017). A colonial psychology curriculum was inadvertently inherited and maintained, and I experienced this as a student of psychology.

This curriculum was marked by profound power imbalances that existed in the ontology, epistemology, and methods of teaching in the curriculum. The teacher is positioned as the 'knower' who transmits knowledge, while the student is the 'empty vessel' with little knowledge. Such a hierarchical approach to teaching and learning fails to acknowledge the psychosocial identities of both teachers and students, thereby denying their agency. Other consequences of such a curriculum include feelings of unbelonging and alienation; to a greater extent, it is also dehumanizing. South African scholars such as Segalo and Cakatha (2017), Kiguwa and Segalo (2018) have highlighted the implications of a psychological pedagogy that studies the self in a Western context. These scholars make calls for a more engaged psychology that allows for the multiplicity of voices. In my experience as a psychology student, this occurred quite late, at the

start of my postgraduate studies, when I enrolled in a critical social psychology course. My perspective began to shift here, and I encountered a different vision of psychology-one in which Black people and other marginalised identities were represented not only as subjects of study, but also as theorists and knowledge producers. My lecturer fostered a space of vulnerability and openness, taking a genuine interest in our perspectives and the issues that provoked our anger and concerns in class. In this environment, we were encouraged to critically interrogate the discipline of psychology itself. We engaged with the work of influential scholars such as Frantz Fanon, Steve Biko, and Hussein Bulhan, whose writings on the psychology of the colonized and the oppressed profoundly shaped my decision to pursue professional training in research psychology.

Participating in that critical social psychology class was also challenging. I had internalized the need to silence myself to perform academic perfection and avoid reprisal for critiquing the curriculum. Initially, I did not feel safe enough to voice my questions or concerns. However, through what I now recognise as a transformative pedagogy, my lecturer moved beyond traditional lecturing to inspire critical thinking and empower us to question our own biases and assumptions about the world.

4.1   From Systemic injustice to critical pedagogy

As a teacher of social psychology today, I now reflect on my own efforts to decolonise the social psychology module I teach. I engage in decolonial reflexivity in my role as an educator. Moosavi (2023) defines "decolonial reflexivity" as a critical stance that reveals how efforts claiming to be inclusive, radical, or decolonial may paradoxically sustain exclusion, maintain the status quo, or reinscribe Western centrism. Moosavi (2023) urges decolonial scholars - whether as curriculum designers, teachers, and researchers - to critically question their efforts to decolonise and challenge them against the risk of performativity. While critical self-reflexivity is a crucial part of decoloniality, we must introspectively locate limitations and potential perpetuation of coloniality even in our decolonial efforts. Curriculum responsiveness demands ongoing debate, critical reflection, and substantive changes to both content (what is being taught) and pedagogy (how we teach). Such discussions should incorporate the psychosocial experiences of both educators and students (Kiguwa & Segalo, 2018).

Before I took on the social psychology module at my university, I had participated in #FeesMustFall movement (#FMF), which advocated for free, quality and decolonized education. This participation brought about bravery and courage to challenge coloniality. The #FMF student-led protests drew attention to a critical interest in decolonization in South African higher education. They called for real transformation in the lives of black students and academics. I found my voice within these engagements and began writing as a form of resistance. It felt like I was back in that critical social psychology class, and this time, I was unafraid of my voice. I also had effective mentorship and support, which was particularly meaningful as it came from Black women. This mentorship created a sense of safety and familiarity; I felt at home.

Efforts to decolonize the curriculum are intended to restore students' sense of belonging within the university. The self should be viewed as political and historical, which will reshape our approaches to teaching and learning. Higher Education (HE) is a crucial site for symbolic struggles concerning decoloniality in South Africa. Founded on ideologies of whiteness, classism, and

patriarchy, if HE processes are not examined, they will perpetuate systemic injustices. When the opportunity to teach social psychology arose, I was determined to use teaching as a space for consciousness-raising and collaboration. Senior colleagues quickly advised me not to alter 'what works'. They suggested that it would be simpler for me to take over the course and teach it as had been previously delivered. I recognised that I could not assign inaccessible reading material to students, as the majority cannot afford such resources. Aware of this, I create alternative materials that are more affordable, ensuring that those students who cannot purchase the most expensive textbooks are not penalized. I understand that this is merely a temporary fix to a systemic issue; it is a band-aid. Addressing the structural issue of access would necessitate taking time off from my doctoral studies. As an early-career academic, my priority has been to complete my doctoral research, and delaying this has made me vulnerable to breaching university policies regarding the expected duration for completing PhD studies. My doctoral thesis was informed by decolonial scholarship, so despite the pressures to complete my studies, I could not disregard my personal convictions to provide a learning experience that integrates decolonial principles. Decolonial scholarship has transformed my perspective as a psychology student, a teacher in South African higher education, and a mentor and supervisor to my students. It has fostered a deeper level of reflexivity in all these roles (as teacher, mentor, and supervisor) and empowers me to be critical of knowledge- who gets to be 'The Knower', and whose voices are absent from the curriculum (both hidden and explicit).

Critical pedagogy, as theorized by Paulo Freire, encourages that teaching and learning experiences should be a space where we collectively expose and challenge dominant ideologies that maintain and perpetuate inequalities. This aligns with decolonial values, which center marginalized voices and a perception of students as knowledge co-creators. I facilitate critical engagement by promoting open discussions on the material I teach. We partake in debates and strive to apply psychological concepts to our daily lives. I challenge my students to reflect on their own positionalities and have developed assessments that require them to practice critical reflexivity. This method of teaching and learning entails a heavier administrative load; it also carries an emotional burden. The cost is that the hours I spend with students with difficulties navigating a racist, classist and sexist world (and academia), are not accounted for when I sit with my manager for end-of-year performance appraisal. I am at intersections because I also do not wish to be the kind of academic whose door is closed to students. I am aware of my power and what being in the position I am means to a student who looks like me. So, I do this work and will continue doing it even if it means I have taken a little longer to complete my PhD. While I embrace this load as my investment in transformative education, I am also conscious that the responsibility of transforming academia should not rest solely on me as an individual, particularly as an early-career black woman academic.

5.   Beyond eurocentrism: reimagining research supervision in Uganda

Moving to Eastern context, the landscape of higher education in Africa, including Uganda, remains profoundly shaped by colonial epistemologies, which continue to influence not only curriculum content but also the very processes of knowledge production and validation (Mutongoza, 2025; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018a; Tamale, 2020). In this context, research training is

often dictated by Eurocentric paradigms that privilege Western theories, methodologies, and topics, frequently marginalizing Indigenous knowledge systems and epistemic traditions (Santos, 2014; Tamale, 2020; Wane, 2014). xxx, as one of Uganda's leading public universities, serves as a vital site where the tensions between inherited colonial legacies and emerging decolonial aspirations are felt, particularly within postgraduate research supervision.

The reflection turns to my (*Leticia*) personal experiences as a lecturer, research supervisor, and member of the School of Education Higher Degrees Committee at Kyambogo University to interrogate how Eurocentric paradigms continue to shape research supervision in Uganda and explores how supervisors can adopt decolonial practices that validate Indigenous knowledge systems, foster epistemic justice, and support contextually grounded postgraduate research. I engage with decolonial feminist theories, particularly those of scholars like María Lugones and Sylvia Tamale, to interrogate how power, positionality, and knowledge hierarchies operate within supervisory relationships (Lugones, 2010; Tamale, 2020). Decolonial feminism emphasizes the interconnectedness of coloniality, gender, race, and epistemic violence, advocating for practices that resist domination and foster pluriversal knowledge spaces (Lugones, 2010; Mutongoza, 2025; Santos, 2014) .

These perspectives are crucial for understanding how supervisory practices can either reproduce or actively challenge colonial power dynamics within academic institutions. So, what can a decolonized research supervision practice truly look like? In Uganda, postgraduate curricula continue to emphasize Eurocentric epistemologies, primarily from the Global North. This dominance is most visible in research methods training, where theoretical orientations like positivism, interpretivism, and constructivism are presented as the main foundation for rigorous academic inquiry (Mutongoza, 2025; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018b). While these paradigms have contributed significantly to social research, their privileged status often sidelines or outright delegitimizes alternative epistemologies rooted in local African worldviews (Nabudere, 2006; Tamale, 2020; Wane, 2014). For example, courses rarely introduce African epistemic thinkers or foundational frameworks such as Afrocentricity, Ubuntu philosophy, or communal oral traditions (Mutongoza, 2025). This leads many students to internalize the belief that credible research must adhere strictly to Euro-American conventions, creating what de Sousa Santos (2014) calls an "epistemology of the North" that positions African knowledge systems as secondary, anecdotal, or unscientific (Santos, 2014).

Based on my experience as a member of the School of Education Higher Degrees Committee at Kyambogo University, I have yet to encounter a postgraduate thesis on parenting practices in rural Uganda that employs storytelling or clan narratives as legitimate sources of data. Instead, I have observed many students reframing culturally grounded topics through Western qualitative models such as grounded theory or phenomenology, even when these frameworks may not align with local contexts. This trend reflects an institutional bias toward Global North epistemologies, which inadvertently limits students' ability to ask contextually relevant research questions and to adopt methodologies rooted in community-based ways of knowing (Chilisa, 2019; Mignolo & Walsh, 2018).

In a related case, one of my graduate students, who sought to investigate determinants of school readiness among pre-primary children in the Buganda region, initially proposed exploring how traditional community norms such as *ekisaakate* (cultural grooming camps) and elders' folktales serve as informal mechanisms for social and emotional preparation for formal schooling.

While innovative and contextually relevant, my training in Western paradigms and heavy workload meant I was inadequately prepared to support this culturally embedded research trajectory. Consequently, the student was encouraged to frame the study using familiar models from developmental psychology, like Piaget's stages of cognitive development, and to adopt structured questionnaires and standardized assessments commonly used in Euro-American contexts (Chilisa, 2019; Tamale, 2020). This experience illustrates how both students and supervisors can unintentionally become complicit in reproducing epistemic hierarchies that marginalize Indigenous knowledge systems.

As a lecturer and supervisor at Kyambogo University, I navigate a complex positionality, balancing the responsibilities of institutional authority with a deep commitment to decolonial educational practice. Uganda's higher education landscape continues to bear the imprint of colonial legacies, particularly in how it defines legitimate knowledge, often privileging Eurocentric paradigms while sidelining Indigenous epistemologies (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018a). In response, I aspire to reimagine supervision not as a hierarchical transmission of expertise but as a dialogical and reflexive partnership (Taliep et al., 2025).

Drawing inspiration from relational models such as *he awa whiria* (braided rivers), which advocate respectful integration of different knowledge streams, I aim to cultivate supervisory spaces that honor students' cultural knowledge systems alongside academic rigor (Barnes & O'Carroll, 2020; Macfarlane, 2015; Scobie & Smyth, 2021). For instance, I envision co-constructing research agendas that validate Indigenous concepts as legitimate theoretical and analytical frameworks within education management. A student might explore how the *Obuntu Bulamu* philosophy of holistic human development can inform school leadership practices, moving beyond Western management theories to understand how concepts of interconnectedness and communal well-being foster a supportive learning environment (Letseka, 2013; Tamale, 2020).

Similarly, we could analyze collective storytelling as a research method to understand community perspectives on educational challenges, such as chronic teacher absenteeism, allowing local narratives to reveal root causes and potential solutions. Another student might use proverbs as a framework to analyze school governance structures, examining how traditional wisdom embedded in sayings like "Agali awamu tegalyowa" (sticks in a bundle are unbreakable, signifying unity) can inform collaborative decision-making among school leaders, parents, and community members (Chilisa, 2019; Nabudere, 2006). I also aspire to guide research that draws on proverbs and oral histories to examine traditional conflict resolution mechanisms used by school communities, practices that may offer culturally relevant information for managing teacher-student or parent-school relationships.

Similarly, I seek to encourage students to employ participatory and community-based methodologies that elevate local knowledge systems (Makerere Institute of Social Research, 2023). This could include youth-led action research projects investigating barriers to student retention from within their own communities, or collaborative inquiries involving school management committees in co-designing strategies to improve accountability and transparency. Other potential areas might involve exploring how school improvement planning can integrate community consultations conducted in local languages, using storytelling circles or community dialogue forums (Barnes & O'Carroll, 2020). Through such approaches, I hope to help students center the voices and lived experiences of those most affected by educational policy and

leadership decisions, while challenging the dominance of top-down, externally imposed management models (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018).

These aspirations reflect a broader goal: to empower students to challenge externally imposed conceptual frameworks and ground their research within the lived realities of their communities (Lugones, 2010). Such approaches demand that I remain critically attuned to how my own academic formation may inadvertently reproduce dominant paradigms. Yet, the pursuit of decolonial supervision is not without institutional barriers. Rigid thesis formats, donor-driven research agendas, and entrenched preferences for conventional methodologies often constrain students' capacity to innovate (Santos, 2014; Tamale, 2020).

While I have not yet fully realized all these decolonial approaches in practice, I am committed to advocating for flexible, contextually grounded research that recognizes community knowledge as valuable and educationally relevant. I envision guiding students who seek to explore alternative methods-such as participatory action research with rural communities or storytelling with refugee learners, despite the potential resistance such methods may face due to narrow definitions of scholarly 'rigour' (Chilisa, 2019; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018b).

Navigating these tensions requires *strategic negotiation*: mediating between student creativity and institutional expectations while upholding academic standards. I position myself not as a gatekeeper of epistemic legitimacy, but as a co-learner committed to epistemic humility, research autonomy, and power-sharing (Lugones, 2010; Tamale, 2020). Ultimately, I see supervision as a transformative and relational practice: one that fosters inclusive, socially grounded knowledge production and contributes meaningfully to the decolonization of education research.

Decolonizing research supervision, therefore, manifests as a dialogical process that actively challenges Eurocentric epistemologies and re-centers Indigenous knowledge systems as legitimate foundations for scholarly inquiry (Chilisa, 2019; Mignolo & Walsh, 2018; Mutongoza, 2025). In practice, this involves co-constructing research agendas that validate African frameworks as theoretical and analytical tools-particularly within education management. Supervisors must adopt a reflexive stance, recognizing how their own academic training may perpetuate epistemic hierarchies, while empowering students to pursue contextually relevant, community-based methodologies. By fostering supervision as a partnership rather than a hierarchical transmission of knowledge, and by advocating for flexible institutional structures, supervisors can create space for plural epistemologies, allowing postgraduate research to be both academically rigorous and socially grounded in the lived realities of local Ugandan communities (Mutongoza, 2025; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2021; Tamale, 2020).

6.   Reading ourselves into decoloniality: teaching Manganyi's *micro-politics of power*

In last reflective section, I (*Peace*) reflect on my practice of adopting what Reyes Cruz and Sonn (2011) describe as "culturally anchored critical psychology" as part of the decolonial agenda. Culturally anchored critical psychology seeks to engage the decolonial agenda by uncovering structural, historical, economic and political underpinnings of subjectivity. Through problem-orientated transdisciplinary approaches, it advocates for a dual approach to learning

and un-learning that is both *uncertainly curious* yet also firmly located in cultural knowledge and practice. Within the classroom context, this can look like all stakeholders of a learning community (including students, professors, community members etc) placing upfront their values and worldviews, seeking to foster a common language that promotes the wellbeing of all members of a community, working to un-learn together imposed knowledge and worldviews that contradict and dismiss as inferior cultural modes of knowledge and practice. In such a reimagined context, students and professors alike are involved in a learning process of who they are and how they come to be, what structural and intimate politics cohere in their identities, experiences and ways of being in the world.

My classroom context (I teach at a historically white institution in South Africa) thus entailed a reimagining of my postgraduate curriculum, framed around understanding the role of power in our respective lives. While the different assessment tasks for the course focused on understanding the structural and macro dimensions of power more generally, I wanted the curiosity about the different power influences in our lives to also include questions about ourselves, our interior lives and even an interrogation of how we are differentially marginalized *and* privileged based on our multiple and often intersecting modes of embodiment. The first aspect of this task involved both students and I engaged in a jointly conceived photovoice project (Gaboardi, et al., 2022) guided by one single question: "*How do I move in the world?*" This guiding question provided the benchmark for individual reflections aimed at interrogating our different and similar intersecting and multiple identities and positions in the world, the communities that we are part of and the relational politics of belonging and so on.

The second phase of the class project involved reading together the work of the South African psychologist, Chabani Manganyi. His classic text, *Being-Black-In-The-World* (1973) provided the epistemological frame for reading ourselves in the world. Manganyi, in his exposition on the effects of racism and racialization, described four critical psycho-existential complexes that tend to arise in racially oppressive societies: *1)* alienation from the body (a sense of being disconnected from oneself); *2)* alienation from material objects (a sense of disconnect such that one either values or devalues oneself relative to the presence or absence of coveted material objects); *3)* alienation from community (a sense of connection or disconnection from one's immediate and broader community, the capacity for empathy, belonging and solidarity with another) and *4)* alienation from time (a temporal disconnect that may include dislocation from hopeful *future* projections or planning, or unhealthy attachment to the *past* that may keep the individual stuck in trauma, grief, rage etc; and also a disconnect from the *present* that may be evident in apathetic states).

