



Decolonizing Heritage in the Global South: The Role of Southern Epistemologies

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Abstract

This article examines the potential of epistemologies of the South to serve as a framework for decolonizing heritage. Northern epistemologies, decolonial critics argue, have historically marginalized non-Western knowledge systems through three interrelated limitations: reductionism, in their exclusion of non-Western knowledge as irrational; racism, in their classification of non-Europeans according to racial-hierarchical standards; and universalism, in their persistent efforts to impose their trajectories globally. In response to this critique, epistemologies of the South offer a constructive alternative by seeking to resurrect the theories, approaches, and epistemes suppressed by colonial powers. Drawing on close textual analysis of key figures—including Mignolo, Santos, and al-Jabri—this article investigates how a critical engagement with heritage, defined as the legacy inherited by the Global South can empower struggles against coloniality, imperialism, and dependency. The article concludes that epistemologies of the South not only provide an alternative representation that challenges hegemonic narratives but also contribute meaningfully to ongoing struggles for epistemic justice. In doing so, it contributes to broader debates on pluralizing knowledge within the Global South.

1. Introduction

Heritage is described as the legacy that previous generations have preserved and transmitted to the present, and which a significant portion of the population wishes to pass on to future generations (Hewison, 1989). This heritage encompasses the history, identity, collective memory, expectations, and aspirations of a given people. However, it requires decolonization, as it remains tainted by colonialism. It is here that epistemologies of the South, which are concerned as they are with ancestral traditions—primarily from the Global South—that were either marginalized or suppressed by colonial powers, assume a critical role. This suppression stems from a Eurocentric tendency that dismisses anything non-Western as belonging to the realm of myth or superstition, thereby rendering it irrelevant. Consequently, this article explores the potential of epistemologies of the South to function as an alternative framework capable of transcending the Eurocentric-reductionist worldview. This Eurocentric perspective is underpinned by a racist discourse that asserts the superiority of the white race over others and classifies the world in a racial-hierarchical manner.

Epistemologies of the South seek to resurrect the theories and disciplines that were silenced, arguing for their indispensability in any genuine project of liberation or development within the Global South. By contrast, epistemologies of the North are understood as complicit in the colonial project and its aftermaths, including the racial classification of non-Europeans. Accordingly, epistemologies of the South call for a break with Northern epistemologies as a

prerequisite for the complete liberation of the Global South from coloniality. Employing a textual analysis approach to critique the writings of several authorities, this article investigates the possibility of decolonizing heritage for the benefit of the peoples of the Global South. This approach is mono-methodological, as it relies exclusively on the critique of books as its primary research method.

In the chapters that follow, I begin by defining heritage and explaining why it must be decolonized for the benefit of the Global South. I then discuss the term epistemology, which scrutinizes the methods employed in knowledge construction, and examine its relevance to epistemologies of the South. Subsequently, I address Bachelard's concept of the epistemological break before transitioning to the writings of Michel Serres, who argues that knowledge develops through continuity rather than rupture. Thereafter, I analyze the mechanisms through which epistemologies of the North impose their vision on the rest of the world. Epistemologies of the North refer to the disciplines, methods, and approaches deployed by Europeans in their colonial project—whether to legitimize the enterprise of colonizing other territories or to marginalize disciplines incompatible with European ambitions. In this context, I focus on Foucault's notion of power, particularly his concept of soft power. Beyond soft power, the article also examines how repressive power contributes to rendering epistemologies of the North acceptable worldwide. Finally, I highlight how epistemologies of the South present themselves as valid alternatives for moving beyond the Eurocentric-reductionist perspective of Northern epistemologies. Concerned with reviving disciplines marginalized or silenced by colonialism, epistemologies of the South aim to maximize the struggle against colonialism, capitalism, and patriarchy.

2. Decolonizing Heritage: Toward a Localization of Knowledge

Definition of Heritage

The past of any nation holds sway over its present trajectory and shapes the contours of its future. At the heart of this historical continuum lies heritage, the rich tapestry of customs, traditions, and knowledge inherited from ancestors, both tangible and intangible. For al-Jabri, heritage (*al-Turath*) is “everything that is present in us or with us from the past, whether our past or the past of others, whether it is near or far” (al-Jabri, 1991, p. 45). This definition underscores the broad spectrum of heritage, encompassing both tangible and intangible elements. On one hand, heritage manifests physically through monuments, while on the other, it takes on non-physical forms such as culture and history. As al-Jabri contends, heritage constitutes an integral component of our identities, shaping our cognitive frameworks and influencing our perceptions of the world. Heritage encompasses elements from both our own past and the past of others, regardless of temporal or geographical proximity. “Our past” pertains to the heritage of Arabs, whereas “the past of others” denotes the heritage of other nations that have exerted influence on Arabs’ heritage. This influence may stem from various sources such as Greek philosophy, the French Revolution, or Marxist ideology.

