

**SHOULD AFRICANS GIVE UP ON THE EPISTEMIC  
DECOLONISATION PROJECT? A CRITICAL EVALUATION  
OF BERNARD MATOLINO'S "WHITHER EPISTEMIC  
DECOLONISATION"**

<https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/ajct.v4i1.1>

**Submission: February 20, 2024      Accepted: June 30, 2024**

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**Abstract**

In 21st-century Africa, decolonisation has become the heartbeat of African philosophy, and epistemic decolonisation has taken the protagonist role in the theatre of African philosophy. As contemporary African philosophers continue to philosophise within the decolonial discourse, a debate has emerged on the importance of the epistemic decolonisation project in post-independence Africa. Bernard Matolino has unequivocally expressed his scepticism in this debate against the epistemic decolonisation project. He argues that theorising on epistemic decolonisation is fruitless, a waste of time, and must be abandoned. On the contrary, I argue that Matolino's position is mistaken. This is because epistemic decolonisation is an empowerment project that offers solutions to perennial African problems, and Africans ought to continue theorising about it. I support my argument by developing an epistemic decolonisation account, which I call the Double Enlightenment Project (DEP).

**Keywords:** Colonialism, Decolonisation, Epistemic Decolonisation, Ubuntu, Double Enlightenment Project.

**Introduction**

In the current discourse of African philosophy, there is a new wave of scepticism against the epistemic decolonisation project. This new wave of scepticism cast doubts on the usefulness, importance, and significance of theorising on epistemic decolonisation in today's Africa,

which is confronted with numerous problems such as poverty, inequality, underdevelopment, etc. In cognisance of this, some prominent contemporary African scholars have developed a dismissive attitude against the epistemic decolonisation project in ways that are interesting and thought-provoking.

Bernard Matolino is one of the most prominent contemporary African scholars who has recently developed this dismissive attitude against the epistemic decolonisation project in Africa. In the article titled “Whither Epistemic Decolonisation”, Matolino argues that there is no need for Africans to continue theorising on epistemic decolonisation because there is no amount of theorisation that will help Africans improve their lives (MATOLINO 2020, 230). For Matolino, theorising on epistemic decolonisation is a kind of waste of time. This is because he thinks that epistemic decolonisation has failed to provide solutions to the perennial problems that are confronting Africans daily. These perennial African problems include, among other things, material underdevelopment and stifled political spaces.

However, in this paper, I argue that Matolino’s position is mistaken. This is because the epistemic decolonisation project in Africa is an empowerment project that enables the marginalised people of Africa to understand the nature of their problems using marginalised epistemic lenses and offers solutions to perennial African problems.

I structure this essay as follows: Firstly, I start by clarifying key terms of this paper and frame the decolonial debate. Secondly, I briefly outline Matolino’s argument. Thirdly, I explain Matolino’s argument in detail and provide a critical evaluation of Matolino’s argument. Fourthly, I develop a plausible account that offers a different understanding of epistemic decolonisation, which I call the Double Enlightenment Project (DEP). I define DEP as a continuous epistemic process that doubly empowers the African people to be locally relevant and globally competitive by integrating the valuable truths that are progressive in African philosophies, such as Ubuntu, with the progressive ideas from other places, such as the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) and Artificial Intelligence (AI), while discarding unprogressive ideas from both indigenous African knowledge systems and knowledge systems from other places. This DEP account of the epistemic decolonisation project is based on pragmatism, and it demystifies the mysteries surrounding the epistemic decolonisation project in Africa.

## Clarifying Issues

In this section, I will conceptualise the key terms of my enquiry, such as colonialism, decolonisation, epistemic decolonisation, Ubuntu, epistemic emancipation, and Double Enlightenment Project (DEP). Furthermore, I will frame the decolonial debate in the discourse of African philosophy and show how a new debate among contemporary African philosophers has emerged concerning the significance of the epistemic decolonisation project.

But before I delve much into the decolonial debate, it is imperative that I start by noting that decolonisation as a concept has a very long history around the globe, and it is famous in formerly colonised continents such as Asia, Africa, and the Americas. Colonialism is defined by Ania Loomba as “the conquest and control of other people’s land, natural resources, and goods” (2015, 20). In this case, decolonisation was originally regarded as a political concept that aimed to counter the Western colonial project. Decolonisation resists Western imperialism and colonialism, and it tries to reverse the devastating effects of colonialism. So, the project of decolonisation is seen by many victims of colonialism as a glorious sunrise from the horizon of modernity.

However, there are two important ideas and concepts that I will use to support my argument in this paper, and these are: The Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) and Ubuntu. To start with the first one, Klaus Schwab (2017, 6), the Executive Chairman and Founder of the World Economic Forum (WEF), defines the 4IR as “the rapid, abrupt radical change in technological advancement and unprecedented automation of things through Artificial Intelligence (AI), Internet of Things (IoT), Robotics, Quantum Computing, Nanotechnology, Biotechnology,” and many more. The amalgamation of these cutting-edge technologies is leading us and our societies into unprecedented technological-led paradigm shifts where the 4IR is entirely transforming the world economy, our communities, and our human identities in an innovative manner. Basically, the 4IR should be understood as a services revolution, which merges ideas and technologies to obscure the traditional boundaries between the physical, biological, and digital worlds.