As a third dimension of practice, our class presentations and discussion centered on reflecting on our individual photovoice explorations of myriad identities and experiences in tandem with a reflection on these four psycho-existential states of alienation. The key objective of the exercise was to foster an understanding of the *micropolitics of power* in our lives, beyond the obvious manifestations of structural and macro effects of power. By so doing, we aimed to foster a deeper layer of understanding of the *intimate afterlives* of transgenerational trauma, loss, and grief in our lives as well as the intricate ways that systems of oppression (and by this logic, an agenda for decolonization practice) have fostered overlapping influences of power in our lives. Building this knowledge with culturally anchored theoretical knowledge canon further helped us in thinking

outside of Western and Eurocentric knowledge canons that failed to address such reaches of effects of power.

7.   "Living in and with ruins": on decolonial hesitation

We now describe a notion that we term decolonial hesitation, elaborating on what Thompsett (2023, p.499) has described as "hesitating worlds into being". Such a notion urges slow movement through decolonization. Thinking with Schildermans (2021), Thompsett asks: "How might practices of hesitation suggest other modes of inhabiting the university, or living "in and with ruins,"? (p. 499). In this question, we have an invitation to imagine the University as more than a bounded space but rather as one of many possible sites and practices of study. Put differently, the university space should not enjoy the exclusive domain for knowledge production and transmission but may be considered one of multiple spaces for knowledge production. Secondly, it is to recognise the different interwoven sites and other domains where knowledge and values may be transmitted, and which may be conversant (or not) with the activities and practices of the formal universities. We understand decolonial hesitation as encompassing two directions for engagement: a situation where academics desire to advance decolonization but lack the sense of safety, confidence and/or knowledge to implement alternative communities of practice; but also, and perhaps more importantly, the willingness to engage slow movement, to include an *ethic of hesitancy* that allows us to reflect on strategies that consider interwoven domains of knowledge production, within and outside the university, so that we do not become overwhelmed with all-consuming institutional modes of practice that debilitate us.

In my context (*Meseret*) of Ethiopia, the hesitation toward decolonial approaches is complex and multi-faceted. Whilst university policies and guidelines do not explicitly prohibit or create barriers for researchers and lecturers who want to explore and use indigenous epistemologies and orientation to decoloniality, there is no formal recognition of the need for such transformative endeavors. Thus, many researchers and lecturers lack the necessary knowledge, interest, and skills to effectively explore and use indigenous, local, and cultural epistemologies as alternative alternate knowledge canon. Secondly, this lack of knowledge and interest often leads to a lack of personal commitment for exploring and implementing indigenous and decolonial approaches in research, community engagement, and research.

For me (*Leticia*), in my role as a research supervisor, I have experienced moments of decolonial hesitation wherein my desire to validate indigenous knowledge systems clashed with institutional constraints and my own academic formation. For example, when a student proposes a study based on storytelling, proverbs, or clan narratives, I hesitate. I feel anxious about how it will be perceived by examiners: will they see these methods as legitimate and rigorous? Or will the work be rejected because it does not fit into prescribed traditional academic research? I am aware that this hesitation is influenced by the system within which I work as well as the Eurocentric orientation of my training. In the absence of likeminded community, these anxieties remain ever present for me.

For me (*Thandokazi*) hesitation has become a critical space of reflection for me as both a teacher and scholar. It allows me to critically reflect on my experiences as a black academic deeply committed to advancing the decolonial project in higher education. I am aware of the

