

The Consciousness of Coloniality: A Phenomenological Inquiry

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Abstract

This article presents a phenomenological inquiry into the consciousness of coloniality – the psychological, epistemological, and moral structures through which colonial domination is sustained, internalized, and contested in contemporary life. Distinguishing among *colonialism* as a historical system, *coloniality* as its enduring structural legacy, and the *colonial mindset* as its internalized psychosocial form; the study examines how these forces persist beyond formal colonial rule. Drawing on phenomenological reflection and decolonial scholarship, the analysis explores learned inferiority, identification with dominant norms, and experiences of interior exile as manifestations of coloniality in lived experience. Situating these themes within broader intellectual genealogies, the article examines rationales for both the continuation and dismantling of coloniality and outlines four recurring aims of decolonization. It concludes by framing decolonization as an open-ended practice of ethical witnessing, reflexive critique, dialogical humility, and historical responsibility.

Keywords: coloniality, phenomenology, decolonization, colonial mentality, internalized oppression, exile, epistemic justice, ethical witnessing

Introduction

Across academia, the decolonization movement aims to dismantle Eurocentric and colonial structures and biases. It seeks to create more inclusive and equitable spaces that accommodate diverse perspectives and knowledge systems. However, the movement reverberates in heated controversy. It is met with a mix of endorsement, advocacy, confusion, indifference, and resistance.

In this article, I offer reflections on the *consciousness of coloniality*, including both the impulses that sustain coloniality and the efforts directed toward challenging internal and external structures of domination. Employing a phenomenological approach, I examined how coloniality is experienced, internalized, and contested. Phenomenology seeks to understand how phenomena are experienced and interpreted in lived

experience (Husserl, 1982; van Manen, 1990). The phenomenon under examination in this study was the consciousness of coloniality. To investigate this phenomenon, I drew upon Donald A. Schön's (1983) methodology of *reflection-on-action*, which involves revisiting experience to examine how beliefs, values, and patterns of interpretation are formed, sustained, and transformed. Guided by scholarship on colonialism, coloniality, and decolonization, I asked how the knowledge structures of coloniality become learned, normalized, and internalized, and how they might be questioned and reinterpreted in light of decolonial critiques. Because phenomenological inquiry requires critical reflection on the meanings through which experience is interpreted, the inquiry remained attentive to how understandings of self, relationships with others, and epistemic commitments evolved through reflection and dialogue (Merleau-Ponty, 1962; van Manen, 1990).

The colonial mindset (or colonial mentality) refers to the internalized ways of perceiving, evaluating, and relating to oneself and others that emerge within colonial systems of power and continue to reproduce hierarchies of knowledge, identity, and social worth beyond the formal end of colonial rule (Fanon, 1961; Memmi, 1957; Quijano, 2000). Although often associated with a past historical era, these patterns are not confined to history; they continue to operate in contemporary social, economic, and educational life, frequently without being named as "colonial." They appear in normalized hierarchies of value, in uneven opportunities, and in the marginalization of communities whose access to education, economic mobility, or civic participation are structurally restricted. They are also evident in cultural and symbolic forms – what has been described as cultural imperialism or "coca-colonization" – in which dominant languages, media, and consumer practices shape aspirations, identities, and desires across contexts (Tomlinson, 1991; Wagnleitner, 1994). In these ways, coloniality persists not only in institutions but in the subtle conditioning of perception, expectation, and belonging.

To clarify, *colonialism* refers to the political system and historical era of direct political and economic control and domination. *Coloniality* describes the enduring structures of power, knowledge, and social relations produced by colonialism, and the *colonial mindset* refers to the internalized psychological effects of these structures on both colonizers and colonized (Quijano, 2000; Maldonado-Torres, 2007). While formal colonial rule may have ended, patterns of coloniality continue in reconfigured forms within economic systems, institutions, and everyday life (Mignolo, 2011). They may be observed in global economic arrangements that maintain dependency, in media and popular culture that privilege particular languages and values, and in educational institutions that treat some ways of knowing as more legitimate than others (Said, 1978; Smith, 1999). These patterns are also evident in everyday life: in communities with unequal access to quality education, stable employment, or safe housing; in experiences of surveillance, exclusion, or displacement; and in public narratives that normalize inequality or obscure its historical roots. Although no longer explicitly identified as colonial domination, these structures continue to shape lived experience through

restricted opportunities, cultural displacement, and ongoing struggles for recognition and dignity.

