



Bibliometric Coloniality in Africa: Challenges, Drivers and Strategies for Resistance

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Abstract

This conceptual paper critically engages with bibliometric coloniality, a concept that refers to the systems and structures of domination of global academic publishing by scholarly indexes and academic bodies based in Europe and North America. These indexes serve as gatekeepers of academic credibility, relevance and visibility. Due to the domination of journals from the Global North and the absence of African journals in major scholarly indexes, most academic journals from Africa are marginalised and remain largely invisible on the global stage. The article offers a decolonial critique of the challenges linked to bibliometric coloniality and Euro-American hegemony in knowledge production and dissemination. It highlights and synthesises key directions and options for addressing, resisting and/or dismantling global bibliometric coloniality. The article also explores how to begin tackling the challenges and hegemonies linked to bibliometric coloniality on the African continent, whether inclusion in dominant indexes or the development of an African scholarly index should be prioritised, and where to find resources and funding for the development of comprehensive scholarly infrastructure and platforms in Africa.

Keywords: Bibliometric coloniality, academic publishing, coloniality of knowledge, decolonisation, Africa

Résumé

Cet article conceptuel propose une analyse critique de la colonialité bibliométrique, un concept qui renvoie aux systèmes et structures de domination de l'édition académique mondiale par des index scientifiques et des institutions académiques basés en Europe et en Amérique du Nord. Ces index jouent le rôle de gardiens de la crédibilité, de la pertinence et de la visibilité académiques. En raison de la domination des revues du

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Nord global et de l'absence de revues africaines dans les principaux index scientifiques, la plupart des revues académiques africaines sont marginalisées et demeurent largement invisibles sur la scène mondiale. L'article propose une critique décoloniale des défis liés à la colonialité bibliométrique et à l'hégémonie euro-américaine dans la production et la diffusion des connaissances. Il met en lumière et synthétise des orientations clés et des pistes pour faire face à cette colonialité bibliométrique mondiale, y résister et/ou la démanteler. L'étude examine également les moyens d'aborder les défis et les formes d'hégémonie liés à la colonialité bibliométrique sur le continent africain, en s'interrogeant notamment sur la question de savoir s'il convient de privilégier l'inclusion dans les index dominants ou le développement d'un index scientifique africain. Elle s'intéresse également aux ressources et aux mécanismes de financement nécessaires au développement d'infrastructures et de plateformes scientifiques complètes en Afrique.

Mots-clés : Colonialité bibliométrique, publication académique, colonialité du savoir, décolonisation, Afrique

Introduction

Bibliometric coloniality is a recent concept. It was introduced in 2022 by Mills and Branford in the conclusion of their paper about academic publishing in Nigeria. They argue that 'across the global science system, a rich diversity of academic publishing cultures and research practices is under threat from bibliometric coloniality'. They further add that in this environment, research ecosystems, such as the one in Nigeria, have been put under immense pressure, with many academic journals and publishing houses struggling to operate, often 'caught between invisibility and being branded as "predatory"' due to their exclusion from dominant commercial bibliometric indexes (Mills and Branford 2022: 856). The concept of bibliometric coloniality was expanded in the book *Who Counts? Ghanaian Academic Publishing and Global Science* by Mills et al. (2023), with authors arguing that the concept refers to domination of global academic publishing by a small number of corporations and academic bodies based in Europe and North America, who serve as gatekeepers of academic credibility and relevance, as well as the tools of exclusion and invisibility of most African journals. Heleta and Mzileni (2024) have further built on this concept in their study about bibliometric coloniality in South Africa, showing the complicity of the country's Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) and universities in accepting the coloniality of knowledge and Euro-American epistemic hegemony as the way the world is. They also link bibliometric coloniality to the concept of coloniality and the ways in

which the Euro-American power structures and systems – including higher education, academic research and the academic publishing industry – built over centuries of European colonialism and United States-led neocolonialism since the Second World War (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2015; Kessi, Marks and Ramugondo 2020) continue to shape and ‘affects various aspects of the lives of [formerly] colonised subjects, including their ways of knowing, seeing and imagining the world’ (Ndlovu 2018: 99).

Despite these important scholarly works, there is limited scholarship on bibliometric coloniality. At the time of finalising this paper in January 2026, a search for ‘bibliometric coloniality’ on Google Scholar returned a total of 32 publications; aside from the above-mentioned publications, other publications mentioning bibliometric coloniality largely did so in passing, referring to the key contributions above. However, while bibliometric coloniality is a new concept, linked to the neoliberalisation, commodification and corporatisation of universities and global academic publishing, the problems and challenges it focuses on have been studied long before this concept emerged in 2022. For example, scholars have been focusing on the coloniality of knowledge (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2015; Ndlovu 2018), politics of and inequities in knowledge production (Afolabi 2022), academic and intellectual imperialism (Alatas 2003), academic dependency (Ajani 2020), gatekeeping in the academic knowledge economy (Soler, Erdocia and Savski 2023), decolonising academic publishing (Grydehøj et al. 2023), challenges facing African academic publishing (Mills, Kitchen and Sidi-Hida 2024), and global and regional disparities in dominant journal citation indexes (Mongeon and Paul-Hus 2016; Tennant 2020; Mills 2022; Asubiaro and Onaolapo 2023; Asubiaro, Onaolapo and Mills 2024).

This conceptual paper engages with the existing literature on bibliometric coloniality and other relevant critical and decolonial scholarship on Euro-American epistemic hegemony, global coloniality of knowledge, politics of knowledge, and inequities in knowledge production and dissemination to map out key issues, concerns, and debates. The paper offers a decolonial critique of the challenges associated with bibliometric coloniality and Euro-American academic and corporate hegemony in knowledge production and dissemination. Decolonial critique and epistemic decolonisation refer to a ‘political and normative ethic and practice of resistance and intentional undoing – unlearning and dismantling unjust practices, assumptions, and institutions – as well as persistent positive action to create and build alternative spaces, networks, and ways of knowing that transcend our epicolonial inheritance’ (Kessi, Marks and Ramugondo 2020: 271). In addition, decolonial critique allows us to critically engage with the Euro-

American epistemic fundamentalism and the hierarchies of knowledge production and dissemination, and imagine and work towards a pluralistic, non-hegemonic global knowledge project (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2021). Beyond, or perhaps in addition to, the decolonial critique, this paper begins to think about how to tackle the challenges and hegemonies associated with bibliometric coloniality on the African continent. The goal is not to offer immediate solutions, as this requires comprehensive engagement, thinking, research and analysis by many; rather, the goal is to build on the existing scholarship, highlight and synthesise key directions offered by scholars interested in or writing about resisting, addressing, tackling and/or dismantling global bibliometric coloniality, and offer recommendations for further research. The paper is structured as follows: the first section critically engages with colonialism and coloniality and their impact on knowledge production and dissemination on the African continent. The next section discusses the unequal global landscape of academic publishing. The third section explores some options and choices in the quest to tackle and dismantle bibliometric coloniality, and the last section concludes the paper.

Colonialism, Coloniality and Knowledge Production

Power and knowledge were key in the making of the modern world, built on the European colonisers' models, priorities and visions (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2023). Sardar (2008: xvi) explains that the European colonial conquest, science and knowledge projects 'went hand in hand'. After the colonial conquest across the African continent, European colonisers imposed educational institutions and curricula modelled on those from the colonial centres (Alatas 2003; Mamdani 2016; Maringe and Ojo 2017; Afolabi 2022; Heleta and Phiri 2023), a development that Alatas (2003) calls academic imperialism. The colonisers and their educational institutions and scholars assumed that their institutional models, curricula and knowledges were superior, while those of the colonised were inferior (Sardar 2008; Grosfoguel 2013; Mamdani 2016; Maringe and Ojo 2017; Afolabi 2022). Through prioritisation of colonial agendas and propagation of White supremacist notions and fallacies, education and knowledge production in Africa have been 'muddled, supplanted and ultimately made subservient to the orthodox Western education forms and structures established by colonial authorities' (Afolabi 2022: 94).

While formal colonialism ended in Africa in the second half of the twentieth century, the model of the world imposed by European colonisers continues to be sustained through the military, economic and geopolitical power and influence of Europe and the United States, as well as through the

coloniality of knowledge (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2023). Coloniality of knowledge is a key aspect of the global system of neocolonial control, hegemony and domination (Alatas 2003; Sardar 2008; Ndlovu 2018; Ajani 2020; Cochrane 2022). Kessi, Marks and Ramugondo (2020: 271–2) argue that the goals of both colonialism and coloniality in reference to education and knowledge production and dissemination have been and remain the ‘subjugation and subjection of people, societies, and experiences [in Africa and elsewhere in the Global South] for the purposes of accumulating knowledge, wealth, and power that serve, directly or indirectly, White Western hegemony’. Coloniality of knowledge ‘includes politics of knowledge generation, as well as questions of who generates which knowledge and for what purpose’ (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2015: 490). The key aspect of the colonial project, and the subsequent neocolonialism and coloniality, has been the ‘desire to control the minds and ways of knowing of the “colonial subalterns” in order to sustain and prolong the very project of colonisation’ (Ndlovu 2018: 96). Afolabi (2022: 97) argues that the colonial subjugation, and the coloniality of knowledge since the formal end of European colonialism in Africa, have led to ‘debasement and near extinction of African knowledge systems’.

The imbalances and inequities in knowledge production and dissemination between the Global North and the rest of the world stem from global power imbalances (Cochrane 2022) and the domination of academic discourses and knowledge production by Euro-American institutions and knowledge platforms (Ajani 2020). These institutions and platforms control and influence global flows of academic knowledge, and the credibility and visibility of platforms in which the knowledge is published (Alatas 2003; Heleta and Mzileni 2024). Linked to colonial conquest, coloniality and global White supremacy, the racial economy of knowledge continues to accrue most benefits to the countries and institutions in the Global North due to the Euro-American hegemony and coloniality of power and knowledge (Sardar 2008). This is the outcome of centuries of colonial, racist and White supremacist subjugation and imposition of Western and White norms, values and worldviews on much of the world, and the erasure and invalidation of other knowledges, ideas, worldviews and ways of knowing in Africa and elsewhere (Alatas 2003; Alatas 2006; Sardar 2008; Grosfoguel 2013; Ndlovu 2018; Ajani 2020; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2021; McKenna 2024).

In addition to, or perhaps on top of, the impact of colonialism and coloniality, African higher education systems, institutions, academics and scholars remain at the receiving end of the ‘hegemonic neoliberal capitalist-driven globalisation and the notions of a global economy of knowledge, which is assumed to be decontextualised and universal’ (Ndlovu-Gatsheni

2021: 78). Despite the claims of universality, the neoliberal discourse and policies represent White, Western and Euro-American-centric worldviews and visions aimed at controlling, regulating, exploiting and extracting from the rest of the world (Luke 2010). Importantly, neoliberalism has built on the structures of European colonial conquest, subjugation, and exploitation across much of the globe (Boughey and McKenna 2021; Heleta 2023). Boughey and McKenna (2021) argue that neoliberalisation and the notions of the global knowledge economy, conceptualised in and for the benefit of the Global North or the West, have been used to entrench and maintain colonial and neocolonial practices of control and influence in all spheres of life across the Global South, including in higher education, academic research and publishing.

Key components of this have been the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) and other neoliberal impositions, which have been promoted and imposed across the Global South by international financial institutions (IFIs) over the past few decades. These impositions have further impoverished African higher education and research ecosystems, already long marginalised, undermined and subjugated by European colonisers, as well as neglected by African post-independence governments (Mama 2007; Heleta and Phiri 2023). For decades since the 1980s, African governments have been pressured by IFIs to prioritise basic education at the expense of higher education and research under the impositions of SAPs. These policy prescriptions have led to systematic neglect of higher education across the African continent, undermining the capacity of already struggling universities to conduct research and develop new knowledge (Mama 2007; Mamdani 2009; Salmi and Bassett 2010; Boughey and McKenna 2021; Heleta and Phiri 2023). While the policy assumptions underpinning structural adjustments and higher education have been debunked and discredited (Salmi and Bassett 2010), the neoliberalisation of higher education remains the norm in Africa. This has led to cuts in public spending on research and higher education, the propagation of market hegemony, and the commodification and commercialisation of the sector (Maringe and Ojo 2017; Boughey and McKenna 2021; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2021; Heleta 2023). As it will be discussed in more detail in the next section, all this is relevant for a critical discussion about bibliometric coloniality, as colonial impositions and erasure, coloniality of knowledge, and the neoliberal impositions and discourses continue to maintain a highly unequal global political economy of knowledge production and dissemination (Cochrane 2022; Mills 2022; Soler, Erdocia and Savski 2023; Asubiario, Onalapo and Mills 2024; Heleta and Mzileni 2024).

The Unequal Global Landscape of Academic Publishing

Global academic publishing is defined, shaped and structured by platforms, parameters and infrastructure developed and controlled by corporations, conglomerates, institutions and academic bodies based in the Global North. They – and particularly the dominant indexing databases such as Scopus and Web of Science – influence, shape, control and gatekeep the geography of scholarly credibility (Tennant 2020; Amutuhair 2022; Asubiario and Onaolapo 2023; Grydehøj et al. 2023; Mills et al. 2023; Soler, Erdocia and Savski 2023; Asubiario, Onaolapo and Mills 2024; Heleta and Mzileni 2024; Gichuru and Rukooko 2026). Most of the largest and most dominant academic publishing companies and/or platforms are based in Europe and North America. Web of Science and Scopus, the most influential commercial bibliometric indexes, are based in Europe (Bol et al. 2023; Mills et al. 2023; Asubiario, Onaolapo and Mills 2024; Heleta and Mzileni 2024). Most of these academic publishing corporations and platforms are also driven by profits, relying on free academic labour through peer reviewing, the publish-or-perish culture in neoliberal academia worldwide, and the public funding for academic research that often ends up behind paywalls controlled by these corporations, or is made accessible through expensive open access publishing models (Pirie 2009; Puehringer, Rath and Griesebner 2021; Amutuhair 2022; Mills et al. 2023). African universities, scholars and most academic journals based on the continent continue to be systematically marginalised and exploited by this academic publishing model and the pressures it creates. African scholars, in particular, find themselves at the margins of the Euro-American-centric knowledge economy (Kamola 2012; Afolabi 2022; Amutuhair 2022; Heleta and Mzileni 2024; Gichuru and Rukooko 2026), exploited for the benefit of dominant global academic publishers (Puehringer, Rath and Griesebner 2021), while at the same time having to negotiate a ‘global knowledge system dominated by “Northern” journals and global publishing conglomerates’ (Mills et al. 2023: 2).

This highly unequal and exploitative global landscape of academic publishing, scholarly indexes and journals ‘is shaped by history, empire and regional income inequalities’ (Asubiario, Onaolapo and Mills 2024: 1484). As highlighted by Soler, Erdocia and Savski (2023: 167–8), ‘how academic knowledge is developed and validated is an inherently political-economic question, determined by the social conditions of those involved in the process’. All this is linked to the broader global structural inequalities and inequities, linked to colonialism, neocolonialism and coloniality, as

well as the long-propagated racist notions and fallacies about European and Western intellectual and academic superiority and the inferiority of much of the rest of the world (Grosfoguel 2013; Kessi, Marks and Ramugondo 2020). The domination of Europe and the United States, on one hand, and the exclusion and erasure of much of the rest of the world, on the other, is amplified by academic publishers and scholarly indexes based in the Global North, which operate as key tools of the Euro-American-dominated hegemonic project (Mills 2022; Heleta and Mzileni 2024), the neoliberal global knowledge economy (Kamola 2012; Boughey and McKenna 2021; Heleta 2023; Soler, Erdocia and Savski 2023), and academic or knowledge capitalism (Peters 2019; Boughey and McKenna 2021). These tools continue to sustain the global coloniality of knowledge and the unequal political economy of higher education and knowledge production (Mills 2022; Gichuru and Rukooko 2026).

Platforms for cultivation, curation and dissemination of scholarly knowledge, and the indexes that make that knowledge visible and perceived as credible and reliable 'are neither physically nor epistemically neutral. They are situated' (Abimbola 2023: 337). In their research, Heleta and Mzileni (2024) analysed major global bibliometric indexes to ascertain where the journals that they index are located. Their focus was on Scopus, Web of Science, the International Bibliography of the Social Sciences (IBSS), the Norwegian Register for Scientific Journals, Series and Publishers, and the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ). Their research, focusing on journals indexed in 2023, found that journals from the Global North overwhelmingly dominate the Web of Science, Scopus, IBSS, and the Norwegian Register. The DOAJ, on the other hand, has had half of the journals indexed in 2023 located in the Global South. Their research also focused on the number of indexed journals from the African continent, finding that Africa is largely absent from all these indexes, registers and directories. African journals represented only 0.35 per cent of all journals indexed in Web of Science in 2023; 1.22 per cent in Scopus; 1.33 per cent in IBSS; none in the 'high-level' list of journals in the Norwegian Register; and 1.8 per cent in DOAJ. Most of the indexed African journals were from South Africa, and this means that much of the African continent is completely absent from these indexes and platforms. Other research has explored global and regional disparities in dominant bibliometric indexes and found similar patterns of exclusion of academic journals from the Global South and particularly the African continent (Mongeon and Paul-Hus 2016; Tennant 2020; Asubiario and Onaolapo 2023; Mills et al. 2023; Asubiario, Onaolapo and Mills 2024; Kanyika and Kim 2025).

As illustrated above, dominant scholarly indexes are highly inequitable in their geographic representation of indexed journals. In particular, they systematically marginalise African journals (Asubiaro and Onaolapo 2023; Bol et al. 2023; Mills et al. 2023; Asubiaro, Onaolapo and Mills 2024; Heleta and Mzileni 2024). In addition to this, English language journals dominate these indexes, with only a small fraction of indexed journals in languages other than English (Mongeon and Paul-Hus 2016; Vera-Baceta, Thelwall and Kousha 2019; Tennant 2020; Mills 2022; Mills et al. 2023; Soler, Erdocia and Savski 2023; Asubiaro, Onaolapo and Mills 2024). This marginalisation of the majority of the world's journals and languages 'extends the old imperial and colonial logics' and racist notions linked to a presumed European and White supremacy (Peters 2019: 11). These practices directly contribute to the marginalisation and erasure of most of the world's knowledges, worldviews and ways of knowing, breeding epistemic injustices (Abimbola, 2023) and representing a 'hegemonic linguistic practice' (Tennant 2020: 2). Yet, this is not a recent phenomenon. Scholars have been raising concerns about the domination of journals from Europe and the United States and the exclusion of many other parts of the world in scholarly indexes since the 1970s (Narin and Carpenter 1975; Seglen 1992; Gibbs 1995; Gallagher and Barnaby 1998).

While the challenges of bibliometric coloniality in Africa are experienced by most, if not all, institutions, journals, and scholars on the continent, specific examples from Nigeria, Ghana, and South Africa are briefly highlighted below. In Nigeria, even though there are hundreds of local academic journals housed largely within the country's universities, university administrators have, over the past few decades, pushed Nigerian academics to publish in 'international' journals. International, importantly, is vaguely defined (or not defined at all) when referring to journals and preferences regarding where to publish; in Nigeria, it generally refers to Europe and North America, even if the research policies and guidelines do not name them explicitly (Mills and Branford 2022). As Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2021) points out, the notion of the 'international' in African higher education and more broadly across the Global South has tended to refer primarily to Europe and North America. This has led to the emergence of 'credibility geographies', in which publishing in journals based in other African countries or elsewhere in the Global South is considered less valid and credible than publishing in journals based in the United States or Western Europe. Over the years, the validity, worthiness, and 'internationality' of academic journals have tended to be defined in Nigeria and other African countries by inclusion in dominant bibliometric indexes such as Scopus or Web of Science (Mills and Branford 2022).

Universities in Ghana expect their academics to publish in ‘reputable’ journals. The meaning of ‘reputable’ is often not unpacked and/or defined in institutional research policies. While most institutional policies do not explicitly state a preference for publishing in international journals, academics and researchers in Ghana often interpret research policies and the notion of reputable journals to mean those based in Europe and North America. This is often due to the fact that many universities promote Scopus index as a reliable guide to reputable journals in which to publish (Mills et al. 2023). In South Africa, annual lists of accredited journals provided to universities by the DHET are dominated by Scopus and Web of Science journals (Asubiaro, Onaolapo and Mills 2024; Heleta and Mzileni 2024), and most of the country’s research output is published in these journals (DHET 2023). Publishing in accredited journals in South Africa is also linked to substantial research subsidies paid to universities and researchers for every publication in a journal on the DHET lists (Macfarlane 2021; Heleta and Mzileni 2024). This forces researchers to pay close attention to journal selection when submitting their research for publication.

Publishing research output in ‘reputable’ and ‘international’ journals is seen as one of the key aspects of neoliberal performativity in higher education. Across the world, performance management systems in higher education are informed by and closely follow neoliberal principles (Macfarlane 2021), particularly regarding research output and a focus on quantity, high impact, and Scopus- or Web of Science-indexed journals. This is also prevalent across the African continent (Mills 2022; Mills et al. 2023; Heleta and Mzileni 2024). Publishing in journals indexed in Web of Science and Scopus impacts the careers and promotion prospects of scholars and academics across the world (Tennant 2020; Macfarlane 2021; Grydehøj et al. 2023; Mills et al. 2023; Heleta and Mzileni 2024), including in most African countries (Ajani 2020; Mills and Branford 2022; Gichuru and Rukooko 2026). Similarly, indexing in Web of Science and Scopus is perceived to greatly improve the reputation and global visibility of academic journals (Asubiaro, Onaolapo and Mills 2024). Publishing in ‘international’ and ‘reputable’ journals, largely based in Europe and North America, is also strongly encouraged by most African institutions as this directly contributes to improvements in international rankings of the institutions (Peters 2019; Tennant 2020; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2021; Mills and Branford 2022; Asubiaro, Onaolapo and Mills 2024; McKenna 2024). Utilising data from scholarly indexes and academic publishers dominated by the Global North, the rankings industry directly contributes to Euro-

American hegemony in knowledge production and dissemination, and to the marginalisation of the African continent and much of the rest of the Global South (McKenna 2024).

Most research ecosystems globally, including those across the African continent, have incorporated data from Web of Science and Scopus in evaluation of their research outputs. National higher education and science systems and higher education institutions tend to see journals indexed by these platforms as the mainstream scholarly publishing platforms, while the journals not indexed by Scopus and Web of Science are seen as peripheral and/or marginal scholarly platforms (Vessuri, Guédon and Cetto 2013; Chavarro, Tang and Ràfols 2017; Tennant 2020; Bol et al. 2023; Mills et al. 2023; Asubiario, Onaolapo and Mills 2024). Thus, in a neoliberal university in Africa and globally, academic ‘publications are not legitimate unless they ... appear in a journal with a high impact factor’ (Macfarlane 2021: 466), which in most cases means a journal indexed in Scopus or Web of Science. It is important to note that the high impact factor is not the only, or even a primary, assessment tool; any journal indexed by these conglomerates is seen by most African universities as a quality and reliable platform for publishing research, although high-impact-factor journals are preferred. In all this, thousands of African journals – and many more from other parts of the Global South – are not seen as reliable and credible platforms for publishing scholarly research by African scholars. This makes the majority of African journals largely neglected and invisible on the global stage (Mills et al. 2023; Asubiario, Onaolapo and Mills 2024; Heleta and Mzileni 2024; Mills, Kitchen and Sidi-Hida 2024). Ultimately, this reinforces Euro-American hegemony on the one hand and epistemic exclusion, injustice, erasure, and coloniality of knowledge on the other (Mills et al. 2023; Heleta and Mzileni 2024).

Contrary to the claims of universality, the Euro-American epistemic hegemony – which includes Global North’s domination of global scholarly publishing – and neoliberalisation and corporatisation of higher education ‘are two sides of the same coin that represents coloniality’ (Heleta 2023: 51). Academia in Africa, while the victim of all this, is also part of the problem (Afolabi 2022). Across the African continent, the ‘Eurocentric order of knowledge and a Northbound gaze’ (Modiri 2021: 47) remain dominant factors that shape and inform the thinking about academic knowledge, institutional priorities, and the credibility of platforms for dissemination of research and knowledge (Heleta and Mzileni 2024). Many in African academia ‘have a seemingly strong belief that knowledge from the world centre [Europe and North America] ... is more “authentic”’ (Ajani 2020: 41). This is reflected in everything the academia does, including the choices

of journals and academic publishers (Alatas 2006; Ajani 2020; Afolabi 2022; Mills et al. 2023; Heleta and Mzileni 2024). Alatas (2006) argues that while much of the Euro-American epistemic and knowledge-related hegemony is structurally imposed onto the rest of the world, significant aspects of it are also willingly accepted as 'universal' by scholars, university leaders, administrators and policymakers across the African continent and elsewhere in the Global South. How to begin to challenge all this and work towards dismantling bibliometric coloniality is discussed in the following section.

Tackling Bibliometric Coloniality: Some Options and Choices

What are the options and choices for tackling and dismantling bibliometric coloniality in Africa? Asubiaro, Onaolapo and Mills (2024: 1487) argue that 'addressing the inclusion of local research ecosystems from regions outside Europe and North America' in the dominant academic publishing industry and indexes such as Scopus and Web of Science is important. They see this as part of the efforts to 'decolonise the global research assessment landscape' and foster a 'more equitable and inclusive research environment that recognises contributions from diverse regions, disciplines, and languages'. Kanyika and Kim (2025: 11) think that 'adjusting ... indexing criteria to better suit African contexts' could contribute to increasing the number of African journals in dominant indexes. While the inclusion of African and other underrepresented regions of the world would be a step in the right direction, particularly when compared to the historical and current trends and patterns of neglect, marginalisation and underrepresentation, is inclusion into the Euro-American indexes a transformative and decolonial solution? Similarly, is the adjustment of criteria for inclusion of African journals into the dominant Euro-American indexes a solution that the African continent should pursue? The problem with the calls to include more African journals into the dominant indexes, or to adjust the criteria and make it easier to include more African journals in these indexes, is that they seem to suggest that solutions may lie in getting a small seat at the edge of a big Euro-American table, or that African journals should be allowed to 'cut corners' to get in. While this may make Euro-American platforms and indexes look somewhat better, as they can boast about their work on inclusion, diversity and better geographic representation of indexed journals, is this part and parcel of the decolonial project? Is it enough to focus on inclusion of 'peripheral' regions, countries and journals into the dominant and hegemonic Euro-American, neocolonial, neoliberal and corporate academic publishing and indexing platforms? Is it appropriate to call for lowering of standards for inclusion so that more African journals can get in?

Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2021: 80) highlights that ‘one of the key demands of decolonisation of knowledge and education is de-provincialisation’ of the knowledges and knowledge platforms from a few colonial and neocolonial centres that continue their hegemony and imposition onto the rest of the world. If we see decolonisation of knowledge this way, the inclusion of African journals into the hegemonic and Euro-American ‘core’ – or the integration of Africa and the broader Global South into the Euro-American and largely corporate academic publishing game, to paraphrase Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2021) – is far from enough. In line with this, Abimbola (2023: 338) argues that African and other Global South scholars should not ‘give in to the notion that the Global South must come to the Global North’s table to be seen as knowers’. Rather than asking to be included in the Euro-American game (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2021) in a largely tokenistic fashion, Abimbola (2023: 337) argues that ‘the periphery [Africa and the broader Global South] must claim centrality by itself.’ Similarly, Bol et al. (2023) call for disruption and dismantling of the neocolonial and neoliberal model of knowledge publication and dissemination. This requires developing, building and/or strengthening academic publishing platforms, indexes and directories in Africa and elsewhere in the Global South (Amutuhaire 2022; Abimbola 2023; Bol et al. 2023; Heleta and Mzileni 2024). In Africa, in particular, this would entail developing a comprehensive African scholarly index (Asubiaro and Onalapo 2023; Heleta and Mzileni 2024; Mills, Kitchen and Sidi-Hida 2024; Gichuru and Rukooko 2026).

Inclusion is a relatively easy and quick solution. It would not take too much effort and resources for dominant global indexes to invest a small amount of funding to help strengthen a few journals from African and other Global South countries so that their statistics and maps look somewhat more ‘inclusive’ and ‘diverse’. But this would not change much, if anything, regarding bibliometric coloniality and the broader coloniality of knowledge and Euro-American epistemic hegemony. Rather, it would be largely superficial and rhetorical, resembling what some scholars call ‘decolonial washing’ (Le Grange et al. 2020). This is not to say that a truly global, pluriversal, inclusive and equitable scholarly index should not be a goal. Rather, it means that this may not be possible in a world where the Euro-American hegemony continues to dominate research, knowledge production and scholarly publishing in most parts of the globe. This is also not possible in a highly unequal and polarised world, where coloniality, neocolonialism, capitalism, neoliberalism, racism, White supremacy, extractivism and many other ills continue to ravage the lives, livelihoods, hopes, dreams, prospects and future of billions of people. All this has been interlinked with the

European colonial project, and later with the United States-dominated neocolonial project, with universities, academia, academic publishers and scholarly indexes playing a key role in colonial and neocolonial impositions, subjugation, erasure and injustices (Alatas 2003; Grosfoguel 2013; Bol et al. 2023). This is why Abimbola (2023: 338) argues that ‘to strengthen or build Global South knowledge platforms is to repair what colonialism destroyed. It is reparative.’

A key challenge facing universities, academics, scholars, researchers, journals and other academic publishing platforms across the African continent has been the underfunding of research and knowledge production by African governments over many decades (Mama 2007; Afolabi 2022; Amutuhaire 2022; Mills and Branford 2022; Asubiaro, Onaolapo and Mills 2024; Heleta, Jithoo and Samuels 2024; Gichuru and Rukooko 2026). In 2006, under the auspices of the African Union, ministers of science, technology and higher education of African countries had committed to work towards raising national budgets for research and development (R&D) to 1 per cent of national gross domestic product (GDP) to strengthen higher education and other sectors involved in scholarly and other research (African Union 2006). Despite this commitment, and the subsequent commitments and calls to increase domestic research and development spending (African Union 2016), most African countries are nowhere near spending 1 per cent of GDP on R&D. According to UNESCO (n.d.), countries in Sub-Saharan Africa have spent on average less than 0.4 per cent of the GDP on R&D since 2010, while the countries in North Africa increased their spending during that period from 0.35 per cent in 2010 to 0.81 per cent in 2022. There are also significant differences between countries. While Egypt spent 1.03 per cent on R&D in 2022, Namibia spent 0.65 per cent, South Africa 0.62 per cent and Kenya 0.41 per cent, to name a few. The most recent available data indicate that Ghana spends around 0.4 per cent of GDP on R&D, while Uganda and Nigeria spend only 0.1 per cent (Heleta, Jithoo and Samuels 2024). Given the underfunding of higher education, science, and research in most African countries, many higher education systems across the continent face enormous challenges and often depend on foreign funders to sustain scholarly research (Omungo 2018; Asubiaro, Onaolapo and Mills 2024; Heleta, Jithoo and Samuels 2024).

As highlighted earlier, most African academic journals are not indexed in major global indexes and directories, making them largely invisible on the global stage (Ajani 2020; Mills et al. 2023; Asubiaro, Onaolapo and Mills 2024; Heleta and Mzileni 2024). A similar situation is faced by academic journals from most other parts of the Global South (Heleta and Mzileni

2024). This is reinforcing Euro-American hegemony on the one hand and epistemic exclusion, injustice, erasure, and coloniality of knowledge on the other (Ajani 2020; Mills et al. 2023; Heleta and Mzileni 2024). On the African continent, the absence of an African scholarly index is a key structural and systemic problem that must be tackled by the African Union, governments, academies of science, universities and academic publishers (Heleta and Mzileni 2024). However, this is not the only challenge facing the continent and its knowledge project. The lack of funding, support, resources and infrastructure for academic research and its dissemination must also be tackled. Most African journals and publishing houses face enormous financial challenges that undermine their ability to operate, grow, and publish consistently (Mills and Branford 2022; Mills et al. 2023; Mills, Kitchen and Sidi-Hida 2024). Arguably, without first addressing these challenges, a comprehensive African scholarly index will remain a pipe dream (Asubiaro, Onaolapo and Mills 2024). Apart from the limited domestic funding and other externally imposed challenges, the lack of political will to tackle and dismantle the coloniality of knowledge and Euro-American epistemic hegemony in all their forms remains one of the major barriers to achieving epistemic decolonisation (Maringe and Ojo 2017; Modiri 2021; Heleta and Phiri 2023) and dismantling bibliometric coloniality (Heleta and Mzileni 2024) in Africa.