urgent need to decolonise higher education and the necessity to question colonial legacies that continue to shape higher education structures and knowledge systems. This awareness compels me to question and interrogate my teaching practices; it prompts deliberate pauses to examine which knowledges and voices I privilege and which ones I inadvertently sideline. And yet, in pursuing decolonial praxis, I am aware of my own limitations and vulnerabilities in confronting structural inequalities with my embodied presence. I am learning to embrace hesitation as a space for internal and collective dialogue with myself, my colleagues, and my students. By so doing, I acknowledge that no single lecturer can decolonise the curriculum in isolation. Collective hesitation is important for resisting superficial decolonial gestures that do not lead to real transformation. For example, in my social psychology class, I intentionally delayed changing the prescribed textbook when I took over the course. This textbook, published in the global North, follows a traditional framework. While it does include some voices from the global South, these contributions often lack the critical depth characterized by texts from within the global South. While using this textbook, I invite my students to be critical of it. I invite my students to interrogate not only the content but also the positionality and limitations embedded in mainstream academic knowledge production. This approach challenges us to question dominant narratives and opens space for exploring alternative, decolonial knowledge. In this way, we move beyond mere inclusion toward genuine critical transformation. Decolonial work can be discomforting but it is important, and it requires deliberate, often small but meaningful actions towards epistemic justice. In my classes, this includes deepening critical engagement with students and inclusion of diverse often marginalized voices as valuable knowledge sources and producers.

My (*Peace*) trajectory in the academy has fluctuated with different moments of resistance, silence and hesitation. Embracing the generative capacity of slow movement, my moments of hesitation have included purposively choosing my struggles: what I may let slide and what I take on as necessary for transformation. My care of students has also changed significantly over the years, embracing a practice of care that does not undermine my own care. I have been deliberate in my community partnerships, both internal and external to the institution. Refusing prescriptions of collaboration rooted in ethic of extraction, academic elitism and 'doom-focused' forms of activism that make no room for gathering in joy, reading together, and playfulness.

Our original coming together as authors came about through a desire for connection, and building community across geographical, national and institutional divide. This is a deliberate strategy aimed at navigating how we may live in and with the ruins that we have inherited. It is a way of staying, not running, but steadily working for transformation. Decolonial hesitation allows for a reflexive engagement with transformative practice and processes within our respective institutions in the form of our own relations, practice and care with students, in our teaching and research and our differential leadership roles within the academy. In this sense then, whilst we hold out hope for a transformative decolonized academy, we are attentive to the challenges of seeking transformative change within an entrenched hegemonic system that remains unequal in terms of access and is often reinforcing practices rooted in colonial legacies of difference and hierarchy. For example, Tadese (2024) notes Ethiopia's historical social inequality continues to exist in modern times, even as new and shifting dynamics enter the picture. Economic stratification has witnessed differential shifts between urban elite and rural communities that are evident in access to education and employment in formal economy. In Uganda, Wanjiku

(2015) has documented that education has played differential pivotal roles in constructing national identity at different historical periods of the country's colonial and postcolonial governance. These roles included creating and legitimating ethnic divisions during colonial rule and attempts to use education to counteract and address these divisions in post-independence. Jones (2023) also notes the political advantage that education confers on different populations within the country, asserting that this advantage includes who is more likely to benefit from government and NGO schemes. In South Africa, formalized Bantu education (1953 to 1992) not only brought about an over-emphasis on Christian/European education (Thobejane, 2013) but also exemplified a formalized social stratification system that further entrenched divisions and inequality at multiple levels for the predominantly Black, Indian, and categorized Coloured populations.

8.   Conclusion

In this paper, we have reflected on instances of our slow movement, engaging four different sites of our own practice and ethics of being academics in inherited colonial institutions in Africa. We elaborate through self-reflection, four sites for decolonialization that include *1)* exploring the role of indigenous knowledge systems in education via Tewahedo Epistemology); *2)* critical pedagogy; *3)* cultural knowledge systems and *4)* micro-politics of power. These four sites, we argue, are critical sites of alienation within the academy and coalese around knowledge production via teaching and research practice. We discuss our individual engagements with these sites of alienation as a step toward engaging decolonial strategies for reclamation. We conclude with a reflection on what we call decolonial hesitation as a slow movement practice that nurtures care and community building within and outside the academy. We continue to collaborate as part of a shared community, focused on transforming pockets of praxis while attending to an ethic of decolonial hesitation.