Genealogies and Rationales for the Continuation of Coloniality

Historians, political theorists, and postcolonial scholars have demonstrated that colonialism and related systems of domination have been sustained not only through coercion but also through powerful justificatory narratives. Historical, economic, and psychological arguments have repeatedly been used to portray hierarchy, dependency, and unequal power relations as beneficial, necessary, or inevitable (Said, 1978; Mehta, 1999). One enduring historical rationale is the doctrine of the civilizing mission, articulated in nineteenth-century European political philosophy and embedded in colonial educational systems. John Stuart Mill argued that despotism was a legitimate mode of governance when exercised over “barbarians,” provided it served their eventual improvement (Mill, 1998, p. 13). Mill’s claim that despotism is legitimate when exercised for the “improvement” of colonized peoples situates domination within a paternalistic moral framework, in which the colonizer assumes the role of tutor or guardian over populations deemed not yet capable of rational self-government. Within this logic, resistance or criticism is not considered a legitimate political claim; it is interpreted as insubordination, incapacity or irrationality.

Economically, imperial and neo-imperial structures have been defended as necessary engines of development. Classical political economy treated colonial trade and resource extraction as natural extensions of market expansion (Smith, 1776), while modernization theorists such as Walt Rostow portrayed hierarchical integration into global capitalism as an inevitable stage of progress (Rostow, 1960). Contemporary development discourse often echoes these assumptions, framing inequality as transitional and structural dependency as efficiency (Escobar, 1995; World Bank, 2000).

Psychologically and sociologically, hierarchy itself has been normalized through theories of natural stratification. Herbert Spencer’s Social Darwinism cast competition and dominance as evolutionary imperatives (Spencer, 1864), while functionalist sociology later argued that inequality stabilizes societies by allocating roles and incentives (Davis & Moore, 1945). These perspectives portray asymmetry and inequality as biologically grounded and socially necessary.

A further rationale operates at the level of subjectivity. Albert Memmi and Paulo Freire describe how colonized and subordinated persons may seek psychic safety through alignment with dominant norms, languages, and institutions – what Freire termed “identification with the oppressor” (Freire, 1968; Memmi, 1957). Domination thus

persists not solely by external force or threat, but through desire: the promise of status, belonging, protection from marginality, and relief from existential vulnerability.

Taken together, the historical, economic, and psychological rationales discussed above illustrate how colonialism and coloniality have been justified and sustained across different contexts. Whether framed as a civilizing mission, an economic necessity, or a natural feature of social development, these arguments have tended to portray hierarchical power relations as beneficial, inevitable, or morally defensible. As scholars such as Said (1978), Mehta (1999), and others have shown, such rationales help explain the durability of colonial structures and the persistence of colonial ways of thinking long after formal colonial rule has ended. They also illuminate why efforts to challenge or dismantle coloniality often encounter resistance – not only because material interests may be threatened, but also because established systems of knowledge, social identities, and cultural assumptions have become deeply embedded in institutions and everyday life. Precisely because these justifications have proven so resilient, anti-colonial and decolonial thinkers have sought to expose their assumptions and articulate alternative ways of understanding power, knowledge, and human flourishing.

Genealogies and Rationales for Dismantling Coloniality

Arguments for dismantling coloniality emerge from a long and evolving intellectual genealogy that spans political economy, critical theory, anti-colonial thought, and contemporary decolonial scholarship. These traditions collectively reveal coloniality as a persistent structure operating across material, epistemic, and psychological domains.

Early critiques can be traced to Karl Marx's analysis of "primitive accumulation," which identifies colonial expansion as foundational to the emergence of capitalism (Marx, 1976). Through processes of dispossession, forced labor, and resource extraction, colonialism functioned as a mechanism for organizing global labor and capital. Although Marx did not fully theorize race or colonial subjectivity, his framework situates colonial domination within systemic economic and political processes.

The Frankfurt School extended this critique into the domain of knowledge and reason. Horkheimer and Adorno (2002) argue that Enlightenment rationality, while emancipatory in aspiration, also generates domination by reducing human and natural life to objects of calculation and control. In this formulation, reason becomes instrumental: it legitimates domination precisely by presenting itself as neutral, universal, and necessary. This insight anticipates later analyses of how epistemic authority sustains colonial hierarchies.