On the second main idea, which is the notion of Ubuntu, I will start by saying that the notion of Ubuntu is a very topical issue in the history of African Philosophy. However, within the limited scope of this

paper, I will not go deeper into a detailed discussion on the semantics of Ubuntu, but I will give a general picture of the notion of Ubuntu. The term or Ubuntu originates from the Southern African Nguni languages such as Zulu, Ndebele, Xhosa, and Swati. Munyaradzi Murove (2014, 36) argues that “the idea of Ubuntu originated with the native African people as part and parcel of the native African people’s cosmology and ontology”. Literally, the term Ubuntu means humanness or personhood.

In this case, Ubuntu, humanness, and personhood can be used interchangeably in native African societies, and they can still mean the same thing because they emphasise the same key tenets such as unity, solidarity, identity, and so on. Furthermore, at the heart of Ubuntu, humanness and personhood are paramount virtues, such as treating other human beings with respect, compassion, care, love, kindness, and so on. The summation of these virtues is what is usually referred to as Ubuntu, personhood, or humanness. Murove argues that the idea of Ubuntu is well captured in the Nguni maxim: *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* – translated as: “a person is a person because of others” (MUROVE 2014, 37).

In cognisance of this, if one fails to treat other human beings in line with the paramount virtues mentioned above, then that individual can be regarded as lacking Ubuntu, personhood, or humanness. In this case, if an individual lacks Ubuntu, he or she cannot be considered a human being in the African native societies. One of the greatest proponents of the notion of Ubuntu, Mogobe Ramose (1999) argues that in the native African society, for an individual to become a human being, he or she must be enjoined with others, and failure to do so, many native Africans would say of that individual, he or she is not a person, and in some cases, other Africans would even say he or she is an animal.

Since I have clarified the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) and Ubuntu, and as unrelated as they may look, I will integrate them at a later stage. For now, let me briefly frame the decolonial project in Africa. It is imperative to note that the decolonial project in Africa started as a political project, and many Africans were convinced in their minds that political freedom was the only way to the African paradise or the promised African land where peace, milk, and honey flow unceasingly for the Black African child. Hence, Kwame Nkrumah famously claimed that “seek ye first the political freedom” and all other things will be added unto you (NKRUMAH 1965, 3). This is one of the ideas that led to the armed struggle for freedom in many African

countries. This is because many Africans had a belief that the only way Africa could be free was by overthrowing the Western colonial administrators and replace them with the African rulership.

However, many years later, after numerous African nations gained their independence, African scholars learnt in hindsight that the root cause of African problems is not political but the mind of the African. In 1971, the South African Black Conscious Movement leader, Steve Bantu Biko famously argued that “the most important weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed” (BIKO 1987, 37). From this assertion, the approach to decolonisation started to shift from political decolonisation to mental decolonisation.

In 1986, Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s famous work, *Decolonising the Mind*, was revolutionary in the sense that he advocates for a different conception of decolonisation, which champions the restoration of indigenous African modes of thought, restoration of African dignity, cultures, and languages after colonialism. Wa Thiong’o argues that the resolutions of the Berlin Conference, which took place between 1884 and 1885, were executed through the bullet and the sword. “But the night of the sword and the bullet was followed by the morning of the blackboard and the chalk, and the physical violence of the battlefield was followed by the psychological violence of the classroom” (WA THIONG’O 2005, 9). On the same note, Kwasi Wiredu argues that decolonisation of the African mind involved reducing the “undue influences” of the Western knowledge systems on the African continent (WIREDU 1998, 17).

From mental decolonisation, epistemic decolonisation emerged, which marks a significant paradigm shift regarding the site of the decolonial struggle. As such, epistemic decolonisation should be understood as a response to the Western epistemic hegemony unjustly imposed on the African people. Ramose (2016) claims that the educational curriculum, which was imposed on the Africans by the colonisers, is an ethical issue in the sense that it completely disregards the ethical principle, which suggests that no one is entitled to enforce or impose his or her truth on others. In this case, Ramose argues that “the human right to freedom ought to be recognised, respected, and always promoted whenever there is an intention to have human beings participate in educational programmes” (RAMOSE 2016, 546). This ethical necessity is even more important for Africans because the colonisers disregarded “the right of Africans to education and imposed

their epistemological paradigm, which continues to dominate the educational curriculum in Africa” (RAMOSE 2016, 546).

In *Bantu Philosophy*, Placid Tempels claimed that Africans are primitive and prelogical in their thinking compared to the Europeans: “the African reasons half as we do (that is to say in accordance with a critical reasoning associated with the nature of things) and that he then abandons all reasoning and gives himself up to magic” (TEMPELS 1959, 22). But in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the “descendants of the once enslaved, displaced, colonised and racialised peoples have entered academics across the world, proclaiming loudly that they are human beings” too, that they can produce intellectual knowledge for progress and development of their continent (NDLOVU-GATSHENI 2018, 3). In short, this is the brief context that Matolino claims to be setting his argument against theorising on epistemic decolonization, which he argues is a waste of time because epistemic decolonisation has failed to produce solutions to the perennial African problems.

However, I argue that epistemic decolonisation in Africa is a Double Enlightenment Project (DEP), which empowers the African people. This is because, on the one hand, epistemic decolonisation as a DEP in Africa resists the unpalatable Western colonial views, which misrepresent and denigrate African people and their cultures. Epistemic decolonisation as a DEP also resists the unprogressive traditional African ideas such as witchcraft, mythological thinking, beliefs in magic, miracles, and so on. On the other hand, epistemic decolonisation as a DEP in Africa embraces progressive ideas from traditional African thought and other parts of the world. In this case, epistemic decolonisation as a DEP in Africa embraces progressive traditional African ideas such as Ubuntu. Also, it embraces progressive ideas from other parts of the world, such as the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) and Artificial Intelligence (AI). Crucially, epistemic decolonisation as a DEP in Africa enlightens and empowers the African people in a double way.

### **An Outline of Matolino’s Argument**

In this section, I will charitably reconstruct and outline Matolino’s argument. But before I get into his critique, it is imperative to note that I agree with his acknowledgement of the devastating effects and evilness of slavery and colonialism in Africa. I also concur with his acknowledgement of the reality of racism in the past and today’s

society, and Matolino's acknowledgement of the right of Africans to engage in intellectual endeavours and epistemic decolonisation. He did well to note that decoloniality is used by African politicians to divert attention from their weaknesses such as corruption, and so on. However, I disagree with his claim that theorising on epistemic decolonisation is fruitless and a waste of time within the African context.

However, below is the outline of Matolino's main argument:

**Premise 1:** Decolonisation is a political project, including epistemic decolonisation.

**Premise 2:** Since epistemic decolonisation in Africa is a political project, some possible pitfalls arise from its political nature.

**Premise 3:** Epistemic decolonisation in Africa is supposed to bring solutions to the African problems, but there is a mismatch between the decolonial epistemic tools and the perennial African problems.

**Conclusion:** Epistemic decolonisation has failed because it fails to solve the perennial African problems. Therefore, continuously theorising on epistemic decolonisation is fruitless and a waste of time because it will not help Africans improve their lives.

## **Details and Critical Evaluations of Matolino's Argument**

### *Premise 1*

Matolino argues that the decolonial project is a political project in the sense that it is a "response to the colonial experience, and it seeks to take over and control the political space" from the colonial powers and replace them with the local forces (MATOLINO 2020, 221). As a result of this, Matolino argues that "everything about decolonisation is political including its epistemology" (MATOLINO 2020, 221). Thus, epistemic decolonisation "must be seen as a political commitment to ridding the formerly colonised space of the epistemological effects" of the Western epistemic hegemony (MATOLINO 2020, 221). For Matolino, there are some problems that are associated with this commitment, and these are:

**Firstly**, the politicisation of knowledge in Africa, where politics was made to be a determinant of knowledge. Matolino claims that if one looks at the discourse of African philosophy, one will find out that there is an overemphasis on the communitarian approach in the major branches of philosophy such as metaphysics, ethics, logic, and

epistemology. In this case, Matolino argues that in Africa, community is prioritised over the individual, and the idea of communalism received a lot of political support. He suggests that when this happens, “it means that politics would have been prioritised over the search for knowledge” (MATOLINO 2020, 222). For him, the danger with this prioritisation is that “epistemologies that fit with the dominant political paradigm” are the ones that are prioritised, and those that “do not fit in the dominant political program will be excluded from consideration or repressed” (MATOLINO 2020, 222). He suggests that this will result in stifling the “growth of knowledge, limiting the possibility of a fair and unprejudiced exchange of views and knowledge to create stronger epistemologies that are truly representative of the best”, and this results in the tailoring of knowledge to satisfy political expectations (MATOLINO 2020, 222).

In response to this problem, I argue that the communitarian approach in African philosophy is not just a political preference. But there is a metaphysical and an epistemic principle that underlies African thought, and this epistemic principle is the idea of Ubuntu. This idea of Ubuntu anchors the African communitarian thought. Thaddeus Metz argues that at the very heart of the communitarian approach are the ideas of “identity and solidarity” (METZ 2011, 26). In simpler terms, harmonious relationships in African communities are shaped by individual human beings who identify with each other and show solidarity with each other. So, prioritising the community over the individual or the fact that there is more emphasis on the communitarian approach in African philosophy is not a matter of political preference, but it is based on the epistemic principle of Ubuntu, which underlies African thought, and this is part of the epistemic decolonisation project in Africa.

**Secondly**, Matolino claims that “epistemic decolonisation lacks frankness when it is at odds with the facts on the ground where we see numerous Africans leaving their countries” to seek refuge in the former coloniser’s countries for safety and fulfilment of their dreams (MATOLINO 2020, 227). In this case, he suggests that “Africans are resolute and willing to proscribe Africa as home while embracing so-called former colonial masters as better hosts than the African-dictators-cum-persecutors” (MATOLINO 2020, 227). Furthermore, Matolino suggests that in some cases, African citizens who hold different ideas about the “dominant political programs are persecuted, jailed or exiled” (MATOLINO 2020, 222). For him, if Africa is to attain rapid

development and pull its masses out of poverty, Africa should copy Rwanda and use Rwanda as a model. This is because Rwanda is a country that embraced modernity, technology, and the 4IR. Rwanda is progressing well without paying too much attention to what happened in the past with regards to colonialism. As such, he suggests that Rwanda “is fast becoming a center of development, excellence, and cleanliness that many Africans are not accustomed to” (MATOLINO 2020, 226).