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APPENDIX A
GLOSSARY

Background of the different institutional contexts: While decolonization is a topic of discussion within South African academia (Mitova, 2020; Tamale, 2020), the same level of engagement is not yet evident in Ethiopia and Uganda. Tamale (2020) points out the importance of attending to particularities of decolonization in Africa, i.e. the differential, intricate and sweeping impacts of colonialism in Africa. Thus, while there are practical and ideological synergies, there are also distinct impacts and unfoldings particular to the different contexts. We adopt Tamale's (2020, p. 2) understanding of decolonization as "various processes of deconstructing colonial interpretations and analyses of the social world". This conceptualization is useful for our purposes of addressing different dimensions of the knowledge canon in our respective home country institutions. We now briefly describe the tradition of engaging decoloniality in our respective contexts. Ethiopia has a long-standing history of statehood, rich cultural traditions, and oral and written indigenous knowledge systems. These intellectual and philosophical traditions could serve as foundational sources for knowledge production, pedagogy, research, and community engagement within higher education. One might expect that Ethiopia's higher education system, given its historical resistance to European colonization (Boddy-Evans, 2024) and its preservation of language, culture, and identity, would reflect a more indigenous epistemological foundation. However, the reality is quite the opposite. Despite the increasing global discourse on decolonial perspectives and praxis, Ethiopian higher education institutions lack significant dialogue on the subject. University teachers, researchers, and scholars have not actively engaged in discussions about the benefits, harms, challenges, and alternative approaches to replacing or modifying Euro-American epistemologies in knowledge production, research, pedagogy, and content. Elsewhere, Kabanda (2016) has rightly observed that social structure and way of life in the majority of post-colonial Africa has remained confined due to inherited systems of governance and knowledge transmission that were never transformed but embraced as part of a colonial legacy. Invariably, this has influenced marginalization of indigenous knowledge systems and local approaches to addressing social issues and challenges. And yet, for the decolonial scholar, Ramon Grosfoguel (2002), the illusion that elimination of colonial structures and forms of administration is tantamount to decolonization is also an important one to add here. His caution highlights how so-called "post-colonial" contexts remain fraught with tensions and problems that confirm their continued enmeshment within "colonial matrix of power". Kabanda (2016) further explores the Uganda and Kenya contexts, arguing that decolonization remains a fraught issue in these two contexts and more generally across Africa. This is the case in the context of Uganda. This is not to argue that Africanization of curricula at different levels of schooling was not a key priority of East African governments post-independence. Indeed, Sebbowa & Majani (2021) show that many East African governments framed education liberation in terms of the transformation of curricula following independence. School curricula were significantly revised to integrate African indigenous knowledge. In Tanzania, for example, the Education Ordinance of 1962, and in Uganda and Kenya, the Education Acts of 1964 and 1965 were aimed at addressing the issue of language in education. This demonstrates that the decolonization agenda remains an ongoing dialogue animated at

different historical and temporal moments. Uganda, like many other postcolonial African countries, has not meaningfully engaged with decolonisation in higher education because colonial legacies were largely embraced rather than dismantled at independence. As Tamale (2020) reminds us, at independence, a lot of the colonial structures of governance and knowledge transmission were just left rather than transformed, and this legacy continues to run our universities today. At institutions such as Kyambogo University, this legacy is visible in the continued privileging of Eurocentric epistemologies through research methods training, how we write theses, and curriculum content, while Indigenous knowledge systems are pushed aside. In South Africa, the student protests of 2015 ignited a renewed dialogue on transformation in higher education with a focus on decolonization of the university and the curriculum. Prior to this, there had been ongoing dialogue and engagement with questions of relevance of the education project. In South African psychology, this largely took the form of what has been categorized as "the relevance debates" (see Sher & Long, 2012; de la Rey & Ipser, 2004 for an overview) and spanned the latter half of the 1980s into the early 2000s. The student protests' reinvigoration of this debate has seen a proliferation of dialogue and interventions around decolonization that remain ongoing. Furthermore, South Africa's historical demarcation of some education institutions as historically white and others as historically black, Indian, and so on, means that there has been a differential animating of the decolonization agenda and practice across the country, with some institutions actively spearheading this call and others not. Postcolonial legacies in many African universities continue to further influence institutional and policy-driven practices that sustain unequal education access and resistance to knowledge production practices that reinvigorate indigenous knowledge canons. Such legacies may include western language dominance of knowledge production and engagement, and emphasis on STEM disciplines for research funding to the detriment of the social sciences and the arts.

Knowledge Canon: Knowledge canon describes the established and prescribed bodies of knowledge that are taught at institutions of higher learning. In the context of colonial Africa, these canons of knowledge are often western and euro-centric scholars and thinkers. The call for decolonization of the knowledge canon seeks to re-shape this continued legacy in education, critiquing the superior status that such canon holds in the academy. Decolonizing of the knowledge canon recognizes that other knowledge canons exist and that no canon has a universal claim to truth.

