

**PALACKÝ UNIVERSITY OLMOUC**

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**Decolonising higher education**

Bachelor's thesis

Supervisor: Mgr. Tomáš Daněk, Ph.D.  
Olomouc, 2024

## **Declaration**

I hereby declare in lieu of an oath that I wrote this bachelor's thesis entitled 'Decolonising higher education' by myself under the supervision of Mgr. Tomáš Daněk, Ph.D. I made due acknowledgements of all information derived from the work of others in the text and the list of references.

Olomouc, 31st July 2024

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signature

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## **Abstract**

This bachelor's thesis brings the discourse of decoloniality to the field of development studies and environmental studies in the Czech academic context. Specifically, it concerns decolonising higher education, of which development and environmental studies are a part. Decoloniality can be understood as a narrative emphasising the empowerment of colonised cultures from Eurocentrism. Universities can participate in coloniality in various ways, both epistemically and materially. The present study proposes intercultural philosophy mediated by intercultural dialogue as a framework for establishing a higher education informed by decoloniality. I begin by defining 'culture' as a Eurocentric idea with onto-epistemic effects on colonised peoples. Then, I examine intercultural philosophy as a tool to address epistemic oppression. This is followed by presenting my cartography of critical posthumanities (Braidotti, 2019-a), specifying that my thesis concerns the 'human' Others, although indirectly also the 'non-human' Others. Afterwards, the social construction of modernity/coloniality is clarified and how Eurocentric philosophy and science differ from Indigenous epistemologies is illustrated. Then coloniality and decoloniality in general and in higher education are examined. My study shows that higher education is dominated by neoliberal discursive orientation and intercultural philosophy is not widely practiced. This needs to change if decolonisation is not to stay a past event and a metaphor.

**Keywords:** decolonising higher education, Eurocentrism, decoloniality, Indigenous epistemologies, intercultural philosophy, critical posthumanities, critical cartographies, positionality, the new transversal humanities, development studies, environmental studies

## **Abstrakt**

Tato bakalářská práce přispívá diskurzem dekoloniality do oblasti rozvojových a environmentálních studií v českém kontextu. Přesněji, zabývá se dekolonizací vysokoškolského vzdělávání, kterého jsou rozvojová a environmentální studia součástí. Dekolonialita může být chápána jako narativ zasazující se o osvobození kolonizovaných kultur od eurocentrismu. Vysoké školy mohou na kolonialitě participovat, jak epistemicky, tak materiálně. V mé práci navrhuji interkulturní filosofii zprostředkovanou interkulturním dialogem jako strukturu schopnou umožnit vysokoškolské vzdělávání informované dekoloniálním diskurzem. V práci nejdříve definuji ‘kulturu’ jako eurocentrický konstrukt s onto-epistemickými dopady na kolonizované bytosti. Následně rozebírám interkulturní filosofii jako strukturu pro odstranění epistemické oprese. Dále vysvětluji svou geografii kritického posthumanismu (Braidotti, 2019-a) a specifikuji, že má práce se týká lidských bytostí, ačkoliv nepřímo také těch ‘nelidských’. Poté ilustruji sociální konstrukci modernity/koloniality a to, jak se eurocentrická filosofie a věda liší od domorodých epistemických tradic. Následně popisuji kolonialitu a dekolonialitu obecně a v kontextu vysokoškolského vzdělávání. V mé práci zjišťuji, že v rámci vysokoškolského vzdělávání dominuje neoliberální diskursivní orientace a interkulturní filosofie zůstává téměř nepraktikována. To se musí změnit, pokud dekolonizace nemá zůstat historickou událostí a metaforou.

**Klíčová slova:** dekolonizace vysokoškolského vzdělávání, Eurocentrismus, dekolonialita, domorodé epistemologie, interkulturní filosofie, kritická posthumanitní studia, kritická kartografie, nová transversální humanitní studia, rozvojová studia, environmentální studia

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### Zásady pro vypracování

This bachelor's thesis brings the discourse of decoloniality to the field of development studies and environmental studies in the Czech academic environment. Specifically, it concerns decolonising higher education, of which development and environmental studies are a part. Decoloniality can be understood as a narrative emphasising the empowerment of colonised cultures from Eurocentrism. Universities can participate in coloniality in various ways, both epistemically and materially. In the present study, I propose intercultural philosophy mediated by intercultural dialogue as a framework for establishing a higher education informed by decoloniality.

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## Introduction

*Decoloniality* means a praxis of disrupting the ongoing hegemonic project of modernity/coloniality. Because it is always context-specific, there are no predetermined goals of decoloniality. Decolonisation, on the other hand, is based on modern/colonial ethics and, instead of staying an open-ended liberating praxis, it sets predefined pseudo-liberating goals. Decolonisation, for example, was the 19th-century geopolitical project to create independent states where colonies had previously existed. Although what is called decolonisation often reproduces coloniality, many movements continue to use the term decolonisation (and other names) for their truly liberating efforts (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018, 49). Many scholars (me included) do the same when writing about decoloniality. Indeed, what matters is not the terminology we use but the direction of our actions (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018, 49).<sup>1</sup>

In my thesis, I describe coloniality (the adverse side of modernity) by illustrating how European culture, assuming the existence of a single centre from which to understand the world, placed itself hegemonically (Eurocentrically) at the centres of other cultures (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 2002, 63–69). American scholar Escobar (2017, 94) defines *Eurocentrism* as ‘a hegemonic representation and mode of knowing that claims universality for itself, derived from Europe’s claimed position as the center’. Because we live in a globalised world, it would be misleading to continue calling people who profit from Eurocentrism inhabitants of the West, the Global North, or Europe (and North America). Rather (with still great simplification) we can refer to them as inhabitants of the ‘One-Third World’, which refers to a social minority privileged over the rest of humanity (Mohanty, 2003). Those from the ‘Two-Thirds World’, the social majority, are mostly (but not only) Indigenous peoples<sup>2</sup>, oppressed by the hegemonic modern/colonial

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<sup>1</sup> Decoloniality was first conceptualised in 1990 by the Peruvian scholar Aníbal Quijano, who still called it decolonisation (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018, 120).

<sup>2</sup> Although I call colonised people Indigenous peoples, this is just for the simplicity of my language and I recognise my privilege to label Others. Said (1979) describes very well how we imagine the (Oriental) Others through the processes of othering.

global imaginary<sup>3</sup> of the One-Third World, whereby their epistemologies (ways of knowing), ontologies (ways of being), and axiologies (ways of valuing) are violated.

Stein et al. (2021), importantly, emphasise that decolonisation does not imply just intellectual work, but also work affective and relational. The *affective* work is done by reflecting and working with the often uncomfortable feelings that arise in our decolonial struggles. The reference to *relational* work points out that any decolonial effort requires harmonising our relationships with others based on reciprocal respect. Mignolo & Walsh (2018) describe decolonisation as healing a colonial wound in anyone, who decides to participate. Whether we are people from the One-Third World or the Two-Thirds World, we can partake in decolonisation.

My thesis concerns *decolonising higher education*, an effort often seen as key to disrupting colonial violence because universities play a crucial role in knowledge production and reproduction (Stein & Andreotti, 2016). The decolonisation of higher education parallels its *interculturalisation* (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018), whereby the university is to become a *pluriversity* (Boidin et al., 2012), open to different knowledge. As examples of recent decolonial efforts from the context of academia, I can mention student-led campaigns such as *Why is My Curriculum White?*, *Rhodes Must Fall*, and *Fees Must Fall*, which have called for a non-Eurocentric, non-discriminatory higher education system (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). Based in the United Kingdom, the *Why is My Curriculum White?* campaign highlighted the centrality of ‘white ideas’ and ‘white scholars’ in university curricula, with whiteness being understood not as a race but as an ideology (Peters, 2015). The *Rhodes Must Fall* and the *Fees Must Fall* initiatives took place in South Africa in 2015 and 2016, and they soon inspired students around the world, giving birth to similar movements in both historical colonies and in the places of former imperial centres. The *Rhodes Must Fall* campaign demanded and eventually achieved the removal of the statue of Cecil Rhodes – a famous British colonialist – from the University

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<sup>3</sup> I take the ‘dominant modern/colonial global imaginary’ from Andreotti et al. (2016). Social imaginaries correspond to what is possible to imagine for a society and thus legitimise related social practices. Within the modern/colonial imaginary, alternative modes of thinking are impossible to imagine. Although my thesis largely operates within the modern/colonial imaginary – since, collectively, we struggle to imagine beyond it – I can still critique its limitations (Andreotti et al., 2016).

of Cape Town campus (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). The campaign inspired the Oxford-based initiative of the same name, which called for the Cecil Rhodes statue removal from one of the Oxfordian University Colleges (Knudsen & Andersen, 2019). The *Fees Must Fall* movement in South Africa, unified at the national level, pointed out the neo-liberal free-market exclusionary character of universities and its impact on Black people (Chinguno, 2017). In addition to the mentioned and similar campaigns, scholars have also attempted to bring the issue of Eurocentric higher education to the fore in their publication activity.

The present study brings the discourse of decoloniality to the field of development and environmental studies (as I am a student of International Development and Environmental Studies) in the Czech academic environment. Specifically, it concerns decolonising higher education, of which development and environmental studies are part. First, I describe what coloniality and decoloniality mean. Intercultural philosophy is presented as a possible tool for decolonisation. This is followed by examining discursive orientations in the context of higher education (following Andreotti et al., 2016) and discussing the decolonial discourse of higher education specifically. I also briefly state how development and environmental studies are related to my thesis. The conclusion is preceded by methodology, positionality (reflecting on my cartographies), and discussion (summarising the findings, limitations, and relevance of this thesis). I conclude by presenting the aim(s) of this thesis and some closing statements.

# 1 Culture and Eurocentrism

To understand the topic of my thesis, I first introduce some concepts related to it. The individual sections of this thesis should not be read selectively because they support each other in my argumentation. I begin by explaining the concept of culture, recognising its constructed nature. To define culture, we must first look at the nature of the human species. To do so, I adopt the scientific point of view because both the concepts of ‘man’ and ‘culture’ (a sub-category of ‘man’) derive meaning from it. Although taken for granted by science, ‘man’ is an artificial category laid down by ancient Greek philosophers. In particular, Christianity, Enlightenment philosophers, and finally, modern scientists further shaped the concept (see Alam, 1983, 25–26). Later in this thesis, I show that the idea of ‘man’ is part of Eurocentric scientific epistemology, with other epistemologies not recognising the same phenomenon.

According to the scientific evolution theory, humans distinguish themselves from other species by bipedalism, increased brain size, and behavioural flexibility (Swimme & Tucker, 2011). The appearance of the third of these human attributes – flexible behaviour – was especially groundbreaking, allowing humans to consciously reflect on what they experienced. That reflexivity meant the ability to wonder about things, although at the cost of diminished animal instinct. For instance, fear in a dangerous situation did not cause us (humans) to flee immediately because we could experience wonder over that situation. With this consciousness, we soon started to use symbols – both in spoken and written form – which enabled us to pass our thoughts among ourselves and from generation to generation. As the process of sharing and storing knowledge was place-specific, what is today called *cultural diversity* emerged (Swimme & Tucker, 2011).

The rest of my work intends to undermine the universality of the scientific paradigm by illustrating how the concepts of ‘place/nature’ and ‘man/culture’ were constructed by one of the place-specific human groups (European culture) and historically made no sense to others, despite the One-Third World’s claim for the objectivity and universality of its epistemology (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018, 160). By moving on the margins of the modern/colonial global imaginary, I strive to bridge different cultural worlds (see Mignolo, 2013) and encounter other ways of knowing, that disregard the false universality science claims to itself. In doing so, I continue to use scientific language and its arguments

for deriving knowledge, since speaking the language of science allows me to be understood in the contemporary academic environment.

Place and culture do not have to be conceptualised only Eurocentrically, but their meanings can be shaped. They can be used as strategic discourses in struggles for intercultural justice (Escobar, 2001). Places are constructed by humans based on the everyday experience of their location (Escobar, 2001). The perceptions of a place in Indigenous cultures differ from the Eurocentric view. According to many of them, the place and they (the people) constantly influence each other, which makes them indistinguishable. A place is a culture, and vice versa (Escobar, 2001). Haraway (2003) calls such a kind of metaphysical world a *natureculture* continuum. Places are in danger of erasure because the One-Third World continues to claim dominance over them, seeing them as universal *space* inhabited by universal rational men. Indigenous peoples actively defend *their places* (calling for the natureculture continuums) because they depend on them to the extent that makes them inseparable (Escobar, 2001).

The process of erasing places is what sociologist Santos (2014) calls *hegemonic globalisation*:

Hegemonic globalization can be defined as the process by which a given local phenomenon – be it the English language, Hollywood, fast food, and so on – succeeds in extending its reach over the globe and, by doing so, develops the capacity to designate a rival social phenomenon as local.

British sociologist Bhabra (2007, 5) defines *Eurocentrism* as ‘the belief, implicit or otherwise, in the world historical significance of events believed to have developed endogenously within the cultural-geographical sphere of Europe’. The Eurocentric superiority thus stems from the construction of Europe as an autonomous cultural unit and the claimed universality of its knowledge. Enlightenment philosophers are regarded as the founders of Eurocentric thinking because they promoted the idea of modern science and scientific discovery, which relies on a *subject*’s ability to reason and describe *objects* – ‘*objectively*’. As Bhabra writes (2007, 35–36), the Enlightenment philosophers saw the theories of Newton and Boyle as the beginning of a new era marked by the shift from religion to reason and science. In science, reason is separated from the senses and deemed a universal source of knowledge. The body-mind (feeling-reasoning) division came hand

in hand with the nature-culture dichotomy. Nature and humankind became objects, whose principles could be universally discovered and described (Bhambra, 2007, 35–36).

I see Eurocentric thought as originating in both Europe and North America because the latter, when colonised by European colonisers, launched its own imperial practice based on the Eurocentric idea of universal science (Santos, 2014). As I have already mentioned, instead of situating current Eurocentric thought in Europe or dividing between the West and the Third World, or the Global North and South, I follow feminist scholar Mohanty (2003), who speaks about ‘One-Third World’ and ‘Two-Thirds World’.<sup>4</sup> The One-Third World stands for a privileged social minority, while the Two-Thirds World represents a social majority whose quality of life is diminished to the benefit of the remaining third. The inhabitants of both worlds can live anywhere in the material world. This categorisation, which builds on the quality of life, although not avoiding certain simplifications, better reflects current global power dynamics, escaping the misleading ‘geographical and ideological binarism’ (Mohanty, 2003).

## **2 Intercultural Philosophy and Epistemic Injustice**

As mentioned above, in the present study, even if I deny the universality of Eurocentric thought, I still operate with the concepts aligned with its worldview, such as ‘culture’ and ‘nature’. This is because to explain the weaknesses of Eurocentric thought to people who perceive the world in accordance with it, it is inescapable to formulate the critique in their language. By language, I do not mean just spoken or written language but also body language, silences, and various cultural ways of living and organising. Language is an expression of knowledge. Knowledge also includes arguments for deriving knowledge, which stem from culturally specific premises of argumentation (Santos, 2014). To avoid forcing our argumentation on other cultures, we must engage in *intercultural dialogues*. The mediator for intercultural dialogue is *intercultural translation*. However, even if we translate as precisely as possible, there is always inherent epistemic injustice in translation, favouring the side into whose language the communication is translated (Santos, 2014).

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<sup>4</sup> The division was originally articulated by Esteva and Prakash (1998).

Intercultural dialogue is practised through listening with patience and respect to people of a distinct culture from ours, whereby equal conditions are created by and for the dialogue partners (Kimmerle, 2004). In the process of intercultural translation, which enables intercultural dialogue, we can maintain our arguments, but we must be willing to understand the arguments of the second culture, challenging our premises of argumentation (Santos, 2014). Intercultural translation into a common language gives rise to new premises of argumentation, which are specific to the contact zone between the two cultures (Santos, 2014). These new premises of argumentation are the basis of intercultural philosophy. *Intercultural philosophy* implies ‘negotiating one’s own identity and the other’s in a jointly constructed new situation for which neither of the two identities has fully prepared either of the participants in that new situation’ (Mosima, 2022, 9). The goal of intercultural dialogue is not to arrive at a consensus or universal truth (Kimmerle, 2004). Instead, intercultural dialogue strives to respect cultural diversity, encountering various ways of philosophising.

Noteworthy, the space of intercultural encounters between different cultures, where intercultural philosophy arises, is a space inhabited by real actors – individuals and communities (Kramm et al., 2024) – not abstract cultures, because it is in the intercultural encounter where actors can experience their cultural specifics (Weidtmann, 2016, 180, cited in Casper-Hehne & Henkel, 2024, 137). There are also intracultural dialogues, which sometimes might be hard to distinguish from intercultural dialogues because cultures overlap (Mall, 2016), the biggest difference being that intercultural dialogue encompasses both linguistic and extralinguistic translation (Santos, 2014).

One problem of intercultural translation is that by translation, as already mentioned, we abstract one’s knowledge by ‘knowing’ it in our language, thus creating epistemic injustice. Epistemic injustice arises when one culture can engage in a dialogue with another culture but cannot discuss the terms in which the dialogue is led because its knowledge is always formulated only in the other culture’s language (Santos, 2014). People of the One-Third World usually do not master the languages of Indigenous peoples very well. Consequently, intercultural translation commonly occurs as the translation of Indigenous languages into English and other hegemonic (neo)colonial languages mastered by the ‘previously’ colonised. To challenge the epistemic injustice favouring colonial languages, the One-Third World must start engaging with marginalised cultures

in both their Native languages and their translated versions. When translating, we must explicitly acknowledge the epistemic injustice we are reproducing (Santos, 2014).