In addition to al-Jabri, Hammoudi refers to heritage as *al-Rasid* which includes what a group of people has inherited from their ancestors. However, heritage loses its significance when it is either idealized and unquestioningly upheld, or dismissed as irrelevant and worthy of abandonment. For Hammoudi, the correct way is to critique “the Arab thinkers for a different intention which is thinking beside them and against them, thinking because of them, thinking using their thoughts and thinking through their thoughts” (2022, p. 15). In this article, heritage denotes the collective knowledge generated by all civilizations throughout human history on this planet.

Decolonizing Heritage and Localizing Knowledge: Critical Perspectives from the Arab World

Decolonizing heritage entails critically analyzing the body of knowledge produced worldwide. Within the framework of decolonizing heritage, arises the concept of localizing knowledge, which emphasizes the necessity to contextualize global knowledge. As such, when localizing Arab-Islamic knowledge, for instance, it becomes imperative for the researcher to critically evaluate the methodologies employed and determine their compatibility with the contemporary context.

An example of this can be seen in the work of al-Jabri, who delineates the Arab reason into three distinct categories: *bayane* which can literally mean demonstration, eloquence, or clarification and *irfan* or illumination which believes in the ability to see what other people cannot see besides *burhan* which refers to the logical deduction based on the use of reason. Al-Jabri concludes that *bayane* relies on textual analysis to derive insights across diverse subjects, while *irfan* employs a range of metaphysical or imaginative methodologies, including *Kashef*, *Mojahada*, *Holoul*, *Ilham*, or *Riadat*, to interpret phenomena in the world. For *burhan*, it is manifested when using methods like deduction, induction, observation, experience, sensation and mental assessment. Ultimately, al-Jabri dismisses *irfan* due to its reliance on irrational methodologies, which could yield irrational conclusions. Instead, he advocates for the validation of *bayane* and *burhan* methods, given their grounding in reason. This example serves as a model for Arab researchers when engaging with the Arab-Islamic heritage critically. Rational methods necessitate epistemological development to align with contemporary contexts. Such development may entail an epistemological break, as suggested by Bachelard, or falsification, following Popper's insights, to prevent stagnation.

Besides critiquing the Arab-Islamic heritage, an Arab researcher has to reflect on the non-Arab-Islamic culture. The study advocates against the dismissal of Euro-American heritage due to its entanglement with colonialism, imperialism, and capitalism. Instead, it underscores the importance of critically examining this heritage and extracting benefits from it. For instance, when reading the work of Hegel (1956) who argues that Africa is out of history, it is essential to discern and discard irrational elements while acknowledging and retaining valuable philosophical contributions. For more clarification, Hammoudi remarks how the Egyptian students sent to Paris to take sociology from Durkheim and his school during the 19th century considered "this imported science a complete discipline that needs no addition through research" (2019, p. 106). This inclination to sanctify the other's knowledge because it is technologically advanced lacks objectivity. Instead, when critiquing the ideas of figures like Durkheim, researchers must adopt a critical stance to enable knowledge to flourish and to avoid stagnation.

In general, the article deems the proposition to abandon heritage as illogical, as heritage constitutes an integral component of any society's collective memory and identity. For example, modern Europe's modernity emanated from a critical critique of its heritage and not on a complete neglect of it. So, in the Arab-Islamic world, heritage must be critiqued and decolonized in a dialectic way. Dialectic entails the ongoing necessity to critique and decolonize heritage incessantly. This process is facilitated through epistemology, which aims to scrutinize the methods employed in knowledge construction. While the preceding paragraphs introduced the research's perspective on decolonizing heritage and localizing knowledge, the following sections will delve deeper into the term of epistemology as an attempt to decolonize reason.

What is Epistemology?

In the subsequent sections, the study delves into the interpretations of epistemology by various scholars, including André Lalande, Gaston Bachelard, Mohamed Waqidi, Mohamed Abed al-Jabri, and Michell Serres. This diverse examination aims to enrich the discussion and highlight the commonalities in defining the term while approaching it from distinct perspectives. For example, André Lalande in his book *Vocabulaire Technique et Critique de*

la Philosophie, defines epistemology as “the philosophy of sciences [not generally but] in a more focused way, though” (1997, p. 293). From this definition, epistemology can be considered as the critical study and assessment of the diversified scientific results. In other words, it examines the way a certain field of science reached a certain conclusion and to what extent the methods and approaches used are valid, scientifically speaking. Epistemology, then, intends to find the shortcomings and the deficiencies of knowledge and propose solutions for them. While commenting on the two definitions, one cannot help but question the relationship between epistemology and methodology which the definition referred to. There are so many similarities between them to the extent that many thinkers demonstrate that epistemology—one way or another—is interested in the methodologies used in sciences.