Conclusion

This paper has engaged with bibliometric coloniality as a concept and its impact on scholarly publishing and the academic knowledge project in Africa. The paper has offered a decolonial critique of the challenges linked to bibliometric coloniality and Euro-American hegemony in knowledge production and dissemination. This included a critical engagement with the ways colonialism and coloniality have impacted and continue to impact knowledge production and dissemination on the African continent; an interrogation of the unequal global landscape of academic publishing; and an exploration of the options and choices in the quest to resist, tackle, and dismantle bibliometric coloniality. Rethinking and reimagining knowledge production and academic publishing are key to the process of epistemic decolonisation (Mamdani 2016; Heleta and Mzileni 2024; Gichuru and Rukooko 2026). Yet, due to bibliometric coloniality and the prioritisation of publishing academic research in journals indexed by Scopus and Web of Science by most African universities (Mills et al. 2023), 'African scholars are [often] forced to "choose" between decolonial principles and career

pragmatism' (Asubiaro and Onaolapo 2023: 756). Promotion of Scopus and Web of Science as the indexes of choice in Africa contributes to the maintenance of the Euro-American epistemic hegemony and coloniality of knowledge (Ajani 2020; Mills et al. 2023; Heleta and Mzileni 2024) through validation of the Global North as the intellectual and scholarly centre of the world that the scholars from the periphery need to be part of in order to be validated and seen as knowers (Abimbola 2023; Gichuru and Rukooko 2026). These are deeply rooted, structural and systemic problems and challenges (Alatas 2003) that require the dismantling of the existing Euro-American hegemony and domination, decolonising the minds and building and/or strengthening pluralistic and non-hegemonic scholarly platforms and indexes in Africa and elsewhere in the Global South (Tennant 2020; Abimbola 2023; Heleta and Mzileni 2024; Gichuru and Rukooko 2026).

Global systemic and structural inequalities and inequities, combined with Euro-American epistemic hegemony and underinvestment in African higher education and research by African governments, will continue to undermine and marginalise research, knowledge production, and scholarly platforms for disseminating knowledge and research in Africa. While inclusion in dominant scholarly indexes may be the quickest solution for some African journals to achieve global visibility and recognition, this would only contribute to the maintenance of the coloniality of knowledge and Euro-American global hegemony. A decolonial solution requires a development of a comprehensive African and/or a broader Global South scholarly index (Abimbola 2023; Heleta and Mzileni 2024). Another option is to work on dismantling the existing hegemonies and corporate capture of academic publishing and building truly global scholarly platforms based on non-hegemonic values, norms, and visions, and the plurality of knowledges, ways of knowing, worldviews, and epistemologies (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2021). Whatever the way forward may be, no change can occur without comprehensive and continuous investment in African science, higher education, and research ecosystems by African governments. Similarly, no change will happen overnight; 'challenging and re-creating systems of knowledge production will take time and effort. It will also require persistence, creativity, and ingenuity' (Cochrane 2022: 84) of many in African academia and in higher education-related policy circles.

As highlighted in the introduction, bibliometric coloniality is a relatively new and understudied concept. More research is needed to analyse, document and further unpack different practices and experiences

with bibliometric coloniality in Africa. Researchers should also continue to study the impact of bibliometric coloniality on the academic knowledge project in Africa, including comprehensive and comparative studies of the impact on different higher education systems on the continent. Similar research is also needed more broadly across the Global South. Additional research should critically explore the experiences and challenges of African and other Global South academic journals, publishers, scholarly indexes and directories, how they operate within the broader coloniality of knowledge and Euro-American and corporate hegemony, and what types of support they need to build sustainable and globally visible platforms for publication and dissemination of scholarly research. Scholars should critically explore the experiences of African scholars based outside the continent to assess whether bibliometric coloniality affects their work and to what extent they can contribute to challenging and dismantling it. Future research should also explore whether bibliometric coloniality affects academic disciplines differently in Africa and elsewhere in the Global South, and whether this is linked to existing hierarchies between so-called 'hard' and 'soft' sciences. Further research is needed to unpack in greater detail what decolonising academic publishing entails and how to go about it. Finally, additional research is needed on how a comprehensive and sustainable African scholarly index can be built, and on the types of support, resources, and infrastructure required for this.

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