As Santos (2014) argues: ‘there is no global social justice without global cognitive [epistemic] justice’. Mignolo & Walsh (2018, 135) also note that ‘it is through knowledge that entities and relations are conceived, perceived, sensed, and described’. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (2002, 68) puts the goal of epistemic justice as follows: ‘It is [...] not really a question of studying that which is removed from ourselves [...] but rather one of understanding all the voices coming from what is essentially a plurality of centres all over the world’. In fact, intercultural dialogue and intercultural philosophy are possible only when acknowledging epistemic injustice (see Mosima, 2022).

A less demanding practice than the effort for epistemic justice is systematic work with the terminology of hegemonic languages to undermine it. For instance, adjectives can be used to change the meaning of nouns (Santos, 2014). A case in point is ‘development’, which transformed into ‘alternative development’ (and subsequently into ‘alternatives to development’). Apart from using adjectives, there are other ways of working with English. Terms like ‘de-growth’, ‘customary law’, or ‘decoloniality’, are some examples.

### **3 Three Types of Epistemic Oppression**

In her famous book *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing* (2007), Fricker divides epistemic injustice into testimonial and hermeneutical injustice. However, we agree with Dotson (2014), who shows that these are not epistemic injustices as such. Instead, she sees testimonial, hermeneutical, and epistemic injustice as three types of *epistemic oppression*. The first – *testimonial injustice* – is caused by prejudices based on denying someone the role of knowledge producer. Fricker (2007) gives an example of the police not believing someone after considering their skin colour. The second, *hermeneutical injustice* – the term coming from hermeneutics (which studies interpretation) – concerns the justice of names (or absence of names) for a phenomenon in different cultures. An example could be when a woman suffers sexual harassment in a culture which lacks this critical name, so she cannot easily explain her experience to others (Fricker, 2007). Hermeneutical intercultural injustice can be removed by intercultural translation. Let us say that one culture calls a phenomenon ‘capitalism’, and



another culture translates it as ‘extractivism’. To do hermeneutical injustice justice, we must acknowledge both names for the single phenomenon.

The third type of epistemic oppression – *epistemic injustice* – cannot be eliminated by simply starting to respect equivalents of another cultural knowledge because it requires one party to add previously unknown phenomena into its vocabulary. Dotson (2014) illustrates it with the help of Plato’s ‘Allegory of the Cave’. All prisoners are fixed inside the cave, unable to move, and can see only shadows of the real world projected on the wall by a fire. Nevertheless, they take different positions within the cave, so if one of the prisoners has a unique experience of the world outside the cave based on her unique position, it will be hard for others to equalise this knowledge with knowledge based on collective experience (Dotson, 2014). Epistemic injustice cannot be reduced by simply engaging in intercultural translation. Epistemic injustice recognises that any universal phenomena to be known and named by various cultural alternatives do not exist because each culture constructs its unique phenomena.

Every culture has its own epistemology, a way of knowing, tied to its own ontology, a way of existing. However, the division between epistemology and ontology stems from the Eurocentric separation of the theorising subject from *merely* existing objects (Braidotti, 2019-a, 42–43). Thus, we need to imagine knowing and being otherwise. To support epistemic justice, we need a shift from comparative philosophy (Mall, 2003) – comparing other ways of knowing according to the Eurocentric idea of ‘knowledge’ – towards intercultural philosophy, respecting different ontological realities. Outside the modern/colonial imaginary, the knowing subject ‘thinking-feeling with the Earth’ (Escobar, 2016) disappears and becomes another knowing object. This trend of dismissing the onto-epistemic division in the contemporary humanities is called the ‘ontological turn’ (Escobar, 2016). In the present study, I use this division because it simplifies my language, but I keep in mind that it is just for communicative purposes. Scholars also sometimes speak about onto-epistemologies or ethico-onto-epistemologies. Such a holistic perception is more suitable to Indigenous realities, many of which could be described as relational, object-oriented, and practical rather than theoretical (Escobar, 2016).

## 4 Critical Posthumanities and Cartographies

Because I engage with epistemic oppression, I cannot omit the fact that I seemingly deal only with human knowledge in the present study. Posthuman scholars strive to go beyond the Eurocentric idea of a human. *Critical posthumanities* were laid down by a feminist continental philosopher Braidotti (2019), the modifier ‘critical’ highlighting the need to deconstruct the residua of human-centrism that scholars from the field of posthumanities often leave out. According to critical posthumanities, human exceptionalism (human with the ability to reason) is nothing but a Eurocentric/anthropocentric idea rooted in the hierarchical dualism of body-mind, animal-human, and nature-culture. Consequently, no such thing as human exceptionalism exists (universally) because other living and non-living entities are equally intelligent beings. The knowing subjects are not men exclusively but also women, animals, nature, matter, and those in between the categorical binaries of men/women, men/animals, nature/culture, and life/matter (Braidotti, 2019-a).

Braidotti (2019) calls all the abovementioned the *missing people* (following Deleuze) and the knowledge they produce a ‘vital, neo-materialist epistemology’. She proposes a monistic perception of the world in which all missing people formulate knowledge, not just the human species (Braidotti, 2019-a).<sup>5</sup> Braidotti argues for a turn from linguistic thinking towards materialist thinking with the *zoe* (the vital force of Life immanent in all existence), whereby not only the body but the mind too is material (Davis & Braidotti, 2016; Braidotti, 2019-a). We have, in fact, never been separated from nature/our bodies, we have only been oppressing non-human knowers by living based on the nature-culture division (Åsberg & Braidotti, 2024). In Braidotti’s monistic philosophy, knowledge is always complete, dwelling in a non-linear time-continuum, but unveils to all knowers in fragments of knowledge, thus manifesting itself as always incomplete (Braidotti, 2019-a). When Einstein saw the consequences of his invention of the bomb, he regretted it, stating: ‘If I had known I would never have thought it’ (see Davis & Braidotti, 2016). Critical posthuman thinking is based on affirmative ethics, which should not be understood as naïve optimism but implies the decision to actualise the present – what we

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<sup>5</sup> Monism is an understanding of the world as consisting of one substance. Braidotti builds largely on the monistic philosophies of Spinoza and Deleuze.

are ceasing to be and what we are in the process of becoming. The fact that knowledge subjects are nomadic in time (think of Einstein) and space – embedded and embodied, and their knowledge thus always fragmental, does not mean a fall into relativism if we track how the knowledge became known, thinking critically of power structures that shaped it and ‘drawing’ them as *critical cartographies*. Any cartography (a cognitive mapping praxis) is always selective, but cartographies help us understand power relations in knowledge production and circulation and be creative in shaping the future (Braidotti, 2019-a).<sup>6</sup>

Intercultural philosophy helps us dismiss the anthropocentric tradition central to the modern/colonial global imaginary. Many Indigenous cultures perceive the world in a relational way, thinking with the zoe (Braidotti, 2019-a). If we accept that knowledge subjects are permeable to bodies and stories of other knowing subjects, then knowledge is always produced in the context of power (Iovino, 2016, cited in Hartman et al., 2024). All knowledge producers have stories to be listened to by other knowledge producers, though not all stories are accessible, intelligible and communicable in a particular context (Hartman et al., 2024). Think, for instance, of dying rainforests telling the story of a suffering ecosystem essential for many lives. Or think of icebergs, which reveal the history of our planet in the form of stored carbon (Hartman et al., 2024). Today, in the ‘Anthropocene’, the continuing pervasive story of nature-culture dualism violates and even kills many (Åsberg & Braidotti, 2024). Therefore, maintaining the separation of natural sciences and the humanities contributes to the current ‘crisis’ and we need interdisciplinary engagement with the world (Åsberg & Braidotti, 2024). Furthermore, according to Åsberg, postdisciplinary research is essential, recognising that disciplines change over time (Braidotti & Oostveen, 2024, 32). Though posthuman subjects other than Indigenous peoples are not the central concern of this thesis, I listen humbly to Indigenous people’s stories of the nature-culture continuums, with the ‘non-humans’ in these stories perhaps becoming central in my following works.

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<sup>6</sup> To see an example of critical posthuman thinking, look at [The Blue Humanities Archive](#) – an interdisciplinary project supporting water biodiversity.