STEM: Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics.

Decolonial hesitation: A collective reflection and a pause. A more thorough and careful process of decolonisation that's not a "quick fix". Decolonial hesitation invites slow movement, reflexivity that suggest alternate ways we may inhabit institutional spaces that are not always alienating even as we work toward transformation.

Tewahedo Epistemology: An Ethiopian knowledge system, as a decolonial orientation that makes space for indigenous knowledge systems within the academy. Tewahedo epistemology as a decolonial framework for reimagining academic literacy in higher education emphasizes peer interaction, collaborative learning, and scholarly argumentation—central tenets of Tewahedo epistemology. The framework indicates oneness or unity that signifies long-standing educational tradition within the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church. Even though Tewahedo epistemology is dominant within the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, its teaching principles and methods can be effectively

applied in a university setting. The core of Tewahedo's teaching involves an active learning method and cooperative learning, which aligns with the underlying philosophies of university teaching often attributed to European scholars and theorists. Rooted in the concept of "oneness or unity," Tewahedo epistemology is a long-standing educational tradition within the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church (Eybers, 2025). This approach to knowledge is inherently multidisciplinary and cultural, prioritizing the integration of visual, oral, written, and spatial methods to create a holistic learning environment. A key principle is its focus on valuing students' own experiences and cultural backgrounds, which helps to prevent the marginalization of indigenous epistemologies. Eybers concludes that Tewahedo education also fosters critical thinking by encouraging students to challenge prevailing paradigms and construct new meanings from their cultural perspective. Some Islamic scholars, such as Ali (1987), argue that Islamic education is distinct from traditional European educational theories because it is based on the Quran, which provides an inclusive framework for both individuals and society. Students in Islamic education are working with small groups (sherika) of students who were at the same level in their studies (Endashaw, 2012). Therefore, Islamic education in Ethiopia serves as the primary source of knowledge, a principle that could potentially align with the core tenets of Tewahedo epistemology, which also emphasizes a unified and holistic approach to knowledge.

Transformation: A process of change aimed at redressing the injustices of the country's colonial and apartheid pasts by reducing inequalities and ensuring inclusivity. In universities, transformation is concerned with questioning how colonial legacies continue to shape university structures and the curriculum.

#FeesMustFall (#FMF): #FeesMustFall refers to student-led protests across South African universities in October 2015 calling for various transformation-related issues facing today's university such as a Eurocentric curricula, institutional racism and financial exclusion.

#RhodesMustFall: A student-led movement, sparked by an act of protest against the statue of the colonizer Cecil John Rhodes at the University of Cape Town, South Africa. Originating in March 2015, and using the hashtag, #RhodesMustFall, the students led a campaign and protest against institutional racism and its legacy in colonial inheritance. They advocated for a decolonized education. The movement sparked global interest and influenced similar protests in other institutions.

#Luister: A viral documentary that documented Black students' experiences of racism at the historically white institution of higher learning, Stellenbosch University, South Africa. The documentary sparked public debate and campaigns on the challenges of transformation at South Africa's previously white institutions of higher learning. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sF3rTBQTQk4

#EndRapeCulture: Protest against gender and sexual violence whereby women and non-binary persons publicly protested in 2016 against what they described as the normalization of violence within higher education institutions. The protest included naked forms of protest and some protestors brandishing whips as part of their demonstration.

Coloured: The Coloured category is rooted in apartheid South Africa's racial classification system that divided the population into four distinct race groups: Black, Indian, White and Coloured. They represent people of mixed ancestry and hail primarily from the

Western and Northern Cape of South Africa. The category has been contested by some scholars who reject the arbitrary classification system of the apartheid regime.

Ubuntu philosophy: Represents African conception of human beings and their relationship with the community, mutual care, and the idea that a person becomes fully human through relationships with others. Often summarized as "I am because we are."

Ekisaakate: A Buganda cultural practice of grooming camps, particularly for children and youth, where elders pass on values, discipline, and life skills through storytelling, rituals, and collective activities.

Obuntu Bulamu: A Ugandan philosophy of holistic human development rooted in compassion, respect, and communal well-being, which prioritizes the dignity and flourishing of the whole community over individual gain.