W. E. B. Du Bois offers a crucial bridge between structural and experiential analyses. His concept of "double consciousness" captures the internal division experienced by

marginalized subjects who must navigate dominant frameworks that deny their full humanity (Du Bois, 1994). This formulation foreshadows later accounts of internalized inferiority and the colonial mindset, highlighting how systemic domination is lived as psychological fracture.

Building on these foundations, contemporary decolonial thinkers articulate a more explicit critique of coloniality as a global matrix of power. Aníbal Quijano (2000) conceptualizes coloniality as the enduring structure that organizes labor, race, and knowledge beyond formal colonial rule, while Walter Dignolo (2011) calls for epistemic disobedience and the recognition of a “pluriverse” of knowledge systems. Nikita Dhawan (2014) further demonstrates how Enlightenment rationality simultaneously enabled ideals of freedom and human rights while also producing the epistemic hierarchies that justified colonial domination.

These genealogical foundations inform contemporary rationales for dismantling both the external and internal structures of coloniality. Frantz Fanon (1961) emphasizes the ethical and psychological necessity of liberation from colonial subjectivity, arguing that domination produces alienation and self-division that must be overcome through processes of “reintroducing mankind into the world, the whole of mankind (Fanon, 1961, p. 106).” Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o (1986) and Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) locate coloniality in language and research, advocating for the restoration of Indigenous epistemologies and methodologies. Paulo Freire (1968) frames education as a site of transformation through *conscientização*, while bell hooks (2000) identifies internalized inferiority as a persistent obstacle to liberation. Liberation psychology (e.g., Martín-Baró, 1994) further situates decolonization as a process of collective healing and ethical reconstruction.

This lineage of thought reveals that dismantling coloniality is a multilayered and multidimensional project. It involves confronting material inequalities, destabilizing epistemic hierarchies, and addressing the psychological residues of domination. In this sense, decolonization emerges as both a historical inheritance and an ongoing practice – one that links structural transformation with the phenomenological work of reconstituting consciousness.

Learned Inferiority and Internalized Oppression

The colonial mentality refers to an internalized belief that the culture and values of the colonizer are inherently superior to those of the colonized (Fanon, 1967; Memmi, 1957). Such beliefs are learned and reinforced through processes of socialization, education, and enculturation (Freire, 1968; Smith, 1999). Over time, individuals may come to view themselves, their communities, or their cultural traditions as deficient when measured

against dominant standards of value and legitimacy (Fanon, 1967, pp. 18–27; Memmi, 1957, pp. 120–128). The result is often a hierarchical worldview in which some forms of knowledge, identity, and ways of being are regarded as inherently superior to others (Quijano, 2000; Mignolo, 2011). These assumptions are frequently reproduced through everyday interactions and institutional practices, gradually coming to appear natural or self-evident. From this perspective, questioning or resisting dominant assumptions may be experienced as difficult or risky and may not always be readily recognized or supported.

This awareness of coloniality clarifies how it is reproduced and how it might be engaged. Recognizing how these patterns take hold within thought and practice directs attention to two interrelated sites of response: the internal, where habits of perception, interpretation, and judgment are formed through lived experience and socialization (Merleau-Ponty, 1962; van Manen, 1990), and the relational domain, where these habits are reinforced, negotiated, or challenged through interaction with others (Freire, 1968; Berger & Luckmann, 1966). In this sense, the consciousness of coloniality points toward forms of *intrasubjective reflection* and *intersubjective dialogue* as ways of interrupting its ongoing reproduction. Such practices resonate with Freire's (1968) concept of *conscientização*, in which critical reflection and dialogue enable individuals and communities to recognize and question inherited structures of domination.

Internally or introspectively, decolonization involves sustained examination of one's beliefs, affective responses, habits of interpretation, and tacit standards of worth. This intrasubjective work is not merely cognitive but ethical and emotional. Scholars of decolonization have observed that dominant academic norms often present particular forms of knowledge, language, and reasoning as neutral standards of rigor, while alternative epistemologies are treated as supplementary, subjective, or less authoritative (Freire, 1968; Smith, 1999; Mignolo, 2011). Through critical self-reflection, educators and researchers may become aware of the extent to which they have internalized these assumptions and reproduced them in their judgments of students, scholarship, and intellectual legitimacy. The work of decolonization then consists in recognizing these inherited hierarchies and experimenting with alternative criteria of scholarly value. Such practices may include validating narrative forms of knowledge, embodied testimony, community-based expertise, and relational ways of knowing. In this sense, intrasubjective decolonization is a process of witnessing how coloniality lives within one's own perceptions and moral reflexes and gradually disidentifying from those inherited structures.

In intersubjective dialogue, decolonization unfolds through relational practices that expose how colonial assumptions are reproduced collectively. In this context, intersubjective dialogue refers to the shared examination of the assumptions, values, and knowledge structures that shape educational thought and practice (Freire, 1968; Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Decolonial scholars have argued that curricula are never neutral; rather, they reflect historical decisions about whose knowledge is considered

authoritative, foundational, and worthy of transmission (Apple, 2004; Smith, 1999). From this perspective, dialogue among educators, students, and researchers can illuminate how particular intellectual traditions come to occupy central positions in curricula while others are marginalized or treated as supplementary. Such conversations encourage participants to examine the historical and institutional processes through which epistemic hierarchies are established and maintained (Freire, 1968; Mignolo, 2011).

Intersubjective decolonial practice therefore involves critically reflecting on the organization of knowledge, the distribution of authority within educational settings, and the assumptions that guide curriculum, assessment, and pedagogy. Through dialogue, these inherited structures may become visible and open to reconsideration. In working together, intrasubjective reflection and intersubjective dialogue form a recursive process: private recognition informs public critique, and collective transformation reshapes personal consciousness. Decolonization thus becomes a lived ethical discipline enacted within the psyche and between persons.

The colonial mindset is often internalized and operates below the level of conscious awareness, shaping perception, judgment, and self-understanding in ways that may not be immediately recognized (Fanon, 1967; Freire, 1968). Internalized coloniality often takes the form of learned inferiority – a persistent, often unexamined sense of inadequacy or self-doubt that shapes how individuals understand their place in the world (Fanon, 1967, pp. 18–27; hooks, 2000; Memmi, 1957, pp. 120–128). Rather than appearing as an explicit belief, it is lived as a quiet but recurring question of worth: whether one’s voice, knowledge, or way of being is fully legitimate. This sense of diminished value may become attached to various aspects of identity, including culture, language, social position, gender, or bodily appearance. Although these experiences differ in form, they often have similar consequences: they constrain what individuals perceive as possible for themselves, influence how they evaluate themselves and others, and encourage the acceptance of dominant norms as natural, legitimate, or preferable (Du Bois, 1994; Freire, 1968; Quijano, 2000). In this way, internalized coloniality operates as a lived pattern of experience that shapes perception, judgment, and action in everyday life.

Identification with the Oppressor

On the other side, the colonial mind manifests as *identification with the oppressor*. Freire argues that the oppressed often adopt the oppressor’s mindset and values. This leads to the oppressed being “sub-oppressors” or showing an “irresistible attraction towards the oppressor and his way of life” (Freire, 1968, p. 45). Similarly, Memmi describes how one

may simultaneously hate and admire the colonizer, thus leading to a profound psychological confusion (Memmi, 1957).

In feeling inferior to the colonizer or oppressor, one may come to prefer the colonizer's language, customs, and values while devaluing one's own. This process of identification may occur consciously or unconsciously and does not necessarily depend upon occupying a position of overt superiority. As one illustration, consider a professor who occupies a position of authority within the classroom. In many academic settings, instructors rely on traditional lecture formats and assume the role of primary source of knowledge and subject-matter expert. Such practices are often shaped by longstanding institutional expectations and inherited educational traditions rather than by individual intention alone (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Freire, 1968). At the same time, these role performances may reflect and reproduce assumptions about knowledge, authority, and expertise embedded within academic culture (Apple, 2004; hooks, 1994). From this perspective, identification with the oppressor need not imply conscious domination; rather, it may be understood as participation in institutional norms that sustain asymmetrical relations between teacher and learner.

From a phenomenological perspective, internalized inferiority and identification with the oppressor may be understood as recurring patterns of experience through which coloniality is reproduced in everyday life. They shape how individuals perceive themselves, evaluate others, and navigate systems of authority and belonging. As Fanon (1967), Memmi (1957), and Freire (1968) each suggest in different ways, structures of domination persist not only through external institutions but also through the internalization of values, assumptions, and hierarchies that come to feel natural or inevitable.

Coloniality and Exile

The mindset of coloniality, marked by the persistent, often unarticulated feelings of unworthiness and inferiority, is “of the same cloth” as the affective states of alienation, banishment, dismemberment, and exile. Edward Said’s (1984) depiction of exile reflects an enduring existential imprisonment within the machinery and mentality of colonial power. Exile, like coloniality, is not only geographic displacement. The mindset and mentality of coloniality, like Said’s construction of exile, “is the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted” (Said, 1984, p. 157).

This condition of interior exile also resonates with earlier accounts of divided subjectivity and colonial consciousness. W. E. B. Du Bois’s formulation of “double consciousness” describes the experience of seeing oneself through the eyes of a

dominant society that denies one's full humanity – a "twoness" that fractures the sense of self and complicates the possibility of belonging (Du Bois, 1994). Fanon also showed how colonial domination produces a lived experience of alienation, in which the colonized subject internalizes inferiority while simultaneously striving for recognition within the very structures that negate that recognition (Fanon, 1961). Similarly, Memmi (1957) observed that the colonized individual may oscillate between resistance and identification with the colonizer, resulting in a persistent psychological tension that destabilizes identity and self-worth.

Read alongside Said's depiction of exile, these accounts reveal a shared phenomenological terrain: a condition in which the self is divided, displaced, and compelled to inhabit a world that does not fully recognize it. What Du Bois names as double consciousness, Fanon as alienation, and Memmi as ambivalent identification may be understood as variations of the same underlying structure that Said describes as exile – an enduring gap between one's lived experience and the social norms, institutions, and expectations that define who is recognized, respected, and allowed to belong. In this sense, coloniality is both a system of external domination and a way of living marked by estrangement, in which individuals take part in dominant institutions while still feeling out of place within them.

Echoing Fanon's (1967) and Memmi's (1957) analyses of the colonized subject, this tension may be experienced by individuals educated within institutions that privilege dominant cultural traditions and forms of knowledge. Although formally included within educational and social structures, they may encounter implicit messages that their histories, languages, and ways of knowing are secondary or lacking in legitimacy. Participation and achievement may therefore coexist with a lingering sense of estrangement and unbelonging. In this sense, coloniality may be lived as a form of interior exile, anticipating the condition that Said (2000) described as a separation between the self and a place of genuine belonging.

Said's (2000) account of exile can also be understood as a description of the everyday phenomenology of colonial subjectivity – a condition in which one lives divided between outward participation and inward estrangement. One is not expelled from the homeland by force of geography alone, but from symbolic belonging, epistemic legitimacy, and moral worth (Said 2000). The individual learns to speak in borrowed vocabularies, to reason through inherited categories, and to narrate the self through conceptual frameworks that do not originate in lived cultural memory. The interior exile is the ongoing fracture between one's inner life and the world that names it. Individuals may achieve recognition within dominant institutions while still sensing a distance from the cultural assumptions, histories, or standards through which recognition is granted (Du Bois, 1994; Fanon, 1967; Memmi, 1957). Coloniality sustains this tension by normalizing displacement as adaptation and by presenting estrangement as the cost of advancement. The result is a form of interior exile in which inclusion and achievement coexist with a lingering sense of unbelonging (Said, 2000).

The sadness Said describes is therefore structural and persistent: a quiet, enduring grief that is experienced even in moments of apparent inclusion, success, or mobility.

Coloniality and ‘The Enlightenment’

The genesis of the colonial mindset and of coloniality may be traced to the rise of dichotomous/ dualistic thinking, scientific rationalism, and the philosophical architecture of the European Enlightenment. From the perspective articulated by Dhawan (2014), the Enlightenment cannot be understood simply as a historical movement that produced universal reason, emancipation, and moral progress. Rather, it must also be recognized as the epistemic condition of possibility for colonial domination itself. Dhawan argues that the same conceptual apparatus that generated human rights discourse simultaneously generated hierarchies of humanity – distinctions between the rational and the irrational, the developed and the primitive, the fully human and the not-yet human. The Enlightenment’s promise of freedom through reason has ironically resulted in domination by reason itself. Along with progress and emancipation, it has brought colonialism, slavery, genocide, and crimes against humanity (Dhawan, 2014, p. 9). Rationality here functions as a moral sorting mechanism: those who embody its standards are positioned as legitimate subjects of history, while those who do not are rendered objects of governance, education, and “improvement.”

This critique echoes earlier concerns articulated by Horkheimer and Adorno (2002), who warned that Enlightenment reason, in its drive toward mastery and certainty, risks collapsing into what they termed “instrumental reason” – a form of thinking that reduces the world to objects of control. What appears as rational progress thus becomes inseparable from domination, as the same cognitive structures that enable scientific advancement also justify the subjugation of nature and human difference. Dhawan’s analysis extends this insight into the postcolonial condition, demonstrating how the universalizing claims of Enlightenment rationality continue to organize global hierarchies of knowledge, humanity, and value.

This epistemic structure embeds coloniality at the level of cognition itself. To reason “properly” within Enlightenment frameworks is already to inhabit a world divided into binaries – reason/emotion, civilization/barbarism, progress/backwardness, subject/object – where domination appears as necessity and hierarchy as common sense. Enlightenment rationality and the Scientific Revolution’s mechanistic view of nature thus “served to sanction and legitimize the domination of nature and, by mutual association, women and social classes and groups who are seen as threatening or peripheral to reason and progress (Eckersley, 1998, p. 183).”

Read phenomenologically, Dhawan's critique, together with the earlier insights of Horkheimer and Adorno (2002), discloses why coloniality proves so resistant to dismantling. What appears is not merely a political ideology that can be consciously rejected, but a deeper structure of intelligibility that quietly shapes how reality is perceived, evaluated, and rendered meaningful. One may explicitly repudiate colonialism and yet continue to rely upon inherited habits of thought that privilege abstraction over relationality, control over reciprocity, and universal categories over situated forms of knowing. In this sense, coloniality reveals itself less as a set of doctrines than as a background orientation that often remains unnoticed precisely because it appears reasonable, normal, and self-evident. Even efforts directed toward decolonization may inadvertently reproduce these assumptions when they seek definitive solutions, totalizing explanations, or singular visions of justice.

From this perspective, the colonial mindset appears not simply as something learned, but as something inherited through the categories and distinctions with which modern subjects interpret themselves and the world. The phenomenological insight drawn from Dhawan and related critiques is that coloniality persists not only in institutions and explicit beliefs but also in the tacit structures that govern what counts as knowledge, rationality, and legitimacy. Consequently, reasoning otherwise requires more than intellectual critique. It involves the difficult and unfinished work of loosening one's attachment to assumptions of cognitive mastery and epistemic certainty and remaining open to forms of knowing that modernity has often rendered marginal or unintelligible. Coloniality thus appears not merely as a historical residue but as an ongoing epistemological condition whose power lies partly in its ability to make domination appear reasonable, inequality intelligible, and alternative possibilities difficult to imagine.

Decolonization: Aims, Agendas, and Methods

The preceding discussion has traced how coloniality persists as a lived condition—shaping perception, identity, and belonging through experiences of division, internalization, and exile. If coloniality operates not only as an external structure but as a mode of being-in-the-world, then the question of decolonization cannot be exclusive to political change or institutional reform. It must also be understood as a response to these lived conditions: an effort to recognize, interrupt, and reconfigure the historical, epistemic, and psychological patterns through which coloniality is reproduced.

The aims and agendas of decolonization outlined here draw from a range of intellectual traditions previously discussed, including Marxist critiques of political economy, Frankfurt School analyses of instrumental reason, and decolonial and postcolonial approaches to knowledge, identity, and power. These traditions are reflected in the

work of thinkers such as Frantz Fanon, Paulo Freire, Aníbal Quijano, and Linda Tuhiwai Smith, among others. While differing in emphasis, they converge in identifying coloniality as a multidimensional structure – material, epistemic, and experiential – that calls for equally multidimensional responses.

The four core aims presented here are not exhaustive, nor are they prescriptive solutions. Rather, they are synthesized from these overlapping traditions as recurring orientations within decolonial thought and practice. They are included here as a way of connecting the phenomenological inquiry of this study with broader educational and institutional contexts, illustrating how the consciousness of coloniality may be engaged reflectively, pedagogically, and relationally.

1. Exposing the Coloniality of Knowledge: U.S. History Textbooks and National Narratives

A first core aim is to expose and critique the coloniality of knowledge. This means challenging Western epistemology and disrupting the hegemonic narratives that portray Western knowledge as superior. Decolonial critique involves destabilizing the authority of Western rationalism, objectivity, and progress narratives and revealing their historical entanglement with empire, extraction, and racial hierarchy.

One way to critique the coloniality of knowledge is to analyze textbooks and school curricula. Historiographers and historians of education have noted that U.S. history textbooks have often organized the national past around narratives of discovery, settlement, independence, westward expansion, and democratic progress. For example, James W. Loewen (1995) argues that many U.S. history textbooks present a celebratory narrative of exploration, settlement, democratic development, and national progress while minimizing the roles of conquest, dispossession, slavery, and Indigenous resistance. In this conventional narrative, European settlers establish colonies, create democratic institutions, secure independence, expand westward, and gradually realize the ideals of freedom and opportunity. In the same vein, Frances FitzGerald (1979) observed that American history textbooks have traditionally narrated the nation's development through stories of discovery, settlement, expansion, and democratic achievement, often treating conflict, dispossession, and inequality as secondary themes. The following paraphrased and synthesized textbook summary illustrates how the celebratory character and progress-oriented themes have been narrated in traditional U.S. history textbooks (FitzGerald, 1979; Loewen, 1995).

Europeans arrived in North America seeking opportunity and freedom. Colonists established settlements, developed democratic institutions, won independence from Britain, expanded westward, and built a nation dedicated to liberty and opportunity. Although challenges and conflicts arose, the nation gradually extended freedom and prosperity to an ever-wider circle of citizens. *[Synthesized textbook narrative based on FitzGerald (1979) and Loewen (1995).]*

When read through a decolonial lens, this familiar narrative foregrounds exploration, settlement, and progress while backgrounding Indigenous dispossession, slavery, and the structures of coloniality that accompanied nation-building. By projecting this idealized worldview, the narrative functions as one of the nation's primary *origin stories* (*aka*, creation myths) that explain how the community, nation, or world came to be. Like Loewen's celebratory narratives and FitzGerald's progress-themed histories, origin stories often function as foundational narratives that provide communities with a sense of shared identity, purpose, and historical continuity (Campbell, 2008; Eliade, 1963). This decolonial reading highlights the extent to which coloniality functions as an organizing theme within familiar American origin stories and traditional narratives of national progress (Loewen, 1995; FitzGerald, 1979). The following intentionally hyperbolized summary illustrates how U.S. history would be told to highlight the thematic coloniality embedded in the knowledge structure.

During the European Exploration era, explorers like Christopher Columbus made voyages to the Americas to prepare for the colonization of the New World. In the Colonial Period, the English, Spanish, Dutch, and French established colonies in North America. The American Revolution (1775-1783) was pivotal in "coloniality" as the European Americans reversed their roles from the "colonized" to "independent" and soon morphed into becoming the colonizers of the American West, of Indigenous peoples, of racially different others, and of the International Economic Empire. [*Author's decolonial rendering*]

This author-constructed rendering is intended to foreground how coloniality can function as an organizing narrative within national histories. Its purpose is to make visible a pattern that is often backgrounded or normalized in conventional narratives and existing historical accounts. From this perspective, coloniality can be seen as part of how knowledge in history and education is structured, shaping how expansion, settlement, and national development are often narrated and understood (FitzGerald, 1979; Loewen, 1995). The centrality of coloniality in the American origin story and in U.S. history textbooks reflects its importance in the American national consciousness and identity. Those who identify with, and subscribe to, the colonial themes would understandably doubt, resist, or oppose the aims and agendas of the decolonization movement. Their voices call for acknowledging, recognizing, and preserving the national legacy and cultural tradition of a colonial social order.

2. Centering Diverse Knowledge Systems: Re-authoring the Curriculum

A second agenda of decolonization is to center and validate diverse knowledge systems. This aim challenges the assumption that legitimate knowledge originates primarily in European intellectual traditions, and instead affirms the coexistence of multiple epistemologies, as Mignolo (2011) terms it, a "pluriverse" of expertise rather than a

single epistemic center. This agenda may be illustrated by the redesign of a teacher-education or social-foundations curriculum. Instead of organizing courses around a linear canon that begins with European Enlightenment thinkers and treats Indigenous, African, Asian, or diasporic traditions as later “additions,” a decolonial curriculum might be structured thematically around shared human questions (Mignolo, 2011; Smith, 1999) – such as land, justice, kinship, or learning – drawing from multiple traditions as co-equal sources of theory. For example, a unit on education and moral formation could place Confucian philosophy, Haudenosaunee teachings, African Ubuntu ethics, and Freirean pedagogy in dialogical relationships rather than hierarchical sequence.

Such curricular re-authoring does more than diversify content; it challenges the tacit assumption that Western traditions constitute universal knowledge while other intellectual traditions are merely local, cultural, or supplementary (Smith, 1999; Mignolo, 2011). In this sense, centering diverse knowledge systems becomes a practical means of unsettling inherited epistemic hierarchies and broadening the range of perspectives available for understanding human experience. Rather than replacing one canon with another, the aim is to cultivate intellectual humility and foster more dialogical and pluralistic forms of inquiry within educational institutions (Dewey, 1916; Freire, 1968).

3. Addressing Ongoing Harms: Collective Memory, Dialogue, and Pedagogies of Repair

A third aim of decolonization is to address the enduring psychological, cultural, and social consequences of coloniality through practices of remembrance, dialogue, and repair (Fanon, 1967; Freire, 1968; Smith, 1999). Decolonial thinkers have emphasized that colonialism leaves effects that extend beyond political structures to include damaged identities, fractured collective memories, and unequal social relationships (Fanon, 1967; Maldonado-Torres, 2007). Consequently, decolonization entails not only exposing systems of domination but also attending to the injuries and silences inherited from those systems.

Collective memory and historical consciousness play important roles in this process. Roger Simon (2005) argues that remembrance constitutes an ethical encounter with the past that can open possibilities for responsibility and learning. Similarly, Freire (1968) viewed dialogue and critical reflection as necessary for confronting inherited structures of oppression. Practices such as oral history, memorialization, and truth-telling can therefore serve as pedagogies of repair by enabling communities and students to acknowledge past injustices and reimagine relationships shaped by coloniality. For example, a university course on national history might incorporate testimonies from Indigenous communities displaced by settler expansion, descendants of enslaved peoples, or migrant laborers shaped by imperial economic systems. Students would be

invited not only to analyze these narratives historically but also to consider how official histories have normalized silence, erasure, or moral distancing. In this sense, the classroom becomes a space where marginalized memories are brought into conversation with dominant narratives and where students are encouraged to understand contemporary inequalities within their broader historical contexts.

Such practices are not intended to erase painful histories or impose reconciliation prematurely. Rather, they seek to cultivate what Ricoeur (2004) describes as a responsible relationship to memory in which acknowledgment, interpretation, and ethical responsibility become possible. Although such educational practices may not resolve historical wounds, they foster ethical attentiveness to injuries and injustices that remain active in the present. In this sense, pedagogies of repair are directed less toward closure than toward sustaining conditions for dialogue, recognition, and renewed relationships.

4. Social Justice and Institutional Transformation: Reconfiguring Academic Power

Finally, decolonization seeks to link intellectual work with social justice and institutional transformation. Freire situates education as a dialogical practice through which learners uncover the historical construction of oppression and become agents of change (Freire, 1968). In higher education, this agenda translates into curricular reform, shared authority in knowledge production, community-engaged research, and policies that seek to redistribute epistemic and material power (Freire, 1968; hooks, 2000; Smith, 1999).

This aim may be illustrated by changes in how universities design research partnerships. Rather than treating marginalized communities as sites of data extraction, decolonial approaches to research emphasize collaborative relationships in which community members participate in defining research questions, selecting methods, interpreting findings, and determining how knowledge will be shared and used (Smith, 1999; Kovach, 2009; Tuck & Yang, 2014). Such approaches seek to reposition communities as co-creators rather than merely objects of inquiry.

For example, scholars of culturally sustaining pedagogy have argued that educational research addressing school inequality should be responsive to locally identified priorities, including language revitalization, cultural continuity, and community aspirations (Paris & Alim, 2017). