

Editorial: Multi-lateral Geopolitical and Decolonial Epistemic Considerations

Johannes A. Smit

ORCID iD: <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-1792-5256>

Anand Singh

ORCID iD: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7139-6511>

Nobuhle Ndimande-Hlongwa

ORCID iD: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9597-8690>

Denzil Chetty

ORCID iD: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4749-8788>

This issue of *Alternation* is titled *Multi-lateral Geopolitical and Decolonial Epistemic Considerations*. It opens a space for collaborative and regional, continental and international multi-lateral scholarship capacity development and knowledge generation. It brings together a few seminal scholarly contributions that each identifies some nodal points for further study and research.

The existing as well as potential epistemic scholarly capacity in South Africa, Africa and the African diaspora is immense, yet, unrecognised, untapped and not mobilised, activated nor organised. Due to their own intellectual and academic resources, universities need to provide leadership in global and local scholarly and research capacity development as well as multi-national relational connections with collaborating global regions and countries. Benefits should be mutual and multilateral, impacting growth, stability, and the responsible and enabling use of resources. Our current ever-increasing globally unstable world, has also become increasingly vulnerable to opportunism and populism as well as immoral and asocial and repressive technocracy. In the interests of the upscaling of knowledge and skills for self-governance, decolonised epistemic systems are the drivers for the discursive and empirical Africa-focused epistemicising of the wellbeing and prosperity of our people.

This volume's diverse yet interconnected set of scholarly contributions

study and interrogate the realities, focuses and opportunities for multi-lateral collaboration. Anchored in the intertwined realities of global geopolitics and local epistemologies, the issue foregrounds Africa not as a passive recipient of external influence but as a dynamic site of negotiation, resistance, and innovation. The collection is organised into two distinct but dialogically related sections. The first, *Russia, China & India through African Lenses*, examines the strategic re-emergence of post-socialist and postcolonial powers on the African stage, critically analysing the economic, political, and ideological entanglements that define contemporary South - South relations. The second, *Decolonial Epistemic Considerations*, pivots toward inward reflection, engaging the urgent project of epistemic decolonisation and academic renewal within African institutions and communities. Together, these sections offer a rich discursive framework of perspectives that illuminate the complex ways in which Africa is both shaped by and shapes global and local orders in the 21st century.

As usual, we provide the edited abstracts of the volume for easy access to readers.



Russia, China & India through African Lenses

The first four papers in this Special Issue of *Alternation* are written as glimpses of the realities that are faced in the world.

The role of the economically and militarily powerful countries in 21st century Africa reflects the constantly shifting geopolitical interests. While Africa, like other continents of the world, served as a battleground between the ideological pursuits of the United States of America (USA) and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), for nearly 45 years, it continued to remain marginalised while being simultaneously exploited for its natural resources. The USA used to be Africa's biggest direct foreign investor until 2014. By this year, American foreign direct investment reached a figure just under 70 billion US\$. In the years that followed up to 2021, it dropped more than 30 per cent to 47.5 billion US\$. Europe's most powerful economic country, Germany, invested barely 1 per cent of its total FDI abroad in Africa. Germany has chosen to invest in Asia and Eastern Europe, where the labour force is considered to be more stable and better trained than their African counterparts. Negative perceptions of HIV-AIDs and other infectious diseases also tend to play a role in investment decisions in Africa. This proportion of German FDI in Africa has remained stagnant for several decades. Other European economic successes, such as the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, France, and Italy, have

investments in Africa that are barely four times more than Germany.

Against this background, post-socialist Russia, China, and India have taken up the challenges and opportunities to invest in Africa. Their rise in prominence in Africa is reshaping a new world order after the COVID-19 pandemic. The idea of a ‘new world order’, however, must not be seen as a radical shift from one order to another for a prolonged period that is likely to span over several centuries. The dynamics of power plays are often determined by creativity in technology and its use in the military, as well as economic dominance in the world. Hegemonic positions can change as swiftly as the liquidation of KODAK in its domination of photography worldwide.

Anand Singh’s paper on ‘**Allegiance to which New World Order? 21st Century Engagement of China and India in Africa**’ is an interrogation of the concept of ‘the new world order’. Retracing the concept from the early 20th century and its uses during this period, filtering into the 21st century, Singh argues that it is a testament to the ever-changing dynamics of power plays and the re-ordering of the pecking order from the most globally powerful economies, downwards. The rise of China, India, and Russia is an indication of the waning influence of the USA and its European counterparts. For its resources, Africa could very well return to its status as a ‘testing ground’ of the economically and militarily more powerful nations.

In his paper ‘**Sino - Africa Relations: Philia or Phobia?**’ **Dev D. Tewari** engages existing discussions about Chinese economic interventionism in Africa and its impact on unemployment levels. Through analysis of published work and conversational outcomes, Tewari surveyed and analysed narratives and perceptions of rising Chinese influence in Africa. His analysis brought him to the conclusion that while Chinese investment in Africa has bridged numerous gaps in technological and infrastructural requirements, the use of imported Chinese labor and the export of African resources and manufactured goods somewhat annuls the good of Chinese investments in Africa. If their presence does not create jobs and their exports do not improve fundamentals, such as improved lifestyles and foreign reserves, they will lead to repercussions.

A more positive perspective is produced in the paper by **Kehinde Damilola Ilesanmi**, in his paper, ‘**Exploratory Study of the Trade Relation between India and South Africa: Opportunities and Challenges**’. Ilesanmi views the collaboration between the two countries as being complementary to each other, with promises of burgeoning possibilities in future collaboration. Their major constraints, however, are internal, constricted by infrastructural limitations. But the challenges are not difficult to overcome.

Kushboo Tewari, Moses O. Vincent, and Anand Singh’s paper on

‘Stigmatising against PLHIV and HIV Prevalence in South Africa: A Linear Discriminant and Spatio-Temporal Analysis’ covers all the country’s nine provinces. While the situation is restricted to one country, South Africa, its extensiveness is indicative of the perceptions that abound in the rest of the world about Africa and HIV/AIDS. Stigmatisation is the foundation for negative perceptions, especially about contagious diseases. Perceptions influence policies and attitudes, which directly impact areas such as FDI, tourism and cultural exchange programmes.

Each paper constitutes a glimpse into the post-COVID-19 world Order, but with the understanding that such a scenario is subject to rapid change.



Decolonial Epistemic Considerations

This part provides focuses on elements of decolonial epistemics, related to the realities of inequality in South Africa, teacher education in comparative perspectives from South Africa and Sweden, the need for greater acknowledgment of the relevance and importance of African religion in society, a critical analytic focus on basic aspects of the prospering of human life and wellbeing, such as water availability and management, geo-political tensions, global peace and security, the African Diaspora and African development, glass artivism, and neoliberal governmentality and the knowledge worker. These were brought together in this volume together with the multi-lateral geopolitical studies, since they all together provide some foundational parameters for what a truly decolonial epistemics in the global South inter-linked and in interaction with the global realities of our times, might yet engage.

In **‘The Controversial Impact of Coronavirus Lockdown Measures in the Context of an Unequal Society: A Decolonial Perspective’**, **Magezi Elijah Baloyi** examines how COVID-19 disrupted the fragile momentum of decolonial transformation in South Africa, particularly within its education and information systems. Baloyi frames the pandemic as a socio-political tsunami. He argues that the lockdown measures imposed to contain the virus exacerbated pre-existing inequalities and stalled critical efforts to reverse colonial legacies. Drawing connections between the aftermath of the #FeesMust-Fall movement and the broader continental push for decolonisation, Baloyi critiques how externally imposed crisis responses often clash with indigenous trajectories of reform. Through a decolonial lens, he reveals how the pandemic not only threatened lives but also undermined the structural reconfigurations

needed to restore African agency, identity, and epistemic sovereignty.

One of the enduring challenges in teacher education is achieving a coherent integration between theoretical coursework and school-based practical experience. This often leads to a misalignment in student teachers' learning, where either theoretical or practical knowledge may be disproportionately emphasised to the detriment of the other. Moreover, the perspectives of teacher educators – who play a crucial role in guiding this integration – are not sufficiently understood in diverse educational contexts like South Africa and Sweden. In **'Navigating Educational Shifts: A Comparative Analysis of Teacher Education in South Africa and Sweden'**, **Sarita Ramsaroop** and **Sandra Jederud** delve into the transformative trends that have shaped teacher education methodologies over the past two to three decades, focusing on the 'university/ research turn', 'accountability turn', and 'practice turn'. These shifts advocate for extended immersion in classroom settings as a means to enhance teacher preparedness. The study offers insights that extend beyond the contexts of South Africa and Sweden by contributing to identifying best practices, systemic gaps, and to a more nuanced understanding of effective teacher education within diverse global contexts.

Alexander Paul Isiko's 'COVID-19, Religious Voices, and the Resurgence of Traditional Healing Practices in Uganda' critically examines the shifting role of religious institutions during the COVID-19 pandemic and the parallel revival of traditional healing practices. Employing a mixed-methods approach, including in-depth interviews and a broad online survey, Isiko explores how the authoritative voice of religious leaders, so prominent during the first wave of the pandemic, significantly waned during the second wave in Uganda. He argues that this decline in religious visibility and influence, while not directly causing the increased reliance on traditional remedies, contributed to a loss of public confidence in religious guidance, prompting many to seek solace in culturally rooted healing practices. His study highlights how the failure of Uganda's under-resourced healthcare system, combined with deep-seated socio-cultural beliefs, facilitated the resurgence of traditional herbal medicine as a trusted alternative. Ultimately, Isiko challenges long-standing theoretical assumptions about the centrality of religion during health crises, offering a nuanced account of how science, indigenous knowledge, and spiritual authority intersect and shift in times of public health uncertainty.

Siyabonga Khumalo's 'Community Perceptions and Strategies for Water Conservation in the Bhambayi Informal Settlement, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa', assessed the perceptions of community members in the Bhambayi informal settlement regarding water conservation and issues

brought by water shortages in their locality. The study employed a case study design, an interpretivist paradigm, and inductive reasoning for data analysis. Ten participants were selected via purposive sampling for comprehensive interviews: five community leaders and five regular community members. Twelve community members engaged in two focus group discussions. The study demonstrated that infrastructure-oriented solutions, including the installation of in-yard taps equipped with water-saving devices, alongside traditional methods such as retrieving water from rivers and boreholes, as well as rainwater collection, might mitigate water scarcity in this community. The land issue is a significant obstacle for the government in constructing adequate housing and installing in-yard taps and toilets for community residents. The absence of community engagement in decision-making was perceived as an obstacle to water provision due to varying political affiliations among community members. This study advances understanding by exploring the efficacy of infrastructure-based and indigenous strategies for mitigating water shortages in the Bhambayi informal settlement, emphasising local viewpoints and systemic obstacles. The findings highlight the need for the government to adopt participatory operations, diversified strategies, and anti-corruption initiatives to guarantee equitable and sustainable access to water.

Globalization is another method of recolonizing African nations, including those that were previously excluded from the previous colonization and have now discovered a new frontier. This entails utilizing predatory tools like the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Trade Organization (WTO), and multinational corporations. To unify the world under one name, companies and other international financial entities of globalization under the United States of America's auspices offer services that in effect make countries dependent on them and also open to ideological coercion and positioning. Development requires full integration into the world system, which implies, in turn, accepting the terms of current macroeconomic policies as they were defined in 1989/ 1990, in the Washington Consensus. The world had changed. Capitalism had triumphed worldwide with the end of the Cold War. In **Geopolitical Tensions and Globalization: New Trends and Realities in Sub-Saharan Africa**, Hlengiwe R. Phetha and Joram Ndlovu examine geopolitics and globalization in the developing countries on whether they are or have not been left out of global world development. The central idea is that East Asia is seen as a model whereby developing countries opened their borders to find competitive niches and attract foreign capital, thereby triggering economic growth for the benefit of tier people. The paper also engages the impact of geopolitics on globalization around Africa. The paper

concludes that globalization underpins transformation in the organization of human affairs by linking together and expanding human activity across regions and continents. It also explores some opportunities and gaps that can be harnessed to the benefit of these economies.

Anand Singh's 'A Critical Review of Samuel P. Huntington's *Clash of Civilisations* (1996)', primarily draws on his 1993 article, in *Foreign Affairs*. Its primary research question is: Is peace and security temporarily illusive or permanently fallacious? First providing an overview of Huntington's hypothesis, the article puts forward the argument that it appears that expectations for peace and security is indeed fallacious. This is supported with data drawn from empirical interview research with postgraduate respondents. It then analyses and evaluates the view in the context of a brief overview of aspects of some global wars, specifically peace and security matters in South Africa, the war between Israel and Palestine, and the dynamics of the religio-cultural tensions between Hindu and Islam followers in India. Similarly, it addresses two related complex dynamics in the Western world, e.g. the cultural stresses and strains within the context of the presence of Muslim migrants in Europe and Britain more specifically, and the matter of the supposed 'waning of confidence in 'democracy', in the western world, especially in the terms of the international Realpolitik of the recent historical and continuing global significance and relevance of the USA.

Life is a continuous struggle for survival in a world where humanity is unable to meet all her needs. The same is applicable to nations and continents. The African continent is in dire need of the further development of a number of international multi-lateral nexus already in existence. So, adopting a qualitative research methodology within a survey research design, '**The African Diaspora – Development Nexus: Issues and Implications for Africa**', by **Odoziobodo Severus Ifeanyi and Nwaokoroeze Chinonye** explores the multifaceted transformative roles of Africans in the Diaspora in the socio-economic and technological development of the African continent. The paper creates a framework for understanding how leveraging the contributions of the Diasporas can transform Africa. However, the paper contends that as much as the importance of their contributions to the development of Africa cannot be overemphasized, most African governments have not adequately mobilized their citizens in the diaspora for their country's development. The paper therefore recommends that African leaders should create an enabling environment for the mobilization of the Diasporas for homeland development.

Despite high levels of gender-based violence (GBV) in South Africa, existing interventions often struggle due to social stigma, lack of sustained

funding, and insufficient community-level programmes to shift entrenched social norms. **‘Glass Artivism: Protest, Upcycling, and the Art of Cutting through the Injustices of Gender-based Violence’**, by **Kameshwaran Envernathan Govender, Tanya Pretorius, and Nalini Moodley**, explores how glass artivism can serve as a dual tool for public awareness and environmental sustainability. By focusing on upcycled glass art, this article employs an ecofeminist framework to analyse how the intersections of gender and environment can discursively challenge patriarchal dynamics and make silenced issues visible. Transforming waste through upcycling into artworks encourages transformative, critical thought about waste in relation to the thematic content of the art. Three case studies are presented: Saarah Begg’s *From Waste to Worship* (2024), Caitlin Greenberg’s *Echoes of Silence* (2023), and Abeer Al-Najjar’s *Diaphanous* (2021; 2022). The findings demonstrate that these works leverage the mutable and symbolic qualities of glass to materialise suppressed truths and confront injustice.

In his **‘Compulsive Work and Neoliberal ‘governmentality’: Benda Hofmeyr’s *Foucault and Governmentality* – A Critical Review Essay**’, Bert Olivier addresses Hofmeyr’s fascinating and to many readers probably startling book, why so-called ‘knowledge workers’ work compulsively, even when circumstances are such that they have to pay attention to other activities, such as child-minding. In his view, Hofmeyr lists three reasons, namely the expectation on the part of employers that they be optimally productive (in exchange for working conditions that promote such productivity, including highly flexible working hours); the advanced technological means to work virtually anywhere (primarily constant access to the internet by means of various technical devices); and most importantly, the fact that they *desire* to work constantly. He situates her inquiry in the (neoliberal) ‘Age of Control’ – problematising this curious phenomenon, where knowledge workers (including researchers and academics) voluntarily supererogate to the point of exhausting themselves, sometimes to the point of ‘burnout’. The review-essay concludes with, first, internal-textual, and then extrinsic-contextual critical perspectives on Hofmeyr’s argument – that is, on what is *not* written there, which corresponds with the notion of the unconscious in psychoanalysis, and with the current, ongoing attempt at a global *coup d’etat* on the part of the so-called New World Order.

This volume on **Multi-lateral Geopolitical and Decolonial Epistemic Considerations**, covers a number of main themes. The editors wish to thank the authors for their formative contributions. The multi-lateral epistemic

development of scholarship in our global South countries are non-negotiable and need to be upscaled. The vision is to bring together scholars that critically study the realities and challenges but also the decolonial and decolonising caveats for our developing global epistemic networks. There are also many opportunities continuously emerging that we need to take on and develop, together with many scholars in South and southern Africa, our African continent as well as the Caribbean and global north. These need to be done in social and epistemic justice inter-, multi-, and trans-disciplinary as well as inter-, multi-, and trans-paradigm research.

In the the next volume of *Alternation* this year's journal research focus is continued and expanded.

Professor Johannes A. Smit
Director: College of Humanities Institute
University of KwaZulu-Natal
Pietermaritzburg & Durban
smitj@ukzn.ac.za

Professor Anand Singh
Research Professor, Anthropology
School of Social Sciences
Howard College
Durban
SINGHAN@ukzn.ac.za

Nobuhle Ndimande-Hlongwa
Dean and Head of School: School of Arts
Co-Editor in Chief, *Alternation*
University of KwaZulu-Natal
Durban & Pietermaritzburg
Hlongwan1@ukzn.ac.za

Denzil Chetty
Manager: Advancing African Digital Humanities Ideation Hub
College of Human Sciences
University of South Africa
Pretoria
chettd@unisa.ac.za