For Mohamed Waqidi, “the field of methodology as a descriptive science and the field of epistemology as a critical study are interested, besides methods, in the foundations and the results” (1987, p. 9). Therefore, if methodology is the set of methods and approaches used in any field of research for the sake of conducting researches, epistemology is seen as the critical eye that validates or nullifies these followed methods. This should not mean, then, reducing epistemology to a science interested in ratifying or discarding a certain scientific result based on the followed criteria rather epistemology aims to develop science via critiquing its methods: strengthening its valid approaches and coming with alternatives for its deficient ones. Frederick James Ferrier, in addition to defining epistemology as “the doctrine or theory of knowing,” enlightens the discussion with his distinction between epistemology and ontology defining the latter as “the doctrine or theory of being (the science of true knowing).” Then, he concludes that epistemology “answers the general question, 'what is knowing and the known?' —or more shortly, 'what is knowledge?’” (1875, pp. 48–9). Being influenced by the Cartesian philosophy, he asserts the precedence of epistemology over ontology because Man does not feel his existence without the ability to think about this existence. Ferrier, in general, focuses on the importance of epistemology not only in critically categorizing methodologies but in aiding humans to recognize their existence. The above definitions of epistemology aimed at introducing the term in a way that would facilitate its understanding. In the coming paragraphs, the research sheds light on Gaston Bachelard’s perception of what he refers to as the ‘epistemological break.’ This term is important to the research since it is used by Santos who calls for a break with Northern epistemologies, as should be seen later.

3. Epistemologies of the North and the South: Divergent Perspectives

Bachelard’s Epistemological Break

It is not easy to verify the conceptualization of a fluid term like epistemology by Bachelard but the study focuses more on his ‘philosophy of negation’ which he uses to show how science portrays knowledge as a non-stop process in the results and methodologies through epistemological breaks. In his book, *La Philosophie du Non*, Bachelard characterizes the true aim behind the philosophy of the ‘no.’ It is not aimed, he argues, at attacking a certain field of research rather it emphasizes the importance of the ‘no-fixity method’ in the world of science. In this context, Bachelard does not attack philosophy as a field of inquiry. Instead, as will become apparent later, he criticizes the reluctance to alter research methods even when they have been demonstrated to be flawed. Further, Bachelard condemns positivism for its sanctification of experiments through taking it as the one and the only valid method for approaching a phenomenon at the expense of marginalizing what he calls rationality which is associated with intentionality and the researcher’s subjectivity.

Bachelard asserts that “sooner or later scientific thought will become the central subject of philosophical controversy; science will show philosophers how to replace intuitive, immediate systems of metaphysics with systems whose principles are debatable and subject to experimental validation” (1984, pp. 2–3). So, in order for philosophy to become valid, it must adhere to the methods of science or it will be marginalized. Said differently, “science in effect

creates philosophy. Philosophy must therefore modify its language if it is to reflect the subtlety and movement of contemporary thought” (Bachelard, 1984, p. 3). As said earlier, Bachelard celebrates change, novelty and discovery of new methods for the sake of developing science and rebukes the fields of research that prefer, in his view, fixity or believe that there is no need for coming up with new methods. This is asserted by Waqidi who shows how “the crisis that philosophers talk about is not inside science but associated with their philosophical patterns which embrace fixed concepts” (1987, p. 16). This fixity does not allow epistemological breaks to take place which causes a stagnation in the development of knowledge. For more illustration, Bachelard mentions the example of a philosopher “who writes at sixty and still defends the thesis he defended at thirty. The entire career, for some philosophers today, is hence a 'continuance defense.' Scientific culture calls for greater renunciation” (1966, p. 43).

The Moroccan philosopher Mohamed Abed al-Jabri elaborates on how one of “the characteristics of philosophy is that it always pursues its subjects, chasing them into their new homes, imbuing them with its color, evolving with their evolution, and enriching itself with the progress of research in them. This, precisely, is the secret of philosophy’s perpetual vitality, and constant renovation” (2006, p. 17). In the same vein, Youssef Tibesse responds to scientists who dismiss philosophy as unreliable by reminding them of how philosophy “aims at giving science a vital push whenever it needs, in addition to paving and varying the paths for it whenever it confronts a hurdle. Briefly, philosophy provides usually the essences and objectives of science” (2014, p. 327). Consequently, the aim behind these differences between science and philosophy is Bachelard’s focus on methodology. For example, in his comparison between philosophy and mathematics, Bachelard urges his readers not to “follow the example of the metaphysician, who sits down at his hearth, one would do well to follow the mathematician who heads for his laboratory” (1984, p. 165). The methods followed by the mathematician, in this case, are based on experimenting, verifying or falsifying a hypothesis while the philosopher is incapable of going to the laboratory for experiencing his/her hypotheses.

Further, Bachelard asserts that “scientific progress always manifests in a rupture—or in continuous ruptures—between ordinary knowledge and scientific knowledge, as soon as one is faced with an evolved science, a science which, due to these ruptures, carries the mark of modernity” (1963, p. 207). For more clarification, he shares the example of “Einstein’s discovery of relativity [...] [which] has revealed a world of such richness and complexity that the inadequacy of Newtonian physics soon became apparent” (1984, p. 142). As said earlier, Bachelard was interested in increasing the continuity and permanent critical verification of research methods more than abandoning the classical science in general. This theory of epistemological break is, further, developed by Karl Popper whose theory of ‘falsifiability’ is different from ‘rupture.’ If scientists and those who follow the inductive approach assert that there are strict, precise and attainable conditions for verifying a certain hypothesis and, hence, confirming or abandoning it, Popper—after taking induction to be a problem—proposes the theory of falsifiability which requires the possibility of refuting a hypothesis as the main criterium. According to him, the true break should not only focus on the past but the present and the future, as well. In other words, if Bachelard emphasizes the vitality of a break with the classical science and their methods in doing research, Popper argues that falsifiability is a permanent break that the scientist is always equipped with. He asks the theoretician not to be interested only in truth but “also be interested in falsity, because finding that a statement is false is the same as finding that its negation is true. Thus, [...] any new theory will not have only to succeed where its refuted predecessor succeeded, but it will also have to succeed where its predecessor failed” (1979, pp. 13–14). This absolutely guarantees, according to Popper, the continuity and validity of science. If one tries to falsify a certain theory, he/she will find flaws that must be overcome by the other theories, and so on.

To conclude, the study synthesizes Bachelard's epistemological break in the following: firstly, there should not be fixed methodologies or perspectives in science rather scientists should opt for critical continuity in approaching sciences. Secondly, the epistemological break does not mean neglecting, for instance, Newtonian or Cartesian's perception of science but renewing methodologies in order to avoid stagnation which kills the scientific spirit. This way of intersection between knowledges is discussed by Michel Serres who was influenced by the work of Bachelard. So, in the next paragraphs, the research discusses his perspective on epistemology especially his belief in the interconnectedness between fields of research.

Serres' Perspective on Epistemology

Serres argues that epistemology is based on progress instead of breaks as claimed by Bachelard. He attacks the attempt to purify science from myths in the name of rationality and calls for interference between the fields of science. If many scientists today believe that science disqualifies non-scientific methods, Serres holds that science can never cancel myth in knowledge which remains present since it takes different shapes. Serres is unhappy with how some scientists—especially positivists—construct walls against imagination, myth or metaphysics in general and who claim being on a journey of purifying science from non-scientific methods or ideas especially those which cannot be assessed through experiments. This is asserted by Massimiliano Simons who reveals the way some “scientists believe true science [...] as that which purifies itself from all the obstacles, from imagination, from myth [...] namely one with clear and strong walls against imagination, in favor of a spiritual purification of the scientist” (2019, p. 76).

For further illustration, one can consider the similarities between the sacrifices of animals, or even humans, in ancient myths to appease a ‘God’ or ‘Goddess,’ and the sacrifices of animals in scientific laboratories driven by ‘scientific’ curiosity. In the same vein, Isabella Stengers recalls how “in the name of science,” innumerable animals have been vivisected, decerebrated, and tortured in order to produce “objective” data” (2000, p. 21). Here, one can see that scientists in their attempt to liberate science from myths and metaphysics are doing just exactly what people in ancient mythologies used to do. So, one might ask the following: what is the alternative?

Serres critiques the break of Bachelard in asserting, as said earlier, that science's methodologies cannot be purified from imagination for they work hand in hand. In his book, *The Birth of Physics*, he asserts that “scientific modernity does not enter history by a fault or a break, but by the revival of a philosophy of nature that has been spreading ever since Antiquity. The so-called break is an artefact of the university” (2000, p. 41). Further, he opposes Bachelard's ‘new scientific spirit’ which focuses on the philosophy of the ‘no,’ and proposes the ‘new new scientific spirit’ that “develops itself in a philosophy of transport: intersection, intervention, interception” (Simons, 2019, p. 74). Serres criticizes the philosophy of ‘no’ which according to him marginalized other fields of research through representing them as non-scientific. Instead, he suggests the philosophy of ‘chaos and anarchy’ which guarantees the diversity in methodologies and approaches. Similarly, Sandra Harding in her attack of androcentric writings supports Serres saying that “a maximally objective science, natural or social, will be one that includes a self-conscious and critical examination of the relationship between the social experience of its creators and the kinds of cognitive structures favored in its inquiry” (1986, p. 250). For her, this will make science more objective and dissolve the patriarchal monopoly of science.

One should not hold that Serres is rejecting the methodologies or approaches which organize the conduct of research, rather he opposes the *epistemicide* caused by disqualifying the knowledges which did not follow certain methods and criteria. Serres's idea of anarchy simply refers to encyclopedia where there are many fields of research interfering for producing knowledge. In this case, the philosopher or scientist is seen by Serres as an encyclopedist who studies a phenomenon or theory integrating diversified methods from many fields of research.

This shows how his “interest in the relations between science and society marked at the same time [his] difficulties with philosophy, and, most of all, with Canguilhem and Bachelard. They were out of their time. How could one teach epistemology of physics while omitting deontology?” (Simons, 2019, p. 76).

All in all, Serres endeavors to demonstrate that the concept of an ‘epistemological break’ will persist indefinitely as researchers continue to reflect on their methodologies and conclusions. He, then, considers knowledge to be multidisciplinary or an encyclopedic (as he refers to it) field where ways of knowing meet, interfere, intercept, interconnect and coexist to produce knowledge that can serve the interests of humans on this planet (Tibesse, 2014). This belief in the encyclopedic researcher is pertinent since the study argues for the importance of localizing knowledge worldwide. To conclude, the aim behind engaging thinkers from different nations was for the sake of enriching the discussion and for showing the possibility of an interrelated relationship between knowledge produced in Europe and the Islamic world. This relationship is, differently, approached by Boaventura De Sousa Santos who talks about epistemologies of the South and the North. As should be seen in the coming paragraphs, epistemologies of the South, for him, were forced to perish during the time of colonialism.

4. Santos and the Epistemologies of the South

Boaventura De Sousa Santos is a Portuguese sociologist who first introduced the concept of epistemologies of the South as an alternative for epistemologies of the North. His epistemologies of the South is a response to what he characterizes as the Eurocentric outlook on the world in general and knowledge in particular. In essence, Santos contends that the comprehension of the world extends beyond Europe’s perspective alone. He emphasizes the necessity for what he terms “intercultural translation” between diverse cultures to provide a comprehensive understanding of the world. In the following paragraphs, the research begins by defining epistemologies of the South.

Epistemologies of the South and the Epistemological Break

In his book *Epistemologies of the South: Justice Against Epistemicide*, Santos argues that “the epistemologies of the South proposed in this book are an invitation to a much larger experience of the world as one’s own and thus to a much broader company in the task of transforming the world into a more equal and more diverse world” (2016, p. 240). In other words, his perspective suggests that Northern Epistemologies have “contributed crucially to converting the scientific knowledge developed in the global North into the hegemonic way of representing the world as one’s own and of transforming it according to one’s own needs and aspirations” (2018, p. 6). This strategic manipulation of knowledge ensured its alignment with endeavors such as colonial expansion, framed as efforts to civilize indigenous populations, and the exploitation of global resources in service of capitalist pursuits. Santos contends that the concept of the global South transcends mere geographical boundaries; instead, it represents a locus where knowledge emerges to challenge systems of capitalism, colonialism, and patriarchy. Therefore, it serves as a platform for resistance and liberation, aiming to combat oppression and seek alternatives. As Santos emphasizes, these knowledges are to be “evaluated and ultimately validated according to their usefulness in maximizing the possibilities of success of the struggles against oppression” (2018, p. 38).

Consequently, Santos advocates for an ‘epistemological break’ from such knowledge “because science and hence the social sciences as we know them are part and parcel of the project of Western modernity, they are much more part of the problem that we are facing than part of the solution we are seeking” (2016, p. 72). This break, for him, will stop the epistemicide caused by these sciences that did not accept the other’s different ways of knowing, simply because they did not abide by the Western criteria. He demonstrates how “the focus on such an epistemological break is what best distinguishes the theory expounded in this book from the

Western-centric critical tradition” (2016, p. ix). Yet, this research, as stated above holds a different attitude toward ‘the break’ that Santos refers to since the break the research believes in is a break with irrationality.