## 5 Intersectionality

Intersectionality has become a word used in various social projects and study areas concerned with inequalities that intersect the categories of culture, race, class, gender, and sexuality, among many others (Collins, 2015). The idea of intersectionality was pointed out by the US Black feminist movement in the 1970s and 1980s. African American women-organised communities, spreading awareness about their experiences of race, class, gender, and sexuality discrimination, highlighted the need for a complex answer to the complex system of injustices. First taking the form of social activism, the idea later entered academia (although it still had no name), giving birth to new intersectional academic fields, such as women's studies, which allowed scholars from separate disciplines to come together (Collins, 2015). The term intersectionality was developed by Crenshaw in 1991, who explored the intersections of race with other forms of oppression. Collins (2015) points out how the current overuse of the term intersectionality across a range of domains, paradoxically, has made it fuzzy and less powerful.<sup>7</sup> To arrive at a definition of intersectionality is problematic precisely because of its intersectional nature. That is also why intersectionality is often used without justification for many not truly intersectional activities. The many false intersectional activities are essentially theories rather than active praxis. Intersectionality understood as critical praxis, does not omit the active part of reflecting on itself, which is central in dealing with inequalities (Collins, 2015). Collins (2015) gives the example of a risk of a purely theoretical understanding of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which defines human rights in separate categories.

In the present study, I use *intersectionality* as an approach to studying decoloniality in the context of higher education, whereby striving for a comprehensive presentation of the topic. That involves stating my positionality (throughout the thesis) by reflecting on my position in the world, thereby trying to reach the limits of my knowledge – reflecting on what we are ceasing to be (noting the actual) and what we are in the process of becoming (actualising the virtual) (Braidotti, 2019-a). There are two more things I wish to emphasise in my intersectional engagement with de/coloniality. First, coloniality, as I see

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<sup>7</sup> I also recommend reading a more up-to-date work by Collins et al. (2021).

it, is one of many forms of oppression with which it may intersect (such as racism, patriarchy, transphobia, ableism, and an infinite number of others) (Stein et al., 2021, 12), thus it is always necessary to bridge and extend categories, providing a complex response to various context-specific inequalities experienced by oppressed knowers. Second, intercultural philosophy is just one way to approach decoloniality, which cannot be applied hegemonically and become a universal way to decolonise.

## **6 Alliance Building and Insurgent Cosmopolitanism**

In the present study, whether I speak about culture, race, gender, or other categories in seeking global justice, I recognise that they are constructed. When concentrating on the liberation of people of one category, the individuals corresponding to that category might not be emancipated at all since different kinds of oppression can intersect one person (Collins, 2015). Because people do not suffer from marginalisation as categories but as individuals, the solution lies in creating non-exclusionary alliances integrating the various individuals (Santos, 2014). For instance, activists can come together as a strategic regional alliance to defend their local specific territories (places) forming that region. A social movement representing Black communities of the Colombian Pacific rainforest follows such a strategy. Although constructing an abstract category of region and highlighting one of the regions – the Pacific rainforest – with a common goal to protect their territories, the ways to achieve this goal are fundamentally locally specific with a focus on a local community and its society (which can also include non-humans in Indigenous cultures) (Escobar, 2001). Similarly, feminists from different contexts can join not based on gender but on context-specific marginalisation (that is what intersectional feminism values) (Mohanty, 2003). Most importantly, if oppressed people of all different kinds, along with their allies from the One-Third World, start to cooperate, they can much more effectively challenge Eurocentric thought that claims global universality for itself and, at the same time, create a respectful, just world of *insurgent cosmopolitanism*, as Santos (2014) calls it.

## **7 The Eurocentric Paradigm of Science and Modernity**

Historian Thomas Kuhn (1962) introduced the theory of the ‘scientific paradigm’, according to which science develops thanks to competing schools that succeed each other. There is always, perhaps, a long time frame when a scientific theory stays unchallenged, being considered truth or a ‘normal science’. When a competing theory emerges (as it

always does), it becomes a normal science itself. Newton's theory of motion succeeded Aristotle's and was later replaced by Einstein's theory of relativity. Kuhn does not see this process as a linear progression towards truth, but he still believes in the power of science to discover the principles of nature. Hence, while he recognises the ever-present irrationality of scientific knowledge based on the paradigm construction, he continues to place science above other knowledge systems, therefore limiting his search for truth to the Eurocentric *paradigm of science* (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2021, 89).

Modern science is part of the modern era. Invented by European theorists, it plays a central role in the Eurocentric paradigm of science (Bhambra, 2007). The shift from the 'traditional' to the 'modern' was first conceptualised by the pioneers in sociology – including the 'father of sociology' Comte – who formulated theories about the progressive development of society. The sociologists reflected on the contemporary, early post-Enlightenment times, which they perceived as radically different from what preceded the Renaissance, the French Revolution, and the Industrial Revolution. These revolutions were seen as marking a new era of modern (scientific) thinking, modern (liberal) state, and modern (industrialised) economy. Authors writing about the turn towards the modern determined, limited by the biases of Eurocentric culture, what is covered, how it is framed, and what stays omitted. Importantly, one large adverse side of modern society – slavery – stayed largely neglected in connection to modernity. Modernism was invented by sociology, which failed to reflect the experiences of other cultures when interpreting history (Bhambra, 2007, 48–64).

Modern science builds on the premise that anything validated by reason becomes a fact, and anything experienced through feelings – such as the belief in God(s) – is false. Because science claims this frame of rationality and irrationality to be universal, it posits itself upon other cultures. Yet, it fails to answer the question of why it should be universal. Why should what is argued by reason be the only truth? The single thing indicating that science could be different from other cultural traditions is that it sees itself as different. Thus, it does not recognise the fact that every culture has its own epistemologies, ontologies, axiologies, and research methodologies (Chilisa, 2012; Mignolo, 2021). Said differently, every culture has its philosophy.

Intercultural philosophy does not imply relativism. While refusing 'modernism' as a part of a Eurocentric hegemonic construct of linear-progressive history can seem like a fall

into relativism with cultures unable to discuss any idea in a common language, Bhabra (2007) suggests an alternative and proposes the reconstruction of the framework of understanding based on *connected histories* – histories that do not derive from a singular standpoint, replacing the paradigm of modernity with dialogical construction of reality, thus making a link between previously separated knowledge traditions.<sup>8</sup>

## 8 The Eurocentric Paradigm of Philosophy

Philosophy is traditionally defined as a systematic, rational inquiry into the substance of the world, in the sense of the Cartesian *cogito ergo sum* (I think, therefore I am) (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2021, 82). Kant saw the European continent as the only place where philosophy had ever been practised, so he summarised the history of philosophy from ancient Greece through the Roman Empire to the Enlightenment (Serequeberhan, 2002).<sup>9</sup> He conceived Europe as gradually advancing its knowledge about the world, which, one day, could ‘give law to all the others [continents]’ (Kant, 1784, as cited in Serequeberhan, 2002, 82). Similarly, for Hegel, and after him, Marx, what originates in Europe is ‘modern’ and ‘real’, while other cultures are ‘backwards’, ‘savages’, and ‘human animals’ (Serequeberhan, 2002).<sup>10</sup> Later, Said (1978) conceptualised this apparent division as ‘othering’ or creating the ‘Others’. This distinction between Europe and the rest was further stratified – Black peoples of Africa were less human than other ‘savages’ elsewhere outside Europe (Serequeberhan, 2002, 81–82).<sup>12</sup>

To deny Europe the right to its privileged status, we must first acknowledge the interactions that always took place between cultures, such as the exchange of knowledge between ancient Egypt and ancient Sub-Saharan African cultures. Ancient Egypt

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<sup>8</sup> Bhabra takes the concept of ‘connected histories’ from the historian Subrahmanyam (1997).

<sup>9</sup> Modern philosophers continued to theorise based on the idea of the ‘rationality of the man’, established in the ethics of Plato and Aristotle (Outlaw, 2002, 165).

<sup>10</sup> Biakolo (2002, 9) writes more on the Eurocentric cultural hierarchy.

<sup>11</sup> Serequeberhan (2002, 83, 81) cites Kant (1786): ‘[M]an’s departure from that paradise which his reason represents as the first abode of his species was nothing but the transition from an uncultivated, merely animal condition to the state of humanity [...]’. Kant (1964) also wrote that: ‘Mr. Humes challenges anyone to cite a single example in which a Negro has shown talents, and asserts that [...] not a single one was ever found who presented anything great in art or science or any other praise-worthy quality, even though among the whites some continually rise aloft from the lowest rabble, and through superior gifts earn respect in the world’.

<sup>12</sup> As Franz Fanon (1967, 18) writes, ‘the Negro of the Antilles will be proportionately whiter – that is, he will come closer to being a real human being – in direct ratio to his mastery of the French language’.

contributed significantly to ancient Greek civilisation, the latter then rediscovered by Enlightenment philosophers. Therefore, the geographical unit of Europe, with its philosophy and science,<sup>13</sup> is not a separate world to which other cultures have not contributed their knowledge (Irele, 2002, 51).<sup>14</sup> Second, we should extend the definition of philosophy to include diverse ways to reason, not just the Eurocentric one. The second point is described more deeply in the sub-chapter on Indigenous epistemologies.

