



Article

Epistemic Educational Futures in an Era of Deglobalization and the Polycrisis: Reparative Futurism in an Age of Reparatory Justice, Racial Justice and Educational Justice

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Abstract

This conceptual paper explores what I term *epistemic educational futures*, utilizing a reparatory framework. It argues that this is possible because deglobalization and the polycrisis have created new geocentric spaces in which we can rethink the role of education in addressing epistemic injustice. Historically, education has served as a tool of dominant epistemes, but it is now time to redefine it to focus on eradicating coloniality. While most reparations studies from the US have advocated the material redistribution of resources to address epistemic violence caused by historical economic disadvantages, this paper calls for a realignment of education toward reparatory justice. It asserts that epistemic education futures should acknowledge histories of racism, exploitation, and epistemic violence that have disproportionately affected different social categories. Focusing on Black knowledge history as an example, the analysis presented in this article represents a forward-looking paradigm shift

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in educating the next generation. Building in part on Afrofuturist scholarship, the article concludes that the concept of “reparative futurism,” in which the future perpetuates the inequities of the present if not disrupted, offers significant potential for shaping how we think about epistemic educational futures.

Keywords: epistemic educational futures, deglobalization, reparatory justice, reparative futurism, cognitive justice, race

Introduction

Bhakuni (2023) reminds us that “every human being has the epistemic right to be a knower, to produce knowledge, to use knowledge, and to disseminate knowledge” (p. 3). Such insights should motivate scholars to reconsider the theft, loss, displacement, and erasure of African and Indigenous knowledge(s), which places the global call for reparatory justice within the context of the polycrisis—interconnected crises impacting multiple global systems—and deglobalization—the reduction of cross-border commercial ties through state action—leading to complex interactions that cause significant human harm. While deglobalization and the polycrisis are not the main focus of this paper, they warrant some explanation, as I argue they have served as catalysts for the broader decoloniality movement within which reparatory justice claims are grounded. On one hand, the polycrisis, characterized by the interaction of environmental, geopolitical, and socioeconomic risks (including climate change, wars, pandemics, and divergent economic recoveries), presents significant challenges to the ongoing extinction of most complex life on Earth, including potentially humans, and will likely trigger disruptive periods in human history. In a polycrisis, crises are not necessarily of equal magnitude or within the same domains, but their intersection compounds their impact. However, we must first address past injustices before responding to these challenges. On the other hand, state-induced deglobalization has emerged as a response to the stagnation of neoliberalism. Deglobalization is characterized by simultaneous shocks, deeply interconnected risks, and eroding resilience. Therefore, deglobalization can be seen as a product of decoloniality—breaking free from the knowledge hierarchies imposed by Eurocentric and other forms of colonization—as it seeks to rethink coloniality’s tools of the Anthropocene (marketization). It can be argued that the injustices leading to the polycrisis stem from colonialisms. As a result, understanding these issues thoroughly is essential to attempting to repair their aftermath (Almassi, 2018). In this way, deglobalization and the polycrisis have opened an agenda for examining the link between the interconnected nature of modern challenges and epistemic injustice, and how education might be used to foster epistemic repair or reparatory justice.

3 Epistemic Educational Futures

Fricker (2007) identifies epistemic injustice as a “wrong done to someone specifically in their capacity as a knower” (p. 1), while Kidd et al. (2017) indicate that epistemic injustice “refers to those forms of unfair treatment that relate to issue of knowledge, understanding and participation in communicative practices” (p. 1), Fricker’s (2007) work provides analytical depth to understand and rearticulate her injustice framework to one based on *justice*. Thus, epistemic justice is informed by Fraser’s (2009) conceptualization of social justice as “parity of participation.” This framework emphasizes equitable engagement within economic, cultural, and political domains structured around the three pillars of redistribution, recognition, and representation. Fricker’s (2007) starting point focuses on understanding a “distinctive class of wrongs,” whereby a person “is downgraded and/or disadvantaged in respect of their status as epistemic subjects” (p. 53). She identifies two distinct forms of injustice that individuals may experience in their role as knowers: (i) testimonial injustice, which occurs on an interpersonal level and affects the speaker’s credibility through acts that undervalue, silence, or misrepresent the speaker’s contributions; and (ii) hermeneutic injustice, which is embedded in the social order and pertains to the marginalization or absence of particular discourses and sensemaking resources within a society. According to Fricker (2007), we are deprived of the “epistemic contribution capability” due to these two injustices. The epistemic contributor capability, built on coloniality’s knowledge systems of Eurocentrism, serves to protect certain groups while disenfranchising others (Maurič & Scherling, 2021). Consequently, epistemic colonial structures perpetuate epistemic injustices that inhibit epistemic freedoms. Within this context, this article locates what I call *epistemic educational futures* as a means to anchor education in discussions of race and reparatory justice, aiming to rectify the hermeneutical injustices (such as slavery, erasure, and dispossession) that have occurred and persist due to coloniality. Epistemic educational futures are an epistemic resource that focuses on redistributing justice (through knowledge transfer) so marginalized groups can maximize their epistemic potential and strengthen their epistemic capacities.

The approach outlined in this article on reparatory justice is mainly conceptual, as I view the dominant global arrangement as a “modern/colonial system.” In this article, I introduce the idea of epistemic educational futures and their role in helping us re/think the current global educational landscape. The focus is epistemic here because the aim is forward-looking: recognizing injustice, calling it out, addressing it, and placing education at the center of recompense. We can think of epistemic reparations as the ability to be recognized, or, as Lackey (2022) contends, “victims can suffer epistemic wrongs by being rendered invisible, vilified or demonized, or systematically distorted, and that these ways of not

being known demand epistemic reparations” (p. 56). She further clarifies that “while there are traditional reparations that are epistemic in nature, such as memorialization and education,” however, “there is a prior and arguably more important epistemic reparation—knowing victims of gross violations and injustices in the sense of bearing witness” (p. 56).

This article’s novel conceptualization of epistemic educational futures begins with the idea that multiple educational futures are simultaneously at play. Epistemic educational futures should be understood as an analytical model for interpreting the intermeshing relationship between knowledge construction and epistemic entanglements. It refers to surveying and projecting future educational landscapes shaped by how knowledge is produced, validated, and transmitted across generations. This concept acknowledges that education is not neutral but is deeply influenced by the power structures of coloniality and the cultural contexts that define legitimate knowledge. By focusing on epistemic dimensions, this approach challenges traditional, often Western-centric paradigms of education and advocates diverse, inclusive perspectives that consider Indigenous knowledges, decolonial practices, and global justice(s). In this way, epistemic educational futures aim to re/con/figure education for the next generation by making it holistic, more equitable, and responsive to different ways of knowing, particularly in the context of reparatory justice efforts.

Recognizing that race is a social construct and in focusing on Black knowledge history as an example, this article utilizes the concept of an epistemic educational future to center the relationship between education and reparatory justice (Brissett & Jules, 2023; Eugene et al., 2024). When discussing the nexus between reparative justice, education, and decoloniality, it is essential to recognize one’s positionality. The author identifies as an Afro-Caribbean immigrant, born and raised in Guyana, educated in the United States, and living and working there. This transnational experience, situated at the intersection of neo- and post-colonial Caribbean identity and U.S. academic frameworks, influences his perspective of reparatory justice as both diasporic and historically rooted, connected to coloniality, migration, and resistance. In what follows, this article discusses how a decolonial approach to coloniality can help us understand the histories of epistemic colonialism and its impact on epistemological knowledge traditions. Next, it examines the call to rethink reparations. A conversation on educational futures follows this. It then calls attention to the geospatial dynamics of epistemic educational reparations. The paper is concluded by merging the idea of reparative justice – which is predicated on ‘repair’ rather than ‘restitution’ – with futuristic and speculative thought to envision future possibilities where historical harms – particularly those related to colonialism, slavery, and systemic injustices – and continuous

harms – coloniality, climate change, structural inequalities – are actively addressed through reparative actions.

The Pursuit of Epistemic Liberation: A Decolonial Lens for Reparatory Justice

Reparation might imply any of the following: compensation for debt unpaid; an act of mending a wrong or injury; to indemnify for transgressions; to make recompense; to make one whole again; to compensate for damages; to restore a nation, pay in money, land, or materials for damages (Obuah, 2016). However, within epistemic communities, moral, legal, economic, and social arguments for reparations coexist with substantial opposition in various forms. Nevertheless, not everyone believes in the connections between the injuries, deprivations, and injustices experienced by enslaved people and those endured by their descendants across generations. Massey (2004) identifies two models: the social welfare model, which views reparations as a means of significant wealth redistribution, and the conventional justice model, which frames reparations as a means of restoring justice to individuals whose descendants suffered multiple forms of deprivation. This, therefore, makes the call for reparations a complex and multifaceted issue. In light of this, I take as my starting point a decolonial approach that focuses on epistemic restitution since “reparation is mostly about making repairs, self-made repairs, on ourselves: mental repairs, psychological repairs, cultural repairs, organizational repairs, social repairs, economic repairs, political repairs, educational repairs, repairs of every type that we need in order to recreate and sustain viable Black societies” (Chinweizu, 1993, as cited in Obuah, 2016, p. 51).

As we pursue epistemic liberation, the move from coloniality to epistemic decolonality is a complex, multifaceted, hermeneutically open project that requires culturally appropriate, unhindered external pressures and forces of domination to achieve freedom. It is within this context of the relations of enslavement, colonialism, appropriation, dispossession, and extraction that reparatory justice comes to bear. While a significant amount of literature has recently begun to theorize about reparatory justice and reparatory futures (Táíwò, 2022), and some have applied these frameworks to education broadly (Brissett & Jules, 2023; Sriprakash, 2023; Stein & Andreotti, 2025; Stein et al., 2022a; Stein et al., 2022b; Walker et al., 2023), much of these works have not used a decolonial lens to explore reparations in the context of education. In this way, a decolonial lens acknowledges the unfinished nature of modernity and presents an opportunity to center reparations within an epistemic perspective, analyzing the epistemic violence and harm that education has caused. Such a lens begins by recognizing that trans-

Atlantic slavery was a legally sanctioned institution, followed by an era of legalized racial discrimination, and ongoing practices that reinforced Black subordination (Obuah, 2016).

Knowledge is central to the advancement of humanity. Thus, who controls knowledge controls humanity. For centuries, we have privileged Eurocentric forms of knowledge and erased Indigenous ways of thinking. However, a decoloniality framework offers an alternative for relocating the lost knowledge that has been erased. Such alternatives are grounded in reparatory justice and place education at its center. The project of decolonizing knowledge makes visible “epistemological colonization” and “epistemological mimicry” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni & Chambati, 2013, p. 38) by focusing on Epistemicide – the systematic destruction of Indigenous forms of knowledge – as we depart from the universalist project and naïve canonization of Western representations of truth (Mungwini, 2019). Decoloniality, henceforth, offers a type of epistemic liberation through epistemological educational alternatives from Western knowledge constructs that are tethered to the “pervasive bias located in modernity’s self-consciousness of itself [...] grounded at its core in the metaphysical belief or Idea that European existence is qualitatively superior to other forms of life” (Serequeberhan, 1997, p. 142).

Decoloniality aims to unmask the darker side of coloniality, driven by Western parochial universalistic notions of progress and modernity that center on what types of knowledges are legitimate. Mignolo (2012) holds that “coloniality is constitutive of modernity and therefore there is no modernity without coloniality” (p. 24). Decoloniality emphasizes epistemic liberation, grounded in the pluriversal nature of knowledge, and asserts that the understanding of the world far exceeds the Western understanding (Dei, 2014). In short, it offers an alternative approach to addressing the historical and enduring Eurocentric and other exclusionary colonial norms and practices that persist in education today. This is because epistemological assumptions about knowledge and ontological suspicions about who is considered human are tied to particular Eurocentric norms of coloniality.

The colonial encounter engendered a colonial condition that rendered the colonized futureless and education an instrument of epistemicide. Mungwini (2019), writing in the African context, underscores that “true decolonization begins at the level of understanding one’s own world” (p. 73). In this way, decoloniality opens different vistas within reparatory justice, allowing us to understand the complexities of domination and colonization in the context of decolonization. From a decolonial perspective, epistemic educational futures aim to map the “colonial modern’s – that is, an acknowledgement of the colonial constitution of modernity” (Bhambra, 2021, p. 73) – racial ecologies and bring together new

forms of animacy and attunement by breaking down the ontological barriers between human/nonhuman, life/nonlife, and subject/object that enshrines Western colonial metaphysics. Epistemic educational future imaginings offer alternative exemplifications of epistemologies. Placing epistemic educational futures at the center of decolonization enables us to undertake the necessary work to effect both material and epistemological change.

Rethinking Reparations through Racial Capitalism

It has become fashionable to theorize the “reparative turn” (Myers et al., 2024) to discuss the future-thinking capabilities of reparations or reparative futures. This is because the goal is to move beyond material and symbolic reparations and focus on repairing epistemic injustices through epistemic reparations, also known as “restorative justice” (Minow, 1998). I am not suggesting that reparations lack a normative dimension (legal, moral, political, and so on); instead, it is argued that epistemic reparations emerge through public apologies, memorialization, and education (see Lackey, 2022).

Reparatory justice is a liberatory form of epistemic decolonization. The ongoing racial and historical injustices and the legacies of institutional racism have placed reparations at the forefront of our minds. However, traditional calls for reparations tend to focus on

restitution of rights, dignity, and property of victims; *compensation* either through monetary payments or other forms of redress to individuals or communities for the harm they have suffered; *rehabilitation*, which includes a range of actions such as providing medical, psychological, and social support to victims to facilitate their recovery and reintegration into society; *satisfaction*, including symbolic gestures of recognition and acknowledgment of the harm done, for instance, through official apologies, memorialisation or commemoration events; and *guarantees of non-repetition*, which involve implementing structural changes and reforms to prevent future violations and ensure justice and accountability. (Scott et al., 2024, p. 3)

In a similar vein, Hunter (2024) identifies seven expansive categories of compensation – political, intellectual, legal, economic, social, spatial, and spiritual – that are necessary to “unlock a new foundation and pathway to truth, love, justice, racial healing, and freedom in America and everywhere Black people are” (p. 22). Although these calls are warranted, I contend they are backward-looking, and it is time for reparatory justice to be forward-looking as well (an idea returned to below). Thus, “a reparative frame brings together consideration of the broader histories responsible for the configuration of contemporary structures of inequality and enables us to think through the implications of their connections in a more meaningful way” (Bhambra et al., 2024, p. 3).

As we challenge the universalism of European modernity, what is essential is to see oneself in the future (Mungwini, 2019). Reparatory justice enables us to displace Euromodernity's ontological being from its centrality/normativity and place *in relation* to other modernities – Afromodernity (Serequeberhan, 2000) and Indigenous modernities (Simpson, 2014; Wynter, 2001). Táíwò (2022) maintains that reparations to date can be divided into three categories: “harm repair,” “relationship repair,” and “the constructive view.” Harm repair, usually legal in scope, views reparations as established on restitution or retribution justice and centers on fixing the present harms. Relationship repair focuses on reconciliatory justice, which includes debt repayment and communicative repair. The constructive view centers not on harm and wrongdoing but on justice, as it is future-oriented and attends to the “consistent and constant interactions between parties in the global whole” (Táíwò, 2022, p. 124). Reparations are about developing an epistemic ethos that rethinks economic development and developmental practices in the Global South. Below, I maintain that such an ethos is grounded in epistemic educational futures or what Táíwò (2022) calls the constructive view of reparations, because reparations

... was never entirely, or even primarily, about money. The demand for reparations was about social justice, reconciliation, reconstructing the internal life of black America, and eliminating institutional racism. This is why reparations proposals from black radical movements focus less on individual payments than on securing funds to build autonomous black institutions, improving community life, and in some cases establishing a homeland that will enable African Americans to develop a political economy geared more toward collective needs than toward accumulation. (Kelley, 2002, pp. 114-115)

In focusing on justice, the constructive view highlights the benefits of redistribution and the establishment of new institutions and networks that benefit those who have been harmed. CARICOM's 10-Point Plan (Caribbean Reparations Commission, 2020) exemplifies this focus through its advocacy for an “Indigenous Peoples Development Program,” a comprehensive framework designed to address the pressing public health crises affecting the islands. In addition, the demand includes initiatives to eradicate illiteracy and secure debt cancellation. These measures form part of a broader reparatory agenda aimed at remedying historical injustices and fostering sustainable development for Indigenous and marginalized communities. This type of reparations is collective instead of individual and can be seen as a form of “decolonial justice” (Atiles-Osoria, 2018)

Reparatory justice conceives slavery and colonialism as unjust and oppressive systems that built the modern capitalist system. Given the history of slavery and racial economic apartheid, following Reed (2016), I believe that reparations should have material (financial payments), symbolic (monuments and memorials), and psychological (tools to address slavery and racial pathologies) and epistemic justice components, addressing not only financial reparations but also non-material aspects vital for repairing

the “Atlantic Order” (Inikori, 1992). This order, built on racism and colonialism, sustains a system managed by global capitalism, explicitly structuring modern injustices through a “Racial Contract” (Mills, 1997) driven by white supremacy. Therefore, for reparatory justice to be an emancipatory act, it must begin by addressing the global injustices stemming from coloniality, which is a fundamental aspect of the modern arrangement of injustice. These events led to the development of racial capitalism or “the Global Racial Empire” (Táíwò, 2022), originating from the trans-Atlantic system, which links slavery, racism, and colonialism to economic and political structures, with racialized groups facing exclusion. Therefore, “slavery was not born of racism: rather, racism was the consequence of slavery” (Williams, 1944, p. 7). Yusoff (2018) speaks of the “geologies of race” and views race as part of the geological formation whereby the “transactions between geology and inhumanism [occur] as a mode of both production (or extraction) and subjection (or a violent mode of geologic life)” (p. 9).

If we think of the European project of colonialism and its successor coloniality as “world-constituting” projects, then we can think of reparations as “worldmaking resistance on the same scale” (Getachew, 2019). This is because the trans-Atlantic slave trade and colonialism created a racial empire linked to global capitalism that had, at its core, new kinds of injustices. Consequently, the vision of worldmaking resistance necessitates a more equitable distribution system in which rights, privileges, and responsibilities are allocated to address injustices inherited from racial capitalism. This framework rectifies historical imbalances and ensures the fair allocation of the benefits and burdens of the transitional rebuilding process. Central to this vision is the principle of reparative justice, which recognizes the need for redistributive mechanisms to address historical wrongs and promote equity during societal transformations. Kelley (2002) reminds us that reparations “was never entirely, or even primarily, about money ... [it is] about social justice, reconciliation, reconstructing the internal life of black America, and eliminating institutional racism” (p. 114). Thus, as discussed below, reparations can be both backward- and forward-looking.

New Trajectories: Epistemic Educational Futures

Education, as a social product, takes many forms, ranging from formal schooling to informal learning and oral traditions. As such, educational injustices have been a central component of the colonial project; therefore, educational epistemic futures are pivotal in advancing decoloniality. Education was a crucial instrument in the colonial enterprise, serving not only to supply the human capital necessary for the operation of segregated colonial labor markets but also to shape racialized subjects who were

conditioned to understand and accept their subordinate position within the colonial social and political hierarchy (Sriprakash, 2023; Walker et al., 2023). Since education's structural injustices were central in shaping the Western episteme around knowledge systems, erasure, and forms of oppression and disadvantage, it is essential to reshape coloniality's episteme, or what Sriprakash (2023) calls the "moral debts of educational injustice" (p. 783). Such a focus on epistemic educational futures shifts the perspective away from viewing education as a trajectory for social mobility or a force of social reproduction (Stein et al., 2022b). In other words, since education has been the Western episteme's global hegemony, it should address the full extent of the epistemic violence perpetuated in its name (Morrow & Torres, 1995). Contemporary education, which is often framed around Western scientific knowledge, has been a tool for reinforcing Western monoculturalism, which perpetuates coloniality in educational settings. Education has become an ideology through which ideas around "modernity," "progress," and "development" are taken-for-granted as assumptions that must be achieved at any cost. In this way, education has served as an instrument that reinforces the pseudoscience of racism and strengthens its ideological role in legitimizing racial inequalities. The predominance of the Western episteme in education has led to linguistic imperialism, further reinforcing Western interests while reproducing disparities in educational outcomes. Stein et al. (2022) argue that there are four salient interpretations of decolonialization in education: (i) "decolonization as equity, diversity, and inclusion," which assumes that the main damage caused by colonization is being excluded from the advantages and commitments provided by mainstream, modern education institutions; (ii) "decolonization as alternatives with guarantees," which seeks to actively dismantle and replace the system and its institutions; (iii) "decolonization as hacking" suggests that existing institutions probably cannot be fully decolonized, at least not in a substantial manner, but it is possible to leverage the resources of these institutions to develop alternatives that can flourish either within the small 'cracks' of decolonial change inside the institution or outside of it entirely; and (iv) "decolonialization as hospicing" maintains that the existing institutions are inherently violent and unstable, and therefore we must look for alternatives redistributing and redirecting institutional resources (pp. 205-210). I argue that education has served to protect rather than challenge the hierarchical ordering of the world. It has wilfully disregarded the ideological and material connections between colonial domination, capitalist exploitation, and epistemic futures. Given the long-standing structural, political, and economic inequalities that education has perpetuated, I argue that it is time for a new reparative approach grounded in epistemic educational futures. This is because "until injustices are actively addressed they can endure in social institutions – such as education – which also shape lives-to-come" (Sriprakash, 2023, p. 783).

Our starting point for thinking about epistemic educational futures is best summed up by Mungwini (2019), who contends that

The problem of epistemic injustice that we face today is not a product of nature for which we must seek to gain a better understanding of the objective laws that govern its operations but a consequence of the arrogance of men who wanted to elevate themselves to the level of gods. (pp. 70-71)

It, therefore, follows that epistemic decolonization is a liberatory act or, as wa Thiong'o (1986) reminds us, "the search for a liberating perspective within which to see ourselves clearly in relationship to ourselves and to other selves in the universe" (p. 86). Thus, epistemic educational futures are grounded in justice and begin by rearticulating the epistemic dimension of injustice, asking how historical events and experiences enable or block redistribution, recognition, and representation. First, epistemic educational futures are grounded in reparatory justice, given that the "collective epistemic resources on which we depend to make sense of and engage the world" (Shotwell, 2017, p. 86) are (un)equally distributed due to the lingering effect of coloniality. Second, epistemic educational futures recognize that we need to go beyond "simplified arguments on knowledge inclusivity and epistemological pluralism" (Keet, 2014, p. 27) to genuinely acknowledge and accept historically marginalized voices. Third, epistemic educational futures are grounded in representation, which situates the knowledge that informs decision-making processes within and beyond education, often shaped by dominant cultural, political, and economic contexts. In this way, epistemic educational futures consider the "coloniality of knowledge" (Quijano, 2013) and the role of "epistemic violence" (Spivak, 2023), both of which remind us of the fundamental structural form of epistemic injustice, deeply rooted in the global colonial regime. It recognizes that the existing epistemic governance system privileges specific ways of knowing, thinking, and being, often aligned with Western, Eurocentric paradigms, while marginalizing or erasing Indigenous and non-Western epistemologies. Campbell and Carayannis (2013) argue that "epistemic governance refers to the epistemic structure and 'knowledge paradigms' that underlie higher education" (p. 1). Epistemic educational futures depend on epistemic governance, which facilitates understanding the conditions that shape the possibilities for epistemic justice. This involves recognizing how individuals may be wronged in their practices of knowledge, knowing, and being acknowledged as knowers, and how those with epistemic authority may, either intentionally or unintentionally, contribute to such injustices. Such an emphasis centers on values, cosmologies, and knowledge systems, and does not reproduce racial inequalities or epistemic injustice.

In an era defined by epistemic deglobalized governance, it is argued that to create epistemic educational futures, we need to move beyond injustice and epistemic oppression toward epistemic agency and epistemological resilience. We can think of epistemic agency as “the ability to utilize persuasively shared epistemic resources within a given community of knowers in order to participate in knowledge production and, if required, the revision of those same resources” (Dotson, 2014, p. 115). Here, epistemic oppression encompasses not only social and political forms of oppression but also accounts for other forms of epistemological oppression. Due to historically contingent power relations, an individual’s epistemic resources and the epistemological framework within which these resources operate may be insufficient to address the ongoing epistemic exclusions that perpetuate epistemic oppression. Therefore, we should promote epistemic freedoms by structuring agency and action to challenge existing structures and relationships. In education, epistemological resilience involves understanding how knowledge processes and knowledge production have been shaped by the “colonial epistemic structure” (Walker & Martinez-Vargas, 2020) and how this can be overcome. This begins with restoration that is understood as a normative rather than historical baseline because “‘restoration’ refers to repairs that move relationships in the direction of *becoming morally adequate*, without assuming a morally adequate status quo” (Walker, 2006, p. 384). Additionally, Walker (2006) holds that reparative justice does not focus on material restitution or monetary exchange because “the more fundamental issue of reparations ... is the moral vulnerability of victims of serious wrongs” (p. 15).

Epistemic educational futures aim to rectify prior epistemic injustices by offering reparatory justice. In other words, epistemic repair lays the foundation for epistemic reparations, and education plays a central role in this respect because state- and individual-led denial may work in tandem. Denial and the lack of recognition of (either testimonial or hermeneutical) epistemic injustices hinder epistemic repair by exacerbating epistemic harm (both primary and secondary). Primary harms deny the subject’s status and are initiated through unjust exclusion, whereas secondary harms focus on negative epistemic and practical consequences with wide-ranging adverse effects (Fricker, 2007; Song, 2021). In this way, we can think of epistemic educational futures as forward-looking justifications of responsibility. The literature describes two types of epistemic responsibility: backward- and forward-looking justifications of responsibility (Butt, 2008; Lu, 2017; Song, 2021; van de Poel, 2011; Young, 2011). Rebuilding, repairing, or restoring a specific status *ex ante* injustice is the focus of backward-looking justifications, while forward-looking justifications focus on making the world better going forward. Backward-looking responsibility draws attention to the political project and normative ambitions of reparations –

restitution, compensation, rehabilitation, satisfaction, and guarantees of non-repetition. To address “the structurally unjust features of schooling and society” (Sriprakash, 2023, p. 783), reparative approaches need to be backward-looking, focusing on identifying, acknowledging, and challenging historical harms (Walker et al., 2023). Whereas “backward-looking epistemic responsibility [...] is important to amend past epistemic injustices to achieve genuine epistemic justice” (Song, 2021, p. 165), I maintain that epistemic educational futures need to be also forward-looking or “future-facing” (Táiwò, 2022) because it is not just about liability, accountability, and blameworthiness. This is because “anti-racist and decolonising educational approaches in education are transformational by definition, resulting in curriculum and pedagogical practices that overturn the legacy of colonial structures by first enabling a shared consciousness of the dynamics of racist social systems” (Walker et al., 2023, p. 4). If we consider reparation a rehabilitative program for creating just futures, normative notions of responsibility are based on moral obligations rather than accountability. Thus, epistemic educational futures can create new opportunity structures considering representational and recognitional processes. Hence, reparations are more than just about making the descendants of enslaved peoples whole for their continued dispossession and inhuman treatment, loss and theft of their humanity, and poorly compensated labor. A forward-looking reparatory justice places education at its center. Such an approach begins by recognizing that education addresses historical injustices and equips people with the skills needed to overcome systemic inequalities. Education is central to transforming inequitable knowledge structures by providing pathways to empowerment for marginalized groups. Therefore, a reparatory justice should seek to address the structural inequalities that have long inhibited access to knowledge. It is through education, write Sriprakash et al. (2020), “that new forms of recognition of these injustices and a solidarity for creating something different can be fostered. Education is, therefore, necessary for reparative futures” (p. 9).

Epistemic educational futures are viewed as a transitional justice mechanism that focuses on educating about the past in order to prevent the reproduction of the dominant status quo. Epistemic educational futures share some aspects of “reparative futures” (Sriprakash et al., 2020), but differ in remarkable ways. Their commonality is that generative knowledge can be derived in both formal and informal settings when addressing knowledge politics. However, they differ in that while reparative futures pay attention to “identifying and recognis[ing] the injustices visited on, and experienced by, individuals and communities in the past” (Sriprakash et al., 2020, p. 1), epistemic educational futures take as its starting point justice, more specifically transnational justice, and make this visible. Whereas reparative futures

ask “ongoing and difficult questions with the past” and are “defined by its imaginative potential” (Sriprakash et al., 2020, p. 2), I contend epistemic educational futures draw on Indigenous practices of interconnectedness or “*rematriation*”² (Newcomb, n.d.; Sogorea Te’ Land Trust, 2021) – the revalorisation and reconnection with cultural, spiritual, and psychological dimensions. As a form of reparatory justice dedicated to benefiting future generations, rematriation calls for restoring living cultures and their spiritual way of life on ancestral lands, without external interference. In this way, epistemic educational futures aim to reject coloniality and epistemic violence, and to reclaim ancestral knowledge as part of epistemic liberation.

The central question for epistemic educational futures is *what* constitutes reparations. In addressing this question, epistemic educational futures move away from a deficit-reparations model grounded in materialist forms of restitution or compensation toward a holistic model centered on restorative justice. It is not that the material is not essential; it is just not placed at the center of epistemic educational futures. It is also not about moving on from the past without acknowledging and recognizing its consequences. It is about creating a better future (forward-looking) so that no one can or should suffer from the implications of epistemic injustices (anti-Black racism, Afrophobia, institutional racism, and the other “isms,” etc.) caused by the trans-Atlantic slave trade and other horrors. Epistemic educational futures teach the next generation how to dispossess themselves of their coloniality. Therefore, for epistemic educational futures to succeed, reparatory educational justice should focus on both backward- and forward-looking responsibility by addressing the unjust social structures of coloniality (the backward dimension) and the specific actors who remain involved (the forward dimension). Here, we see that acknowledging injustice becomes the first step in rectifying historical wrongs. Returning to CARICOM’s 10-Point Plan (Caribbean Reparations Commission, 2020), we can now understand why this Plan begins by calling for a formal apology and for reconciliation, truth, and justice for victims and their descendants. A formal apology, as opposed to “statements of regret” that express “we are sorry” for slavery, genocide, erasure, and dispossession, places accountability upon the United Kingdom for its original sins and leads to the promise that “we will never do that again.” In this instance, acknowledgment is a powerful tool for making epistemic amends.

² Newcomb (n.d) argues that reparations have been co-opted as a way to describe colonial/racist/patriarchal plans. I agree with him and view reparations as much broader than colonial/racist/patriarchal plans and, as such, use reparatory justice to center epistemic educational futures.

The “*what*” question that guides epistemic educational futures moves away from centering on the past and toward future-oriented theorizing. While I agree with Sriprakash (2023) that reparation in education can be material, pedagogic, epistemic, and relational, I argue that her conceptualization of these is mostly backward-looking, focusing on strategies to repair historical harm and prevent the recurrence of educational injustice. I believe these strategies do not get to the root of the question of what, in that epistemic educational futures are more than simply focusing on how specific historical-structural forms of educational injustice have shaped today’s educational trajectories. It is about understanding, interrogating, and rethinking the current educational architecture, a product of coloniality. Such measures begin by calling for new tools to rebuild the “master’s house” (Lorde, 1979). A forward-looking decolonial approach begins not by throwing out the proverbial baby with the bathwater. Instead, by keeping the baby and changing the bathwater, drawing on other forms of knowledge, we can conceive of new ways or strategies that move the needle forward, where it is not just about addressing the past but about creating epistemic futures. Epistemic futures employ the concept of epistemic relations – our ways of understanding ourselves, our histories, and the interplay of knowledge, beliefs, and values – to critically engage with the structures that shape societal outcomes. By foregrounding these relations, epistemic futures aim to reconfigure how knowledge is produced and transmitted, thereby preventing the perpetuation of harm, injustice, prejudice, and inequality. As a decolonial approach, epistemic futures intentionally challenge existing epistemological frameworks of coloniality that reinforce power imbalances, seeking to envision just, inclusive, and equitable futures by reshaping the foundations of what is considered valid or valuable knowledge.

Geospatial dynamics of epistemic educational reparations

In focusing on epistemic educational futures and addressing epistemic wrongs through epistemic reparations, I claim that attention must first be paid to epistemic injustices. To address this, some scholars have called for reparative redress in education (Sriprakash, 2023; Walker et al., 2023). Stein and Andreotti (2025) call for a cartography of approaches grounded in recognition, representation, redistribution, and reparation to confronting colonialisms. However, they contend that in higher education, “recognition and representation remain the most common and could be considered ‘on the curve’, whereas redistribution and reparation are ‘ahead of the curve’” (Stein & Andreotti, 2025, p. 71). Writing in the context of health disparities but applicable to educational settings, Bhakuni and Abimbola

(2021) identify two types of epistemic wrongs, “credibility deficit and interpretive marginalisation, which stem from structural exclusion of marginalised producers and recipients of knowledge” (p. e1465). In drawing on Fricker’s (2007) work, they propose that

epistemic wrongs are moral wrongs that occur in processes involved in knowledge production, use, or circulation ... [and] can lead to epistemic injustices if the knowledge held by people who belong to marginalised groups (and if their status as knowers) is systematically afforded less credibility and if their interpretive (or sensemaking) resources are not recognised. Such wrongs also lead to injustice if structurally marginalised groups are prejudicially denied interpretive resources to make sense of the world or their perception of the world, or if they are unable to use the knowledge they receive because it was produced in isolation from them. (p. e1465)

In applying this to education, we can consider the persistent, structural exclusion that endures in educational settings, leading to epistemic injustices. Epistemic educational wrongs can be amplified through testimonial injustice (where the hearer ascribes lower credibility to the speaker’s words) and hermeneutical injustice (credibility deficit created due to gaps in sensemaking, leading individuals or the group not to make sense of shared experiences) (discussed above), and therefore, we should frame them as moral wrongs related to epistemic injustice. Since educational knowledge systems function as social systems, often shaped by inherent prejudices and implicit biases that lead to credibility deficits and interpretive marginalization for marginalized groups, these biases hinder equal participation in producing, disseminating, and utilizing knowledge. Epistemic injustice is relevant from a knowledge decolonization perspective because credibility deficits in education are often tied to the undeserved epistemic privileges granted to dominant groups, manifesting as credibility excess. This excess is rooted in historical social structures—such as racism, sexism, and colonization—where the inflated credibility of one social or epistemic group directly contributes to the credibility deficit of marginalized groups. Bhakuni and Abimbola (2021) assert that “to decolonise knowledge is therefore to even out credibility deficits and reverse interpretive [hermeneutical] marginalisation in society” (p. e1466), and given the complex social system (governance) or social realities (inequalities), it “requires a plurality of ways of thinking about or making sense of it” (p. e1467).

Educational reparative futures draw attention to how marginalized voices have been historically silenced both in and out of the academy. In doing so, it reminds us of the silent undercurrents that maintain the status quo. Epistemic injustice is everywhere, and epistemic wrongs are habitual. However, in education, their manifestations simultaneously lead to recognition (credible recipients of knowledge can speak) and marginalization (knowledge practitioners are silenced). For example, in comparative and international education (CIE), we tend to privilege Western knowledge practices by imposing Western paradigms on

the study of foreign systems from a comparative perspective. However, we often fail to recognize or acknowledge that epistemic injustice arises when knowledge production prioritizes the interests of foreign or distant actors and elite epistemic communities over local audiences and perspectives, thereby undermining local learning. This occurs when global standards or universally applicable knowledge are favored over what a system needs to learn from and about itself. Similarly, if one does a content analysis of scholarship in the prominent journals in CIE, one will encounter a so-called “stuck-in-the-middle pattern” (Hedt-Gauthier et al., 2019) that gives rise to “the Matthew effect” (Merton, 1968) and “the White Bull effect” (Kwok, 2005). The Matthew effect posits that the academy disproportionately favors established and recognized coauthors over less established or junior researchers. The White Bull effect occurs when senior researchers take the first authorship credit in a coercive or manipulative manner. Reparatory justice through epistemic educational futures seeks to address the credibility deficits that manifest in the academy and the privilege afforded to the dominant group.

We need to change and challenge the geospatial dynamics of reparations, and I argue that epistemic educational futures can achieve this by presenting a holistic model of epistemic reparatory justice. This is because epistemic educational futures focus on more than material and symbolic reparations, attending to the moral wrongs that have occurred and selecting beneficiaries and burdened parties based on their historical relationships. Epistemic educational futures aim to confront the hidden mistrust and post-truths that have emerged due to colonial history, global power relations, and modern extractive political economies (Richardson, 2020). If we agree that epistemic injustice recognizes who is deemed a credible knowledge producer and privileges specific interpretive frameworks for understanding existing or emerging knowledge, then epistemic educational futures are grounded in “epistemic repair,” which can help us undo the unfair knowledge practices of coloniality that proliferate in educational settings. We can think of epistemic repair as including “the nurturing of corrective virtues, that is, to individually cultivate the practice of giving [sic] a higher degree of credibility to knowers and to avoid practices that erode the interpretive role of marginalized groups” (Bhakuni, 2023, p. 1).

Generational land robbery, dispossession, discriminatory denials, and theft of humanity, creativity, and labor cannot be fixed easily. However, epistemic educational futures move the conversation beyond economic and legal arguments, seeking to foster more inclusive discussions that extend beyond acts of enslavement. Reparatory justice addresses ongoing harm and dispossession through epistemic responsibility in epistemic educational futures. In this way, we do not allow those who have committed wrongs and/or harms to dictate the solutions. Epistemic educational futures advocate for a renewed

social contract that protects everyone's rights. It places those who have been and continue to be dehumanized at the center by centering their dignity.

Reparative Futurism: The right to recognition, the right to justice, and the right to reparation

The onset of deglobalization and the ensuing complex interdependencies of the polycrisis, in which various crises (social, political, economic, environmental, etc.) interact in ways that make it challenging to address them in isolation, prompt us to think differently about reparatory justice. As such, in moving towards a conclusion, the final section reflects on the work of Afrofuturism, which Zamalin (2022) suggests has the possibility for opening up new political horizons “by undoing in fiction what is socially familiar and naturalized in practice and history, whether unconscious racist common sense or the sense of political and legal stasis – Afrofuturism opens up a vantage point for a utopian reconsideration of the (racially unequal) status quo” (p. 8). In these horizons as our benchmarks, I propose “reparative futurism” as a way forward for episteme educational futures. In merging the ideas of reparative justice (discussed above) with futuristic and speculative thought to come up with reparative futurism, I see the concept as envisioning future possibilities where historical harms – particularly those related to colonialism, slavery, and systemic injustices – and continuous harms – coloniality, climate change, structural inequalities – are actively addressed through reparative actions. I envision that this framework could heal past wounds while simultaneously looking to the future by redistributing resources and creating equitable systems that prioritize the well-being and agency of historically marginalized communities. Such a framework is possible due to the onslaught of deglobalization and the polycrisis. In this framework, the future is imagined not as a continuation of the present’s inequities but as a radical shift toward epistemic justice, epistemic repair, and epistemic healing. The aim is not to reproduce colonial circularities but to interrupt colonial patterns by questioning and rethinking inherited educational paradigms (Stein et al., 2022a). The aim is to de-link from colonial patterns by engaging with alternatives without reproducing colonality (Stein et al., 2022a). Reparative futurism is a speculative approach to envisioning futures in which restitution for past wrongs is not just theoretical but built into educational, social, economic, and political ecosystems. These futures are often imagined through the lens of marginalized groups, predominantly Indigenous and Black communities, whose visions of justice extend beyond traditional reparative frameworks to include educational, cultural, ecological, and spiritual dimensions. This concept is tied to themes of Indigenous sovereignty, land back movements,

climate justice, and the restructuring of global systems to recognize and prioritize the dignity of all peoples. It seeks to reshape narratives of power, identity, and justice through speculative visions grounded in the need for tangible, present-day reparations. Reparative futurism allows us to highlight the imaginative and reconstructive potential of education that is both backward- and future-oriented.

In my assessment of our epistemic makeup, I identified two kinds of epistemic injustice: testimonial and hermeneutical injustice, and operationalized these within the context of reparatory justice. I demonstrated how these injustices shape epistemic exchanges and contribute to epistemic wrongs, and argued that, while a restitutive approach calls for perpetrators to compensate victims, reparative justice should be not only backward-looking but also attentive to the re-creation of a viable future. Above, it was argued that we must transform the social ecosystem in which these transactions occur to remedy epistemic injustice, as this necessitates an urgent response. For epistemic educational futures to work, we cannot focus only on the individual level; we must also attend to the distributive determinants shaping global educational systems and driving differential epistemic development. In other words, epistemic educational futures are not just focused on correcting the injustices of practical and epistemic harm, but also on implementing ameliorative measures to effect epistemic repair and redress the harms of epistemic injustice. As such, a “relational-reparative approach” (Almassi, 2018) to restorative epistemic justice, grounded in epistemic educational futures, allows us to center on reparative futurism.

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