Additionally, Santos views the epistemologies of the North as hindrances to the Southern people’s emancipation and their struggle against capitalism, colonialism, and patriarchy. He follows Alvaro García Linera’s statement about how “‘modernist and teleological narrative of history’ ended up becoming a theoretical blindness and an epistemological blockage *vis-à-vis* the new social movements” (2016, p. 43). This break or divergence from Northern epistemologies will empower the voices of the silenced and marginalized. Through this process, Santos challenges the concepts utilized by Northern epistemologies to assert dominance and impose their worldview on the global stage. Similarly, Raewyn Connell does not define her Southern theory as a fixed “set of propositions but a challenge to develop new knowledge projects and new ways of learning with globally expanded resources” (2013, p. 1). In other words, it challenges the confinement of knowledge to a specific geopolitical entity: Santos. She urges Northern intellectuals, instead, to “start learning in new ways, and in new relationships” (2013, p. 10) to avoid Eurocentrism, ethnocentrism, universalism, and *epistemicide*.

Connell, further, supports—in her book *Southern Theory*—Santos when she asserts that knowledge produced in the South must be taken by Northerners seriously and learn from it simply because the “colonized and peripheral societies produce social thought about the modern world which has as much intellectual power as metropolitan social thought, and more political relevance” (2007, p. xii). Therefore, Southern theory broadly addresses the center-periphery relationship in the realm of knowledge. This lays the groundwork for Sinha and Farid Alatas’s book *Sociological Theory: Beyond the Canon*, which aims to distinguish “the Eurocentric from the universalistic aspects of classical theory; and to introduce non-Western social thinkers with the aim of universalizing the canon” (2017, p. 6). Consequently, there is an urgent imperative to diversify the field of sociology by incorporating other non-Western voices such as Ibn Khaldun, who is regarded as the true founder of sociology, along with figures like Harriet Martineau, José Rizal, and others. Furthermore, Immanuel Wallerstein remarks on how the “social sciences have become closed off, or have closed themselves off, from a full understanding of social reality, and that the methods which the social sciences had historically developed in order to pursue this understanding may themselves today be obstacles to this very understanding” (2007, p. 71). This reflects a lack of willingness to reflect on the obstacles encountered, thus hindering the development of these social sciences.

Besides science, Santos rejects capitalism because it is the primary driver of colonialism, attributing its invention and propagation to Northern epistemologies. In light of this, he actively seeks a viable alternative to capitalism that could potentially foster greater justice for all individuals. He asks the following: “How long will we continue to ‘solve’ the problems caused by capitalism with more capitalism? Why is the economy of reciprocity and cooperation not a credible alternative to the economy of greed and competition?” (2016, p. 23). Consequently, Santos challenges the alternatives put forth by Europe and other nations, including “social democracy, Keynesianism, the welfare state, and the developmentalist state of the 1960s in what was then called the Third World” (2016, p. 24), viewing them not as a departure from capitalism but rather as its perpetuation in varying forms. Santos raises a question: “why is the economy of reciprocity and cooperation not a credible alternative to the economy of greed and competition” (2016, p. 23). However, he does not present these as definitive alternatives to capitalism.

In addition to capitalism, Santos observes that Northern epistemologies are shaped by a universalist perception of the world, which seeks to discredit not only alternative epistemologies but also religions, cultures, histories, languages, and morals. In contrast to this perspective, Mignolo asserts that “knowledge and aesthetic norms are not universally established by a transcendent subject but are universally established by historical subjects in

diverse cultural centers” (1995, p. 13). In addition to Mignolo, Fredrick Nietzsche’s book *Beyond Good and Evil* insists that morals, ethics, or human rights cannot be universal, as what is perceived as good in one culture might be deemed evil in another, and vice versa. Similarly, Linda Tuhiwai Smith criticizes European universalism by recalling how “indigenous peoples across the world have other stories to tell which not only question the assumed nature of those ideals and the practices that they generate, but also serve to tell an alternative story: the history of Western research through the eyes of the colonized” (1999, p. 2). This critique of universalism is pivotal to Santos’s theory which aims to refute the notion that modern knowledge exclusively belongs to Europe, and that all other groups must fully adopt its worldview to achieve modernity. Instead, it endeavors to incorporate knowledge produced by all nations, whether European or Muslim, in its approach to understanding global phenomena.