## **9 The Eurocentric Paradigm of Gender**

As Mohanty (2003) writes, it is mainly ‘women’ and ‘girls’ from the ‘Global South’ who suffer most from global capitalism. What connects them is not gender because gender is a social construct. One-Third World feminists often forget that their ‘sisters’ from the Two-Thirds World are not necessarily ‘women’ and ‘girls’, nor are they ‘sisters’. European nuclear family with a ‘woman’, a ‘man’ (the breadwinner), and ‘children’ is not a universal model worldwide. A person whom we would call a ‘woman’ in English might be marginalised but might also be privileged in a given society. In Africa, age is traditionally the primary factor that determines social position. A person called a ‘sister’ in Eurocentric languages might be much more distant from a person with whom she shares the same parents than from her ‘cousins’ (Oyewumi, 2002).

Patriarchy describes a social order with a long history where ‘men’ use the discourse of gender dualism to create a division between themselves and ‘women’ and profit from it.<sup>15</sup> Everything rational is associated with ‘men’ and assigned universality, whereas all natural relates to ‘women’ and subjectivity. Today, patriarchy manifests itself, for example, in modern science. Sociobiology, for instance, is concerned with biological determinism, searching for universal principles of society. Sociobiologists examine the gender binary

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<sup>13</sup> Gradually, philosophy, theology, and essentially the entire field humanities have been subjected to science in the sense of natural sciences (Santos, 2014). Alam (1983, 26) comments on it: ‘[...] neoplatonic Aristotelian Christian cosmology with its hierarchies in heaven and earth was challenged by and decisively defeated by the new philosophy, which was different variants of mechanical philosophy’.

<sup>14</sup> This was demonstrated by the Senegalese theorist Cheikh Anta Diop and further elaborated by others, especially Théophile Obenga (Irele, 2002, 137–138). Also, the Nigerian professor Sophie Oluwole (2014) argues, in her detailed analysis, that Ọ̀rúnmìlà, who was living among the Yoruba people of Western Africa at the time of Socrates, practised philosophy in no way less worthy than that of Socrates.

<sup>15</sup> Note that there are also Indigenous ‘patriarchies’, which in many cases have been reinforced by coloniality, even if the intention may have been to empower ‘women’ (Mohanty, 2003).



with the prevalent condition in the natural world, where the male is the promiscuous active figure seeking the female, who passively chooses among them with no creativity (Santos, 2017, 75–78).

## 10 Indigenous Epistemologies

*Indigenous epistemologies* are traditionally found in stories, songs, proverbs, myths, and similar practices, not in the Eurocentric positivist seek for truth. Not being written down but transmitted orally or by practices such as dance and rituals, they are thus fundamentally different from Eurocentric philosophy and science.<sup>16</sup> Their practice of philosophy does not lie in theorising (Chilisa, 2012). Their epistemologies and ontologies create one world without a delineated theorising subject (Escobar, 2016). Yet Indigenous philosophies are based on reason (Ramose, 2003-a). For instance, Africans, when they hear music, they move themselves to the rhythm while creating the emotion of *cosmic harmony*. Although they decide spontaneously, this does not mean their decision is irrational (Ramose, 2003-b). Other types of reasoning do not suit the Eurocentric paradigm of philosophy and science. It is reasoning expressed through practice; not ‘neutral’ theorising isolated from reality.

The nature-culture division is one of the central ideas of Eurocentric philosophy and science. It has a destructive impact on other cultures, for example, in the form of development policies (see Kothari, 2019). Nature is perceived differently in various cultures, and many do not view the natural and human worlds (accompanied by the spiritual world) as strictly separate (Escobar, 2001). Though words like ‘community’, ‘culture’, or ‘nature’ are used in the present study, they should not be deemed universal categories since they might not have equivalents in other cultures. Let me illustrate this on the African philosophy of ubuntu of the Zulu and Xhosa peoples of Southern Africa, the principles of which can be found in most Indigenous philosophies throughout Sub-Saharan Africa (van Norren, 2017, 191). Ubuntu philosophy stands on three legs – people living now (the living), their ancestors (the living dead) and those who will live in the future (the yet-to-be-born) (Ramose, 2005-a). The African ‘community’ cannot be

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<sup>16</sup> Presbey (1996), for instance, is one of the contributors to the topic of orally transmitted philosophy – the expression of knowledge often disregarded to be a true philosophy.

perceived as just the living; it also entails the ancestors and the yet-to-be-born, establishing intergenerational solidarity (Kelbessa, 2022). In Africa, traditionally, the whole universe is the expression of God; therefore, the land is sacred and must be protected for future generations and as the home to spirits and ancestors. Some animals and plants serve as totems. Totemism is the belief that humans are spiritually connected with certain animals or plants and respect each other, with different tribals and their members connected to different totems (Kelbessa, 2022). Many Indigenous worlds are characterised by such interconnectedness, collectively called ‘relational ontologies’ (Escobar, 2016).

## 11 Coloniality and Decoloniality

The colonisation of Indigenous lands was de facto legitimised by the ‘Doctrine of Discovery’ – a series of papal bulls issued in the 15<sup>th</sup> century – which guaranteed Spain and Portugal the right to possess the lands they discovered as long as they had not yet been under the rule of a Christian king. Other countries later justified the same practices by referring to the Doctrine (Miller, 2019). These colonial states were discovering Indigenous lands, considering them empty because they were not Christian.

Tuck & Yang (2012) distinguish three forms of colonialism. The first is characterised by extracting fragments of Indigenous worlds – such as knowledge, materials, animals, plants, and humans (*external colonialism*) – often using military power. The second kind of colonisation involves colonisers attempting to control Native people living within the ‘domestic’ borders of the imperial nation, segregating them in prisons, ghettos, reservations, and boarding schools (*internal colonialism*).<sup>17</sup> The third kind of colonialism entails both external and internal colonialism, whereby the colonisers take fully over the Indigenous peoples’ lives and lands (*settler colonialism*) (Tuck & Yang, 2012).<sup>18</sup> Colonisation is not without violence, both physical and epistemic. In his *Necropolitics*, Cameroonian theorist Mbembe (2003) describes processes by which some colonisers hold

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<sup>17</sup> In fact, external and internal modes of colonialism ‘overlap, reinforce, and contradict’ each other in a local-specific context (Tuck & Yang, 2012).

<sup>18</sup> An example of a settler colonial state is the United States, where many Indigenous peoples have been displaced, segregated, and re-educated (internal colonialism), and, at the same time, fragments of Indigenous peoples’ worlds have been extracted (external colonialism) (Tuck & Yang, 2012).

Indigenous peoples in a state of barely living. They are alive, but under the brutality of colonial oppression, their lives closely resemble death.<sup>19</sup>

The nightmare did not end with formal decolonisation. *Decolonising*, in the title of this thesis, stands for ‘making non-Eurocentric’, in our case, education. In my thesis, I borrow from Maldonado-Torres (2016), cited in Mignolo & Walsh (2018), who distinguishes between *decolonisation* and *decoloniality* (although I also continue to use the former for referring to the latter, as many other scholars). Decoloniality highlights that the formal process of decolonisation failed to address the so-called ‘colonisation of the mind’ (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1987). Newly independent states have faced adverse effects of the ‘postcolonial’ global political and economic order. The new global structures led to the formation of national minority elites in the previous colonies, which has served the Western hegemony by supporting colonialism both within national borders and in global governance (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018). Today, colonialism manifests itself mainly (but not exclusively) as the ongoing settler colonisation of Indigenous peoples and the continuing legacies of Black enslavement (including militarism and the violent policing of state borders), the accumulated onto-epistemic matrix of injustices stemming from the colonial oppression (for instance, uneven distribution of ‘resources’, (scientific) racism, and heteropatriarchy), and global governance reinforcing coloniality by unjust power distribution (such as the lending policies of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, immigration control policies of the European Union, etc.) (Stein & Andreotti, 2016). These effects are ascribed, by postcolonial scholars, to the worldwide universal application of the Eurocentric ideas of the nation-state and capitalism (and other related ideas within the modern/colonial imaginary). In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, science became the rationale for capitalism (Santos, 2014). During decolonisation, the Eurocentric concept of independent nation-states was applied to the rest of the world. Capitalism overshadowed other kinds of economies and the state removed traditional forms of social organisation.

The decolonial work can be approached either narrowly, conducted within existing institutional infrastructure, or deeply, by being open to new things arising in the long term

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<sup>19</sup> Mbembe builds on Foucault's concept of *biopolitics*.

(Stein et al., 2021, 4–5). The drawbacks of capitalism and the state have been framed scientifically as either market or political failures and have never been interpreted (in the mainstream) as a failure of capitalism/the state as such (Santos, 2014). Shallow decolonisation implies working with the existing institutional settings (Stein et al., 2021), which involves the global redistribution of resources and power, defence of human rights, recognition of non-binary gender rights and the rights of nature, to provide some examples. But for ‘the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house’ (Lorde, 2007), more is needed in the long term. Deeper decolonisation means the openness to experience thinking-feeling beyond capitalism, beyond the nation-state, beyond gender, and beyond science.

Over time, decoloniality/decolonisation has become, similarly to intersectionality, an overused metaphor without transformative potential. Tuck & Yang (2012) argue that with decolonisation becoming a metaphor, the people who were or continue struggling with settler colonialism are losing their right to get their places back. It also implies the so-called ‘settler moves to innocence’ – the settler-coloniser handing over the responsibility for settler colonialism by pretending decoloniality, often to silence the emotion of blame for it. In my conception of decoloniality, I disregard it as a metaphor and acknowledge that settler decolonisation is a fundamental part of mental decolonisation for, without the land, Indigenous philosophies are becoming extinct (given the fact that they are practised in places and – inseparable from nature – by places) (see, e.g., Escobar, 2001; Tuck & Yang, 2012; Simpson, 2014). Decolonisation must not be reduced to theorising about decolonisation. Theorising without practice is not decolonising. In their text on decolonising the university, Bhabra et al. (2020) point out the necessity to draw red lines around decolonisation if it is not to lose its power and become a widespread new concept – yet – inside the same old structures. In my thesis, I call for ambitious decolonial moves, recognising that – as an influential anti-colonial theorist Fanon (1963) writes – ‘decolonization never goes unnoticed’.

In a given culture, what can be expressed is known, and what is known can be expressed. Enlightenment philosophers assumably played a large role in the legitimization of slavery and racism since they wrote about the difference between the ‘foolish’, ‘irrational’, ‘uncivilised’, ‘human-animal savages’ and the ‘white intellectuals’ (Serequeberhan, 2002). Given that ‘white people’ were so ‘different’ from the Others, the latter could be

treated differently by the former. Later, it was not hard for succeeding theorists to believe that Europe, with all its inventions, discoveries, and advanced science, was the chosen one to help other continents escape human suffering (Serequeberhan, 2002) – a suffering Europeans largely caused by destroying cultures that sustained and gradually evolved for hundreds of years before (though I am not idealising them) (see, e.g., Escobar, 1988; Gudynas, 2011; Kelbessa, 2022).

From the colonial era until today, Indigenous peoples have been taught the (previous) colonisers' languages. Naturally, it is impossible to express their traditional ideas in those languages. Decoloniality applied universally still implies epistemic oppression and instead of universal application it is designed to embrace various cultural conceptions of liberation. Sometimes, we distinguish between decolonising and Indigenising, the former signifying the disruption of the existing colonial structures, the latter being about replacing them with Indigenous ones (Stein et al., 2021). Poka Laenui (2000, 150–160, cited in Mosima, 2022, 9) identifies five phases present in the course of decoloniality – rediscovery and recovery, mourning, dreaming, commitment, and action. South African theoriser Ramose calls for *mothofatso* (in South African Zulu) – translated as 're-humanisation of human relations' instead of decoloniality (Ramose, 2020). Other cultures might have their own expressions. Local sensitivity is what the imposed European hegemony misses when speaking about 'human rights', 'democracy', or 'justice' (Santos, 2014). To provide an example illustrating how creating one universal democratic culture is unethical, we borrow from Heinz Kimmerle. He mentions Mbongi (in Kikongo, a language spoken in Congo), an Indigenous democratic practice based on unanimity in which all community members engage in dialogues with each other until everyone agrees (Kimmerle, 2004, 74–75). Ecuadorian Indigenous peoples came up with the idea of a *pluriversal state*, which would be based on a new kind of democracy, intercultural and anti-capitalist (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018, 60–61).

## **12 Decolonising Higher Education**

The first universities were founded in Baghdad, Timbuktu, and Cairo around the 10<sup>th</sup> century and were later replicated in Europe along with their teaching methods (Santos et al., 2022; Santos, 2017). The shared goal of all the first universities was to form elites, whether religious, political, cultural, or scientific (Santos, 2017). In Europe, universities were then developing on a separate route, and during colonisation, colonial powers

introduced their university model to the cultures they colonised. European universities were reproduced as universal institutions globally – teaching in modern (colonial) languages about modern issues to develop modern solutions (Santos et al., 2022; Santos, 2017).

As I have already partly illustrated, universities were not the only social structure forced on other cultures by Europe and North America. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, universities expanded into the world together with the colonial project of *the nation-state*, which was racist and capitalist, since Indigenous peoples, Black peoples, and women were excluded from education (Santos et al., 2022). With *global capitalism*, the exclusion has accelerated, as education has become increasingly privatised (Santos et al., 2022). The continuing presence of the Cecil Rhodes statue at Oxfordian University could be, as covered by the media, to some extent driven by a threat of funding cuts for the university, and this is just one example of such exclusion (Rawlinson, 2016; Mohdin, 2021). In the following paragraphs, borrowing from Andreotti et al. (2016), I discuss three discursive orientations (and their intersections)<sup>20</sup> which can be observed within contemporary higher education. The discursive orientations are part of the two most salient imaginaries (which are juxtaposed, with contradicting effects on higher education) within the modern/colonial global imaginary – the civic (modern nation-state) and the corporate (capitalist market) imaginary (Andreotti et al., 2016).<sup>21</sup>

First, let me discuss a *neoliberal* discursive orientation. Neoliberalism is an ideology valuing the role of the free market with minimal state regulation in determining human well-being. In the late 1980s, universities underwent a deep transformation when higher education as a public good was diminished by neoliberalism (Santos et al., 2022). Education in the Global South was affected by a further erasure of local cultural identities

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<sup>20</sup> A discursive orientation refers to a group of discourses (Pashby & Andreotti, 2016). Discourse is described by Foucault (1972) as everything that can be said, thought, and done in a given society at a particular time. Discourse is shaped by and shapes both a society's epistemology (what is known) and ontology (how things exist). Discourse does not only mark what can but also what cannot be said within a society. Depending on the scale we focus on, discourse ranges from a simple judgment to entire systems of thought that form the basis of societal knowledge and practices (Foucault, 1972). I situate all discourses within the globally dominant modern/colonial imaginary (Andreotti & Stein, 2015).

<sup>21</sup> Two important others are the scholastic imaginary (associated with the 12th to 16th-century European philosophy, dominated by Christian thought and the revival of Ancient Greek Hellenic philosophy), and the classical imaginary (related to the Renaissance and the Enlightenment) (Andreotti et al., 2016).

and English became a necessary language for success in publishing activities (Santos et al., 2022). Internationalisation of higher education has been promoted as a mechanism to balance the erasure of cultural identities and practise intercultural dialogue but, today, it becomes clear it has too often been used to legitimise the neoliberal system and that ‘everything that quacks is internationalisation’ (Hans, 2024). Students are now educated to generate human capital, in the form of gained expertise in particular scientific disciplines, which can then compete in the global labour market. Grants and other sources of financing support disproportionately more STEM study areas over social science and the humanities (Stein & Andreotti, 2016). The oppression reproduced by the neoliberal discursive orientation is epistemic since only Eurocentric knowledge can excel, and material, whereby high financial costs exclude some students, which was criticised by the *Fees Must Fall* campaign. Furthermore, Global North universities occupy high positions in international rankings, while universities in the Global South lack the critical infrastructure needed for modern education (Santos et al., 2022).

A *liberal* discursive orientation builds on social democracy, which is still representative and decentralised, in line with neoliberal values, but stresses market regulation by the state. The nation-state serves its inhabitants as the guarantee of social justice and economic well-being. Keynesian economists would promote such a view and argue that state regulation is inevitable for human prosperity. While being sceptic about the free market as a means of ensuring social well-being, the liberal discursive orientation continues to ignore the material and epistemic structural inequality between the global economic ‘core’ and ‘periphery’ (Andreotti et al., 2016).

A *critical* discursive orientation acknowledges that there are onto-epistemic injustices produced and reproduced by the university directed by the modern/colonial global imaginary. It overlaps with the liberal discursive orientation, as both emphasise higher education as a public good. But, in contrast, the critical orientation highlights that for true justice, we must be willing to imagine the university otherwise (radical democracy) (Andreotti et al., 2016). Where else should we conceive other realities if not at the university, which has already evolved through many crises (Braidotti, 2019-b)?

The intersections of the three discursive orientations are neoliberal-liberal (economic rationalisations of former civic services, e.g., the importance of the humanities, but only to serve the market), liberal-critical (advocations for social justice without calling for

structural changes), critical-neoliberal (perception that radical justice can be achieved by neoliberal means), and the one where all three discursive orientations intersect (Andreotti et al., 2016). Now, let me elaborate on decolonial discourse as part of the critical discursive orientation of higher education.

The decolonial work in higher education may be divided into three patterns or strategies, which interact in a messy way (Stein & Andreotti, 2016). The most common one is emphasising inclusion, which is, however, rather tokenistic (Stein & Andreotti, 2016). It argues that some groups of students are structurally underrepresented in higher education, which should be changed. For instance, many researchers analysed the diversity of their university department teachers' gender and place of origin (Gorji, 2019; Achterberg, 2021). Nevertheless, when the previously excluded are supported to enter the academic environment (both students and teachers), often, there is the impression that they should be grateful and their unique identity is not valued when it threatens the status-quo neoliberal and liberal discursive orientations (Andreotti et al., 2015).

Contrary to such policies of 'inclusion', the second group of decolonial efforts in higher education is rarely present, because it involves challenging the established order. In former colonies, philosophy was presented as universal to students, so they had to study all the white men and their rational theories, even if these were not part of their culture (and continue to do so until today) (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2021).<sup>22</sup> For critical thinking, students should be given the option to put context-specific philosophies at the centre of their education (Mungwini, 2022). That applies both to students in the 'Global North' and 'Global South' and involves changes to curricula (by adding literature or other work of Indigenous scholars) and pedagogies. Different pedagogies give rise to different knowledge, whereby pedagogies connected to practice rather than theory enhance creativity (Wagner, 2005). For instance, the pedagogy of dialogue is essential to deconstruct and decolonise (Wagner, 2005). Shahjahan (2015) gives an example which shows the exclusionary character of scientific pedagogies. 'Unlike Western theories of learning and knowing [...], silence and 'nothingness' are paramount in Eastern

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<sup>22</sup> Depending on the nationality of the former colonial emperor, universities in some countries include some amount of traditional philosophies. For example, African philosophy is part of the curriculum at universities in previous British and Belgian colonies, but not in former French colonies in Africa.



philosophies of education' (Shahjahan, 2015, 496). The emphasis on the linguistic dimension of education is, therefore, not inherent to all cultures. Scientific methodology also presupposes the linearity of academic time. Academic life is exclusionary because it does not allow people with a non-linear sense of time to be in harmony with themselves and their bodies (Shahjahan, 2015). Not in all cultures, there is such a thing as a lack of time. The curricula should also mention that research methodologies can be built on Indigenous philosophies (Chilisa, 2012).

There is no decoloniality without critical thinking. Since the university today is dominated by the neoliberal discursive orientation, the goals of education are violently predefined. Humanities are expected to promote critical thinking (Ivković & Trajković, 2024), but because there is not much space for it, there is an exodus of academics outside the university. As Braidotti (in Davis & Braidotti, 2016) writes, people move to the art world, to private industry, where some innovation can happen. But they do so mostly on weekends, in their free time, which is a 'scarce resource' (Davis & Braidotti, 2016). There are few critical thinking initiatives in academia, because of the infrastructure tied epistemically to the neoliberal discursive orientation. The barrier is not so much financing (there are financial sources that counter privatisation, such as EU funds), but the fear of new (the providers of these finances restrain critical education epistemically). The humanities must support the creation of the epistemic infrastructure that would connect them back to the public, which has changed since their emergence in the 1960s (Ivković & Trajković, 2024), and allow them to escape the 'epistemic acceleration of cognitive capitalism' (rapid growth of scientific terminologies driven by the capitalist profit system) (Braidotti, 2019-a). That would enable them to reconnect to the public and maybe also to imagine other market economies besides capitalism: the commons, Indigenous economies, and others (Davis & Braidotti, 2016).

The second pattern also does not ignore that in settler colonial settings, such as in Canada and the United States, universities are located on stolen land (Stein et al., 2021). These universities could no longer function if the lands were returned to Indigenous peoples. Other universities are tied to fossil fuel companies or different unethical colonial projects (Stein & Andreotti, 2016). It is also highlighted that Global South universities often lack equipment for good quality education, so they are not placed high in international rankings and find themselves in a structurally unequal position, which is left to be solved

by the market (Santos et al., 2022, 3). Universities have been called, by (academic) activists, to reassess their politics. Many have issued statements of recognition of their colonial legacies and committed to focusing on ways to decolonise (Andreotti et al., 2015).

The previous two patterns fall under the shallow work of decolonisation rather than the deeper work of decolonisation. Promoters of beyond-reform decolonisation (Andreotti et al., 2015) see the university as not capable of decolonising and give rise to what Moten and Harney (2004) call the ‘undercommons’ – a space for people to whom higher education as the ‘commons’ is not enough and never be enough.

Interculturality in the university is seemingly supported in many ways, the question remains, whether intercultural dialogue is practised and intercultural philosophy arises. While it is a sad realisation that in most cases it probably does not – due to a lack of critical decolonial efforts, this can be perceived as a space for transformation, and the affirmative ethics of critical posthumanities make us open to new things. My thesis is not a decolonial practice but should be seen as ‘preparing’ for the decolonial practice, ‘preparing’ for the transformation – ‘doing one’s homework’ (Stein et al., 2021). It invites you (the readers) to imagine ways in which higher education based on intercultural dialogue and philosophy could arise (at your universities).

Although not living in a former colonial centre, Czechs also possess colonial legacies. In ‘colonial times’, they participated in the epistemic and material violent processes of Othering, for instance, in their imagination of the Turks of the Ottoman Empire, or their ‘civilising’ mission in Bosnia-Herzegovina (Malečková, 2022, 92). They also engaged in scientific explorations of the Others, their ‘discoveries’ being exhibited in museums and presented in academia (Křížová & Malečková, 2022, 30). A group of Czech academics have highlighted this in their *Decolonial Manifesto* addressed to local universities to mobilise decolonising Czech higher education (Arttalk, 2020).

### 13 Development Studies and Environmental Studies

In this part, I briefly discuss decolonial thinking in the context of development studies and environmental studies, which correspond to the name of my study programme (International Development and Environmental Studies). Nonetheless, I describe the study field only in general, to make a connection to what I study, without intending to refer to the specifics of my study programme.

The development studies community constitutes a wide range of views on development (Kothari, 2005). Generally, it deals with the need to ‘develop’ the livelihood of people in ‘underdeveloped’ countries of the ‘Third World’. Some scholars remain largely committed to material aid, others have become more concerned with social aspects as significant determinations of successful ‘development’ and have even begun to seek ‘alternatives to development’ (Kothari, 2005; Escobar, 1995). Development studies focus on structural social changes, crossing disciplines to provide holistic answers (Kothari, 2005, 3). Nonetheless, not often in development studies do we see hybrid theories, methodologies, and practices, the field thus being predominantly based on multi-disciplinarity rather than interdisciplinarity (Kothari, 2005, 4). Development studies in the current times of globalisation are more diversified than before in terms of representation of scholars of different gender, class, or ethnicity (Kothari, 2005, 4). Nonetheless, development studies often fail to reflect on the epistemic violence they reproduce. Boogaard (2021) describes her participation in a livestock development research project in rural Mozambique, which epistemically violated the target communities by using the ‘sustainable development’ paradigm. Although there were (some) Indigenous peoples represented during the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) negotiation (Chasek & Wagner, 2016), their epistemologies were not (Sultana, 2018). This is reflected, for example, in SDG5 – ‘Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls’, or in SDG8 – ‘To promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all’. To apply SDGs and development to all people without question is not politics based on interculturalisation, nor Indigenisation, but promotes epistemic injustice.

Boogaard & van Norren (2021) articulate four points for transformative ‘inclusive development’, which are not exhaustive but should serve as a starting point. First, promoters of ‘inclusive development’ need to *reflect* on the epistemic injustice they

reproduce. Second, engagement with *Indigenous philosophies* is required, whereby more appropriate terms are used instead of ‘development’, such as ‘harmony’. Third, we must be cautious about *knowledge appropriation*, engaging ethically with philosophies of different cultures and not using them in reports and other documents that in fact discriminate against them. Fourth, the *natural world* should be at the centre of our attention because we know it cannot be separated from Indigenous peoples.

In contrast to studies within natural sciences and social sciences, environmental studies are influenced by the humanities and thus question the engagement with nature and culture as concepts (Hartman et al., 2024). Similarly to development studies, they cross disciplines and, in contrast with them, often are even interdisciplinary (Hartman et al., 2024). Interdisciplinary and postdisciplinary research appear when disciplines are insufficient for academics. Undisciplined knowledge has been increasingly produced as part of the Digital, Environmental, Biomedical, and Public Humanities (Braidotti & Oostveen, 2024). The new transversal (or undisciplined) humanities arise both at the edges of scientific disciplines (such as physics, economics, or humanities) and from new ‘studies’ that are not yet disciplines of their own but are multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary, or postdisciplinary, the latter being my case (Braidotti, 2019-a). The new transversal humanities converge in the critical posthumanities, since they all to some extent embrace the ‘non-human’ and ‘not-fully-human’ Others (Braidotti & Oostveen, 2024).