In response to this, I will start by saying that in as much as Rwanda may be one of the African countries that are fast becoming the center of development and cleanliness as Matolino suggests, I argue that the Rwandan example that Matolino has given us as a benchmark or a perfect model of excellence that African countries should follow, does not exonerate Rwanda from the problems that Matolino is highlighting and complaining about. For example, over the past few years, Rwandan citizens have run away from Rwanda to seek refuge in other countries, and they have promised not to go back to Rwanda. Good examples of these Rwandan citizens include Rwandan public figures such as Patrick Karegeya, Faustin Kayumba Nyamwasa and Seif Bamporiki, just to mention a few.

To make matters worse, some of these Rwandan citizens have been assassinated in exile and the Rwandan government has been fingered in all these assassinations (YORK 2017). According to York, the South African Supreme Court of Appeal found out that the Rwandan government was behind the assassination plots of its citizens in exile especially those who criticised the Rwandan government. Indeed, Michela Wrong (2019) suggests that Patrick Karegeya was assassinated at Michelangelo, a 5-star Hotel in Sandton Johannesburg, South Africa, and the Rwandan government is linked to his assassination. Over and above that, Chutel and Dahir also suggest that Seif Bamporiki was assassinated in Cape Town, South Africa, “while Faustin Kayumba Nyamwasa survived an assassination attempt also in South Africa” (CHUTEL & DAHIR 2021, NP). Unfortunately, all these assassination attempts and assassinations of the Rwandan citizens in exile are linked to the Rwandan government.

These few examples show that Rwanda is not a perfect model for Africa to follow. This is because what Matolino is speaking against, is exactly what is happening in Rwanda. Lives have been ruined in Rwanda, political space has been stifled, opposition leaders have been

jailed or exiled, the political system in Rwanda has turned totalitarian, and the Rwandan leader, Paul Kagame has become what Matolino calls ‘dictator-cum-persecutor’ to his own Rwandan citizens.

### *Premise 2*

Matolino claims that the main goal of his “paper is to present some possible pitfalls of decolonisation both as an epistemic orientation and as a political orientation” (MATOLINO 2020, 213). In this case, he argues that decoloniality projects have some limitations in how they “can empower the people they are meant to benefit” (MATOLINO 2020, 213). Matolino highlights what he calls the twin problem of decoloniality, and this twin problem of decoloniality goes as follows:

**Firstly**, Matolino claims that the major problem with the projects of decoloniality is that they concentrate too much on the devastating effects of colonialism while overlooking other possible ways and strategies that can be used to benefit African people both conceptually and practically.

In response to this first problem, I will start by saying that the devastating effects of colonialism in Africa are so real that they cannot be ignored. Colonialism left permanent scars on the conscience of many Africans, who are often confronted with the legacies of colonialism, such as poverty, underdevelopment, inequality, and many more. So, theorising on these devastating effects of colonialism in Africa helps the African people to understand the nature of their situation, and this helps in creating solutions that will move the African continent forward. In other words, if Africans stopped theorising on epistemic decolonisation, *Ipsa facto*, Africans would have failed to utilise an important tool for overcoming the problems associated with the colonial situation.

**Secondly**, Matolino argues that decolonisation strategies tend to overlook the importance of internally generated problems. In this case, he suggests that the epistemic decolonisation project in Africa concentrates on publicly attacking the legacy of colonialism and its accompanying racism, while it is not as resolute in diagnosing the homebrewed misdemeanours and transgressions “that could also have as much devastating effects in compromising the sense of epistemic and political freedom” of the African people (MATOLINO 2020, 213). For him, problems like material underdevelopment and migration of Africans to Europe and America are internally generated.

However, in response to this, I argue that the internally generated problems that Africans are facing are just a tiny fraction compared to the externally generated problems on the African continent. In other words, if one takes a closer look at what Matolino calls internally generated problems, he or she will realise that the root cause of most internally generated problems, if not all of them, is external. In support of my argument, I will use a few examples from the African continent such as Zimbabwe, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Libya, and “the Coup Belt of Africa”, which is a new geopolitical concept that describes African regions such as West Africa, Central Africa, and the Sahel region that are home to African countries with high prevalence of coups d’etat that have recently formed a continuous chain of coups from one country to the other, Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso, and so on. Due to limited space, I will use these few examples to illustrate that material underdevelopment, migration of the citizens, poor healthcare, corruption, and bad leadership are all instigated and exacerbated by Western imperialists and colonial forces that are external to Africa.

Let me start with Zimbabwe. Prior to the year 2000, Zimbabwe was famously known as the Breadbasket of Africa and many global citizens desired to work and live in Zimbabwe, but this was deliberately created by the Western imperialist forces to be so. But in the year 2000, Zimbabwe embarked on what is famously called the Fast-Tracked Land Reform Programme, which saw the government of Zimbabwe expropriating land without compensation from the former white colonial settlers who were largely of British and American descent. The white colonial settlers in Zimbabwe amounted to less than one per cent (1%) of the population, yet they owned more than 90% of the Zimbabwean fertile land, while the Black majority who were more than 90% of the population were forced to settle and languish on the less than 10% of the unfertile reserve land. The radical decolonial move of expropriating land from the white colonial settlers without compensation by the government of Zimbabwe was a redress towards economic emancipation of the black majority, and this was aimed at correcting the historical colonial injustices that had been created by the colonisers.

However, in response to this radical decolonial move towards redress by the government of Zimbabwe, the United States of America (USA), together with the United Kingdom (UK), the European Union

(EU), Australia and Canada, all ganged up against Zimbabwe and illegally imposed a barrage of unilateral economic sanctions on Zimbabwe, and this was aimed at reversing the Fast-Tracked Land Reform programme. The 2022 United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) report on Zimbabwe suggests that the devastating effects of the unilateral and secondary economic sanctions imposed on Zimbabwe caused a humanitarian crisis for the Zimbabweans. The UN Special Rapporteur to Zimbabwe, Professor Alena Douhan, reports that:

Unilateral sanctions decimated the economic performance of the country, thereby aggravating the humanitarian situation and consequently adversely impacting access to basic rights, including the right to life, food, water and sanitation, health and education, and the rights of Zimbabwean residents, migrants and refugees. (DOUHAN and UNHRC 2022, 6)

Furthermore, the UN Special Rapporteur notes that the unilateral and secondary economic sanctions imposed on Zimbabwe by Western countries had “undoubtedly” caused the irregular movement of the Zimbabwean citizens, as:

sanctioning states have generally failed to protect irregular migrants and refugees fleeing from misery and lack of opportunity. Numerous Zimbabwean migrants and refugees were reported to engage in covert and often dangerous journeys to western and neighbouring countries, living in substandard conditions and being subjected to forced labour and servitude, forced prostitution and trafficking of persons. (DOUHAN and UNHRC 2022, 10)

Over and above that, the UN Special Rapporteur suggests that the economic sanctions imposed on Zimbabwe have prevented and crippled the government’s ability to “develop and maintain essential infrastructure”, and these economic sanctions have led to:

Low salaries, unemployment and growing involvement in the informal economy, resulted in migration to neighbouring countries and an increase in poverty, criminal activities, corruption, prostitution, trafficking in persons, sexual

exploitation and drug abuse, especially among the most vulnerable, including women, young people and children. (DOUHAN and UNHRC 2022, 16)

Based on these findings by the UNHRC, which became the UN General Assembly position in 2022, one can easily see that all the noise about corruption, bad leadership, poor healthcare, mass migration of citizens, and material underdevelopment in Zimbabwe, were all instigated and externally generated by the Western imperialist forces that wanted to further their neo-colonial agenda.

However, in the case of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), which is one of the richest countries in the world in terms of mineral resources, has been under a civil war for almost three decades now. The rebels that are wreaking havoc, destabilising DRC are heavily armed with world-class artillery. But in Africa, apart from South Africa and Egypt, it is a well-known fact that there is no other country that can produce the kind of military weapons that the rebels in DRC are possessing and using. A report by Amnesty International claims that “large quantities of weapons and ammunition from the Balkans and Eastern Europe are flowing into Africa’s conflict-ridden DRC and they are being used in gross human violations” (RELIEFWEB 2005, NP).

The study by Amnesty International revealed the role played by powerful agents, arms dealers, brokers, and transporters of arms to DRC from various Western countries such as the United States of America, the United Kingdom, France, Israel, Serbia, Albania, Bosnia, Czech Republic, and many more. Amnesty International study report traces how weapons and ammunition are supplied to the governments of DRC, Rwanda, and Uganda, and subsequently channelled and distributed to the armed groups and militias in DRC that are committing atrocities that amount to War Crimes and Crimes Against Humanity (RELIEFWEB 2005, NP). Amnesty International report suggests that agreements such as Arms-for-Diamonds, Gold and other precious minerals, by various Western arms companies have led to the proliferation of aircraft flying into DRC carrying illegal arms cargoes, and when these aircraft leave DRC, they leave fully loaded with precious minerals.

In this case, Warlords in the West are continuously supplying weapons and ammunition of mass destruction to the armed rebels in DRC so that when the Congolese people are busy fighting and killing each other, the Warlords are busy looting Congolese minerals without

anyone noticing. Hence, Amnesty International wrote to the UN requesting the UN to put an arms embargo on DRC, so that the war in DRC can come to an end. But that has not solved the problems. It seems that as long as DRC still have precious minerals, which the Western countries are in need of, DRC will never know peace. Its citizens will continue to migrate to other countries, running away from the war that is sponsored by the Western Warlords. As the war continues, underdevelopment will continue because no country can develop at war.

In the case of Libya, before the so-called NATO military intervention in Libya in 2011, which led to the killing of the revolutionary leader Muammar Gaddafi, Libya was one of the stable African countries. When Gaddafi took power in 1969, he nationalised the Oil industry in Libya, and Libyans became stakeholders and direct beneficiaries of every sale of Libyan oil. Under Gaddafi's leadership, Libya's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) Per Capita rose to more than US\$11 000, fuel was less than US\$0.20 cents per litre, education and medical healthcare were free, unemployed graduates were paid an average salary for their qualifications up until they find employment, and a house became a human right in Libya. Hence, newlyweds were given houses by the Libyan government. But this did not augur well with the Western imperialist forces as the initial effort of the military intervention in Libya was led by France, the United Kingdom (UK), and the United States of America (USA) (FRANCE24 2021, NP).

France24 interviewed Libyan citizens ten years after the killing of Gaddafi, and this is what some of the Libyans said: "Before 2011, Libyans were the masters of their own destiny. Since then, we've seen 10 years of injustice, bombing, killing and kidnapping" (FRANCE24 2021, NP). Some Libyan citizens argue that NATO's military intervention in Libya in 2011 "has been a conspiracy against Libya" and since 2011, the Libyan economy has been "wracked by inflation and conflict, which is more stark evidence that life was better under Gaddafi" (FRANCE24 2021, NP). Priyanka Boghani argues that years after the Arab Spring protests that turned into an armed uprising which led to the overthrow and death of Muammar Gaddafi, the "life of an average Libyan has become more dangerous and unstable than it was under Gaddafi" (BOGHANI 2015, NP).

Boghani argues that "criminality is skyrocketing, insecurity is pervasive, there are no jobs, .....and a UN report points out that the fighting in Libya has led to shortages of food, water, electricity and

medical supplies and reduced access to health care and public services” (BOGHANI 2015, NP). In this case, more than 10 years after NATO’s military intervention in Libya, Libyans are still yearning for Gaddafi’s rule. Garcia Navarro a reporter for NPR argues that “it’s been nearly a decade since the US-backed ousting of Libyan dictator Muammar Gaddafi, and conditions in the country have gotten worse and more complicated.” (NPR 2021, NP). Garcia Navarro of NPR suggests that “European powers and the United States held a conference in Berlin on Wednesday to try and work out a solution that can bring stability to Libya, including holding elections in December.” (NPR 2021, NP).

However, France has been at the center of the social and political upheavals in the Coup Belt of Africa, where coup d’etats have been happening one after the other, mainly in West Africa and the Sahel region. In August 2020, a coup d’etat happened in Mali, followed by a coup d’etat in Burkina Faso which occurred in May 2021, and in July 2023 another coup d’etat occurred in Niger. It is important to note that France’s nuclear power plants depend on uranium from Niger, which is regarded as the third largest producer of uranium in the World, and since colonial times, France has been looting Gold from Mali and Burkina Faso. When Niger decided to cut ties with its former colonial master, France, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) “backed by France threatened Niger with military intervention, and Burkina Faso and Mali promised to fight alongside Niger in the event ECOWAS attacked” (MANDUNA & TUSHKIN 2024, NP).

### *Premise 3*

Matolino argues that “at the conceptual level, resources of reflecting” on the effects of colonialism and how to overcome it may be “incapable of unravelling the true extent and the effect of colonialism in Africa”, because “colonialism was a trickery of the highest order” (MATOLINO 2020, 220). Matolino asks: How best can we understand this historical trickery? “Is it sufficient to study it as a phenomenon that requires decolonial appraisal, or it requires some other tools of engagement which the decolonial scholars may not have?” (MATOLINO 2020, 220). Matolino illustrates this argument by highlighting the colonisers’ principle of divide and rule, which was successfully used in the Rwandan genocide.

In response to this claim, I argue that the decolonial resources that African scholars have developed so far and other decolonial

resources that are in the making are equal to the task. This is because, if one looks at the principle of divide and rule which Matolino argues has been used successfully by (neo)colonial powers against the African people, then one will realise that as far as 1963, African scholars and African leaders set in Addis Ababa and formed the “Organisation of African Unity (OAU), which was later transformed into the African Union (AU)” to defeat the imperialist agenda which utilises the principle of divide and rule (RAMOSE 2016, 549).

For Ramose, the emphasis on the principle of Unity of the African people can be seen in “the first constitution of the Republic of Ghana, which adopted the African philosophical perspective of Ubuntu, and this was against the notion of state sovereignty” (2016, 549). Ramose suggests that in 1963, Kwame Nkrumah inspired the people of Ghana to surrender their sovereignty to the OAU for the furtherance of the African Unity (2016, 549). For Nkrumah, Ghana’s surrendering of its sovereignty to the OAU was a necessary step towards recognising the oneness (Unity) of African humanity as brothers and sisters deserving justice and peace amongst themselves.

Based on this, it seems Matolino’s claim is the opposite of the truth when he argues that African scholars seem to have no solution to ideas like the principle of divide and rule, which has been repeatedly used against the African people. I argue that Africa’s problem is not in generating ideas, but it is in the implementation of the generated ideas. This is because ideas like the principle of Unity, a product of Ubuntu as the African guiding principle, are available in the epistemic decolonisation literature. But the only problem is that African leaders have not practically implemented the principle of African Unity due to the lack of political will from the African leaders. Once the African principle of unity has been practically implemented successfully, it will go a long way in resolving the problem of disunity among Africans.

### *Matolino’s Conclusion*

Matolino claims that continuous obsession with the colonial past and its effects on our current situation “has not only taken away responsibility from our local perpetrators of the greater injustices, but it has become intellectually limited and unhelpful in thinking our way out of the current situation” (MATOLINO 2020, 230). For Matolino, decolonisation has failed to “take us to our intended destination of the political and intellectual paradise that was initially imagined as desirable

and possible” (MATOLINO 2020, 229). Therefore, continuously theorising on epistemic decolonisation is fruitless and a waste of time because it will not help Africans improve their lives.

I will separate this premise into three parts and respond accordingly. In response to the first part of this argument, I will start by saying that in this life, there are three important phases that shape the society and the life of an individual. These three phases are the past, the present, and the future. As society evolves, we as human beings, learn from the past, live in the present, and plan for our future. In this case, epistemic decolonisation in Africa is a balanced philosophical discourse covering all three episodes: the historical, present, and future.

As such, I argue that there is nothing wrong with the African scholars theorising on the colonial past and its effects on our current situation. This is because the current lived experiences of the African child are shaped by the colonial past and its effects. The fact that history has a tendency of repeating itself, makes it difficult for one to properly plan for the future without considering what happened in the past to avoid it from happening in the present or in future. In other words, the colonial episode and its devastating effects are the major root causes of the current lived experiences of the African child.

In cognisance of this, I argue that focusing on the root cause of the current lived experiences of the African child with the purpose of overcoming the devastating effects that emanate from the colonial past cannot be interpreted as “taking away responsibility from our local perpetrators of the greater injustices” (MATOLINO 2020:230). This is because the current manifestations of what Matolino is complaining about in African societies such as poverty, inequality, and material underdevelopment, are the legacies of colonialism and cannot be divorced from the colonial past. So, I wonder how theorising on the root cause of perennial African problems, such as colonialism, and trying to make sense of the current situation for the purpose of overcoming it, can be interpreted as “intellectually limited and unhelpful in thinking our way out of the current situation” (MATOLINO 2020, 230).

Hence, I argue that the indirect and unintended consequence of Matolino’s argument is that it may end up participating in perpetuating and contributing to epistemic injustices against the African people. This is because, in some sense, Matolino’s argument tries to put down and silence the lived experiences of the marginalised people of Africa. The evidence of this can be seen in Matolino’s conclusion as he claims that

there is “no amount of theorisation on epistemic decolonisation that will help Africans to improve their lives”, it is just fruitless and a waste of time (MATOLINO 2020, 230).

However, the second part of Matolino’s argument suggests that decolonisation has failed to “take us to our intended destination of the political and intellectual paradise that was initially imagined as desirable and possible” (MATOLINO 2020, 229). I argue that epistemic decolonisation has not failed as Matolino claims. This is because the epistemic decolonisation project in Africa is a form of liberatory epistemology for the African people. As a liberatory epistemology, epistemic decolonisation in Africa seeks epistemic justice for the African people. It provides the marginalised people of Africa with the marginalised epistemic tools that help them to make sense of their lived experiences, and these marginalised epistemic tools are not available in the Western epistemic paradigm, which is the epistemic paradigm of the colonisers. In this case, Western epistemic tools may not be able to correctly spell out and characterise Africa’s problems.

Hence, I argue that epistemic decolonisation in Africa is an empowerment project that enables the marginalised people of Africa to understand the nature of their problems using the marginalised epistemic lenses. In other words, the epistemic decolonisation project in Africa empowers the people of Africa by correctly diagnosing and characterising their perennial problems, and this helps Africans to come up with the right solutions to the current problems in Africa. The danger of using Western epistemic lenses in diagnosing Africa’s problems is that it results in misdiagnosing of the problems, and this will eventually lead to wrong prescription for African problems. If Africans continue to use the coloniser’s epistemic lenses in diagnosing the problems in Africa, then this will derail the pursuit of epistemic justice for African people, and Africans may not be able to realise the epistemic justice that they are seeking.

There are good examples that show that epistemic decolonisation as a liberatory epistemology has not failed in its pursuit of epistemic justice for the African people. In this case, epistemic decolonisation gave birth to the postcolonial resistance, and some good examples are the Rhodes Must Fall Movement in 2015 and, subsequently, the Fees Must Fall Movement in 2016 in South Africa. Epistemic decolonisation as an empowerment project for Africans directly triggered both movements, the Rhodes Must Fall and the Fees

Must Fall Movements, and they got global attention which led to some changes in the status quo in terms of transformation, institutional cultures, and curriculum reform at the institutions of higher learning in South Africa and Africa at large. Jonathan Jansen and Cyrill Walters argue that “the spectacular downing of the Rhodes statue in 2015 by the protesting students who were demanding the decolonisation of the education curriculum was the beginning of a decolonisation imperative” in South Africa as “the fingerprints of colonial epistemologies were virtually visible in every field of enquiry” (WALTERS 2022, 2).

It is important to note that both the Rhodes Must Fall and the Fees Must Fall Movements were a direct response to all the perennial problems that Matolino is complaining about, such as inequality, poverty, unemployment, underdevelopment, and so on. This is because the Rhodes Must Fall and Fees Must Fall protesters, protested against the exclusionary costs of the university education, alienating cultures and content at the institutions of higher learning that makes things difficult for the marginalised African people to get out of the misery corner of poverty, inequality and unemployment. In Africa, education is regarded as an equaliser, or a ticket that the marginalised people of Africa can use to buy themselves out of the misery corner. That is why Sabelo Ndlovu Gatsheni (2018, 1). argues that “seek ye first the epistemic freedom and all other things will then follow”. Because once an African child gets a decolonised education, he or she is empowered socially, economically, and politically. But if access to this equaliser is not equally accessible, especially to the marginalised people of Africa, it would then mean that the marginalised people of Africa will perpetually be disadvantaged.

### **Epistemic Decolonisation as a Double Enlightenment Project (DEP) in Africa**

In this section, I develop my own plausible account that brings a different understanding of the epistemic decolonisation project in Africa. I call it the Double Enlightenment Project (DEP). I will start by showing that in Europe and America, the Enlightenment project is seen as the triumph of Science and Reason over Faith and Religious Superstitions (SOLOMON & HIGGINS 1996, 192). The Enlightenment age is understood in the West as a period when society transitioned from the traditional religious belief systems of the Dark Ages, such as Faith and Christianity, to the Modern Age belief systems, such as rationality

and science. In other words, the resistance or the rejection of traditional belief systems such as Christianity, which was dominant in the Dark Ages, and the embracing of Science and Reason is what is regarded as the Enlightenment. This paradigm shift brought remarkable development in Europe and around the world.

In Africa, epistemic decolonisation as a DEP empowers the African people in a double way. This is because, on the one hand, understanding epistemic decolonisation as a DEP in Africa resists the unpalatable Western colonial views that misrepresent and denigrate African people and their cultures. Epistemic decolonisation as a DEP resists the unreliable and unprogressive traditional African ideas that are non-scientific such as myths, magic, witchcraft, and other African ideas which do not transform the lives of many Africans in the 21st century. On the other hand, epistemic decolonisation as a DEP also empowers African people by bringing in the technical and the scientific aspects of understanding philosophy by embracing progressive indigenous traditional African ideas such as Ubuntu and progressive ideas from other parts of the world such as the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR). In this case, epistemic decolonisation as a DEP is purely pragmatic.

Hence, I define DEP as a continuous epistemic process that doubly empowers the African people to be locally relevant and globally competitive by integrating the valuable truths that are progressive in African philosophy such as Ubuntu, with progressive ideas from other places such as the 4IR and AI, while discarding unprogressive ideas from both the indigenous African knowledge systems and the knowledge systems from other places. Thus, DEP is a unique moderate account of epistemic decolonisation because it centres around pragmatism and integrates ideas that are ostensibly at loggerheads with each other. DEP seeks the knowledge and truth that liberates and frees the mind of the African child from the Western epistemic hegemony and the bondage of unprogressive traditional African beliefs. As such, DEP claims and affirms the inalienable and universal right of African people to reason, and this enables African people to philosophise and theorise about their reality and their experiences, without being forced to use the imposed Western epistemic lenses. In simpler terms, DEP is synonymous with the idea of self-liberation.

However, it is imperative to note that epistemic decolonisation as a DEP encourages the African people to embrace 4IR. This is because in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the 4IR and its associated cutting-edge technologies

have taken over all spheres of life, and the scientific fiction of yesterday is no longer a dream but today's reality, as 4IR continues to bring profound services and new products that we cannot imagine living without. But while embracing 4IR, Africans are forewarned and forearmed not to be gullible and avoid recolonisation through technology. In this case, DEP, as a way of understanding epistemic decolonisation, empowers African people by alerting them to be vigilant when embracing such projects as the 4IR.

Furthermore, DEP, as a way of understating epistemic decolonisation, suggests that indigenous African knowledge systems such as Ubuntu contain some valuable truths that Western knowledge systems and other knowledge systems around the world do not possess, and these truths are progressive in the 21st century. So, as part of the solutions for Africa not to lag or fall behind in terms of development and technological advancement, Africans need to decolonise technology that comes to Africa under the banner of the 4IR and AIs.

Over and above that, understanding epistemic decolonisation from a DEP perspective demystifies mysteries surrounding the decolonial project in Africa and African philosophy in general such as accusations of not being critical, dynamic, and progressive. In this case, DEP, as a way of understanding epistemic decolonisation, responds to sceptics of epistemic decolonisation, in the sense that it responds to the accusations of equating the epistemic decolonisation project with epistemic relativism. This problem of epistemic relativism in the discourse of African philosophy has been one of the problems confronting a group of African philosophers called Ethno-philosophers. This is because Ethno-philosophers view the idea of objectivity as a heritage of colonial thinking.

However, it is important to note that philosophy is supposed to be critical, dynamic, and progressive. As such, understanding epistemic decolonisation from a DEP point of view makes decolonisation project in Africa to be critical of both indigenous African ideas and ideas from other parts of the world. As a part of this, understanding epistemic decolonisation from the DEP perspective solves the problem of epistemic relativism in the decolonial project because DEP incorporates what I call Partial Epistemic Relativism (PER) in the discourse of African philosophy. In this case, PER is all about ideas that work practically (pragmatic ideas) regardless of their origin. PER also focuses on what counts as progressive knowledge with respect to time, context,

and so on. Since DEP incorporates PER, DEP rejects the full-blown relativism or relativistic decolonisation approach, which is mainly advocated by African Ethno-philosophers.

Therefore, I argue that Africans ought to continue theorising on epistemic decolonisation to rediscover themselves and rebuild self-confidence, and this will enable Africans to think originally and critically. This will also allow creativity and innovation among African people, and these are some of the most fundamental values that Africa requires in solving the perennial problems in Africa of poverty, material underdevelopment, and so on.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, I have critically evaluated Matolino's argument, and I have argued that Africans ought to continue theorising on epistemic decolonisation because, in the discourse of African philosophy, the project of epistemic decolonisation is a Double Enlightenment Project (DEP), which empowers African people in a double way. Theorising epistemic decolonisation from a DEP point of view enables Africans to understand the nature of their problems using the marginalised epistemic tools and offer solutions to the perennial African problems.

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