Later, Santos introduces the concept of ‘abyssal line’ which refers to how the West created a line to separate between what is seen as civilization (North) and savagery (South) in science, culture, religion and all the other fields. After giving many examples of this abyssal line’s perception of the world, he reports how it resulted in colonialism, capitalism and patriarchy. As an alternative, he proposes what he terms the post-abyssal line, which transcends the narcissistic separation rooted in Western/Eastern dichotomies, asserting: “we do not want to be spoken about. We want to speak for ourselves. We do not want to be seen on the other side of the line. We want to eliminate the line” (2016, p. 6). This perspective is integral to the main framework of this research. It acknowledges that European modernity cannot be uncritically adopted by other societies rather it must be developed by a critique of heritage and localization of knowledge worldwide.

One of the examples of this abyssal line is how “Guantánamo is today one of the most grotesque manifestations of abyssal legal thinking, the creation of the other side of the line as a non-area in legal and political terms, an unthinkable ground for the rule of law, human rights, and democracy” (2016, p. 124). In other words, the notion of human dignity and respect is exclusively attributed to Euro-American societies, while other cultures are often deemed unworthy of such considerations due to their perceived inferiority. Santos critiques this Eurocentric perspective, highlighting how Europeans have historically positioned themselves as the sole authority permitted to do research on non-European people. Furthermore, he condemns the hierarchical dynamic inherent in this approach, whereby the European researcher assumes the role of the master, while those from non-European cultures are relegated to mere objects of study, devoid of agency or the ability to critically engage with the research findings.

Indeed, the discourse on Eurocentrism and its implications for philosophical inquiry is a central theme in Hamid Dabashi’s book *Can Non-Europeans Think?* Dabashi critiques the Eurocentric perspective prevalent in the works of many philosophers, highlighting its limitations and biases. Consequently, Santos invites the post-abyssal researcher to “see deeply but always bearing in mind that she is dealing with unequal and unequally differentiated bodies, and that such inequalities and differences define the ways in which bodies are seen and also how they see the researcher, as well as the ways in which they see themselves among themselves” (2018, p. 171). In conclusion, Santos sought to expose the deficiencies of Northern epistemologies and advocated for the development of epistemologies of the South as an alternative. This led him to contemplate an epistemological break that would facilitate the flourishing of Southern epistemologies.

Epistemologies of the South and the Displayed Alternatives

For Santos, these alternatives are compared to going out from an epistemology of blindness to an epistemology of seeing as many researchers in Northern epistemologies predominantly rely on their sight and hearing to gather information, considering these senses to be the only valid ones. These senses, argues Santos, are not enough because they result in the prevailing of one way of knowing over the other. As mentioned above, Santos asserts that Southern

epistemologies are generated when there is resistance and struggle against oppression. This resistance is presented by Santos as the beginning of seeing the world from the perspective of the non-European. One of these alternatives is 'the sociology of absences' which attempts to retrieve the muted as an alternative to epistemicide caused by modern science. Santos defines it as a will to "identify what is missing and why, we must rely on a form of knowledge that does not reduce reality to what exists. I mean a form of knowledge that aspires to an expanded conception of realism that includes suppressed, silenced, or marginalized realities, as well as emergent and imagined realities" (2016, p. 57). Still, Santos has not given any practical example of the sociology of absences, though. One would ask the following question: what is the goal behind retrieving silenced epistemologies? Can we solve the problems of our society when retrieving these ways of knowing?

As a response, he comments saying: "the sociology of absences starts off from the idea that societies are made up of different times and temporalities and that different cultures generate different temporal rules" (2016, p. 177). For instance, when Europe lived in the 'Age of darkness,' other territories like the Islamic countries were prosperous and highly progressed. In this case, al-Biruni, for instance, is a Muslim researcher who practiced anthropology in his book entitled *A Critical Study of What India Says, Whether Accepted by Reason or Refused*. So, retrieving his writings enabled Hammoudi to conclude that his methodology was highly advanced and objective compared with colonial anthropology which was biased and subjective.

After introducing 'the sociology of absence,' Santos talks about 'the sociology of emergence' which facilitates the emergence of the retrieved voices into the world of knowledge. He distinguishes between the sociology of absences and emergence, explaining that in the sociology of absences "what is actively produced as nonexistent is available here and now, albeit silenced, marginalized, or disqualified, [while] in the sociology of emergences the absence is an absence of a future possibility as yet not identified and of a capacity not yet fully formed to carry it out" (2016, p. 186). So, the sociology of emergence involves the retrieval and development of methods, such as al-Biruni's approach in anthropology, for contemporary research. In the end, for Santos the sociology of emergence aims at seeing the extent to which there can be an interconnection, interference and interdependence between Southern epistemologies in order to empower the struggle against colonialism, imperialism and patriarchy.

Besides the sociology of emergence, Santos reports that the ecology of knowledges refers to the "sustainable diversity based on complex relationality. It is therefore a normative concept based on the following ideas. First, the value of diversity, complexity, and relationality must be recognized: nothing exists by itself; something or someone exists because something else or someone else exists" (2016, p. 175) which is the belief in the continuity of knowledges since the far ancient times to now. Said differently, there is no invention of knowledge as Jack Goody (2006) asserts but development of what the previous civilizations produced. If there is continuity or interference between epistemologies, Santos hypothesizes, "different modes of knowing, being irremediably partial and situated, will have different consequences and effects on the world" (2016, p. 196). This is why he calls for 'the intercultural translation' because what is not found in one culture can be found in another culture.

Santos thinks that "incompleteness of all knowledges is the precondition for epistemological dialogues and debates among different knowledges" (2016, p. 189). In addition to the incompleteness of knowledges, he hints for the need to localize these knowledges because "the work of translation is based on the idea of the impossibility of a general theory" (2016, p. 227). So, intercultural translation highlights the importance of diversifying epistemologies and knowledges with a clear focus on the different cultural and historical background of any society. Santos is inviting the Euro-American researchers to learn from the other civilization's knowledge since retrieving knowledge should not be used by the belonging researcher (Muslim, Latin American or African) rather by the world's researchers. To conclude, in the previous paragraphs, the article attempted to discuss Santos's theory of

epistemologies of the South which influenced the research. In this discussion, the study tried to show the alternatives that he proposes to move beyond the Eurocentric vision of epistemologies of the North and their exclusive attitude.

5. Conclusion

I tried in this article to discuss the indispensability of heritage for people in the Global South. This importance is the reason behind the urgent need to decolonize heritage from all forms of coloniality, dependency and universalism. So, the need of heritage is manifested in how it can be used to localize knowledge and contribute in the flourishing of epistemologies of the South. These epistemologies attempt to maximize the battle against colonialism, imperialism and patriarchy. For the Global South researchers, heritage is necessary in retrieving numerous disciplines and methods that can help contemporary thinkers in their struggle for a modern-developed world. When the research talked of decolonizing heritage, there was a clear assertion of rejecting the claim that heritage is to be discarded under the pretext that it is tainted by colonial malicious practices. The article affirmed that using sociology or anthropology to serve colonial purposes does not mean rejecting these well-established disciplines rather the Global South researcher must benefit from these disciplines in their efforts to develop epistemologies of the South. Further, considering sociology or anthropology as colonial disciplines is similar to regarding Islam as a religion of terrorism simply because a group of people interpreted certain sacred texts in a way that does not accord with the original meaning. Thus, the article highlights the need to consider heritage to be cosmopolitan that all civilizations have contributed in developing which requires a critical critique by researchers from the Global South.

In the process of decolonizing heritage, it is necessary to distinguish between various approaches to this endeavor. The Kenyan critic Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, for instance, advocates for the decolonization of the mind, arguing that Africans must abandon colonial languages, as their continued use facilitates the Europeanization of Africa. Instead, he promotes the adoption of African languages in education and scientific discourse, emphasizing the need to break with Western influence. For Ngũgĩ, rejecting the colonial language is a prerequisite for decolonizing the African mind, which constitutes the first step toward liberating Africa from European control.

Beyond African contexts, numerous critics from Latin America similarly argue for the necessity of decoloniality. Walter D. Mignolo, for example, contends that the Global South remains colonized by global powers—a condition he distinguishes from historical colonialism by employing the term coloniality. Mignolo uses decoloniality to refer to the process of liberating Latin America from colonial control, particularly through the soft power exerted by epistemologies of the North, which he views as complicit in the colonial project. In response, he calls for the adoption of epistemologies of the South and for a deliberate delinking from the colonial perception of the world. In sum, this article has sought to underscore the necessity of critiquing heritage, given the multiple benefits that Global South researchers may derive from such an endeavor. These benefits, it has argued, can assist in the broader struggle to free the world from coloniality, dependency, and marginalization.

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Author’s Bio

Khalid Abartal is a Moroccan researcher. His research interests include epistemology, decolonial theory, heritage studies, and the epistemologies of the Global South. His work engages critically with postcolonial and decolonial frameworks, drawing on scholars such as Boaventura de Sousa Santos, Walter D. Mignolo, and Mohamed Abed al-Jabri to examine how knowledge is produced, legitimized, and contested across different cultural contexts. This article is part of his broader inquiry into the role of Southern epistemologies in decolonizing intellectual heritage and advancing epistemic justice.