## Methodology

In the present study, I strive for intersectionality by recognising that knowledge and research methodologies are never free of value judgments (Collins, 2015, 14). I am studying for a Bachelor of International Development and Environmental Studies, a largely multidisciplinary study programme. If I am to classify the present study according to the Eurocentric classification of academic disciplines, it falls into the humanities. However, my cartographies of intercultural philosophy and critical posthumanities make my thesis rather postdisciplinary than belonging to the humanities. To be undisciplined does not mean to resign to the rules of scientific disciplines, which discipline us and organise communication. It is to question and criticise them, being prepared to liberate ourselves in epistemic anarchy if necessary (Hartman et al., 313, 2024).

The structure of this thesis is in line with the standard academic format, although it would not have to fully align with it (Chilisa, 2020, 201–203). It could have been written, for example, in story form, if it was to express my points more accurately. Stories can help when the authors aim to preserve the message of their research, allowing them to escape the rules of scientific language. Adjustments to scientific form necessarily change the meaning of research findings, for ‘the closer you get to defining something, the more it loses its context’ (Wilson, 2008, cited in Chilisa, 2020). The purpose of scientific research is to define. Theorising is a practice of living that aims to understand other practices but fails to recognise itself as part of what is in reality a variety of diverse practices of living. Research results can also take the form of proverbs or poems from the researched Indigenous culture. Essentially, researchers who translate Indigenous languages should do so as precisely as possible and, better, write their work bilingually. Even if concepts might be possible to articulate quite similarly in two different languages, by translating them to make them intelligible, they lose their context and, therefore, meaning – their meaningfulness changes to serve science (Chilisa, 2020). In my thesis, when I present pieces of knowledge from Indigenous cultures, I try to state their translated and original version.

Literature for this thesis was obtained via mandatory and recommended reading material for the African Philosophy course I took at Wageningen University during my exchange study programme. I searched for further sources by typing keywords in the

Web of Science (WoS) and Scopus domains. To a small extent, I used Google Scholar. In this way, I strived for a balance between, on the one hand, the WoS and Scopus peer-reviewed sources, which are, however, limited in the coverage of books and works in social science and humanities and, on the other hand, the increased coverage of Google Scholar in the named disciplines (Mingers & Leydesdorff, 2015). The Educational Resources Information Centre (ERIC) platform was also explored to some degree. The scientometrics-based domains allowed me to find highly cited scholars and works, however, we should not overlook the exclusionary character of scientometrics (Mingers & Leydesdorff, 2015). A notable part of the literature was then identified by ‘snowballing’, that is, by finding more scholars and publications cited or referenced in previously identified sources. Some literature was provided to me in the various courses I took during my bachelor’s, hence the eclectic character of my list of references.

## Positionality

I state my positionality here and throughout the thesis to reflect on the limits of my knowledge. According to Mohanty (2003) privilege makes people blind to injustices. Because we can never be sure we see clearly, the positionality work is always incomplete. That is why I deem it important to nurture awareness of my gender, location, race, class, ethnicity, etc. I invite you (the reader) to also explore your positionality while you ‘translate’ the language of my thesis. My positionality is informed by intercultural dialogue and critical posthumanities, whereby reflecting on what we are ceasing to be and what we are in the process of becoming (Braidotti, 2019-a).

My motivation for writing this thesis was to raise awareness about decolonial discourse in the context of higher education and bring this discourse into the field of development studies and environmental studies in the Czech context. I acknowledge that academic language and English can be hard to understand for the public, thus not all people may access the message of my thesis. The interaction with the public is key to creating the university which is not an ‘ivory tower’ (Ivković & Trajković, 2024). While arguing for intercultural philosophy, my point of view is intended to inform and possibly inspire, not to convince the reader, since my knowledge is not universal. In times of massive extinction (of ‘humans’ and ‘non-humans’) on the Earth, intercultural dialogue can serve us as a hope, not naïve but affirmative and actualising.

I see myself as an ally to marginalised cultures, but I dare in no way to speak for them (Santos, 2014). I am privileged to be ‘human’, born and live in a ‘developed’ European country (Czechia), be white, study at university, be able to produce a thesis concerning other cultures and do so in English. The fact that I was inspired to write on decoloniality while taking a course on African Philosophy during my Erasmus exchange (during the winter semester of my third grade) at Wageningen University influences the diversity of examples I use for my argumentation, many concerning Indigenous philosophies of Africans. Before taking the course, I was not familiar with coloniality and Eurocentrism. I also met some students from Africa there, who were talking to me about their culture, which was very enriching for me. However, I do not generalise when speaking about Africans and Indigenous peoples, I only point out the need for epistemic justice for

oppressed individuals. My desire and the goal of decoloniality is to emancipate marginalised/missing people so they can speak for themselves (Santos, 2014; Braidotti, 2019-a).



## Discussion

This thesis is intended to inform about decolonial discourse in the context of higher education. First, it discusses coloniality and decoloniality in general. Then specifically in higher education, whereby dominating discursive orientations of higher education are introduced and decolonial discourse on higher education, as part of the critical discursive orientation, is debated.

The topic of this thesis is related to my study programme International Development and Environmental Studies. Development studies usually do not move within the critical discursive orientation, contrasting with environmental studies, where critical thinking generally arises. In my case, I strive for critical, postdisciplinary research, whereby bringing decolonial discourse into my study programme. I approach decoloniality as the praxis of intercultural philosophy, which creates space for the reconnection of oppressed and oppressive knowers (the ‘human’ knowers are central in my thesis, although ‘human’ and ‘non-human’ knowers are inseparable). The university is a well-suited space for such a transformative praxis since it plays a vital role in knowledge production and reproduction and has already evolved through many societal changes (Braidotti, 2019-b). My thesis is produced as part of the preparation for the decolonial work in higher education. Decolonising universities is not easy in the neoliberally oriented environment. Thus, intercultural philosophy can also arise ‘under’ the university (Moten & Harney, 2004), but my thesis concentrates on shallow decolonisation and seeks the potential to transform the university, which is, in fact, the reason I wrote it.

The limitation of my thesis might be the relative newness of the topic to me; therefore, the cited sources are not exhaustive. Nonetheless, it might still serve as a good overview of decolonial discourse on higher education. Other scholars can build on my work in many ways, including the option to contribute with additional relevant sources. Scholars can also ‘conduct’ research with Indigenous peoples or focus more on the voices of the ‘non-human Others’.

## Conclusion

Decoloniality is not a concept but an attitude emphasising the need to liberate colonised peoples from global Eurocentrism, thereby putting their philosophies at the centres of their worlds. In the present study, I suggest intercultural philosophy as a tool for decolonisation based on reciprocal respect and listening to people of different cultures. It seems like intercultural philosophy is missing in contemporary academia, whereby tokenistic policies account for most of the decolonial work in higher education.

In the present study, I first describe the concept of culture and disregard the universality of Eurocentric thought, including its idea of nature-culture division. I propose intercultural philosophy mediated by intercultural dialogue as a tool for decolonisation. Afterwards, I explain three types of epistemic oppression and epistemic injustice as one of them, highlighting the difference between comparative and intercultural philosophy.

Subsequently, I discuss critical posthumanities as my cartography, embracing the ‘non-human’ or ‘not-fully-human’ Others, who are the missing people (Braidotti, 2019-a). In this thesis, I focus on Indigenous peoples, yet, along with their liberation, other missing people are likely to be decolonised. As part of my cartography, I practice intersectionality, a praxis of reflecting on one’s knowledge. Throughout the thesis, I reflect on what we are ceasing to be and what we are in the process of becoming (Braidotti, 2019-a). The sixth chapter concerns creating intersectional alliances and strategic relationships for decolonisation.

What follows is an explanation of how modernity emerged and coloniality, its adverse side, has stayed omitted. This is mirrored in the Eurocentric paradigms of philosophy, science, and gender. The cardinal difference between Eurocentric thought and other metaphysics, I try to illustrate in chapter ten. I perceive Indigenous epistemologies as based on relationality, emotionality, and practice, instead of rational theorising.

Chapter eleven finally introduces coloniality and decoloniality, and the following chapter focuses on decolonial patterns in contemporary higher education, which are dominated by the neoliberal discursive orientations as part of the civic and the corporate juxtaposed imaginaries within the modern/colonial global imaginary.

Chapter twelve briefly puts my thesis into the context of my study programme the International Development and Environmental Studies, showing its relevance. At the end

of the present study, I present my methodology and positionality, reflecting on my cartographies – although I also do so throughout the whole paper. The discussion summarises the findings of my thesis and suggests ways in which it can be useful for future research and critical decolonial praxis.

I believe I have managed to fulfil the aim of my thesis. The aim was to contribute to the preparation for the decolonial work in higher education since it is not in theorising, but in practice, where decoloniality emerges. I invite the readers to consider their position and think of creative ways of practising decolonisation and intercultural philosophy at their universities.

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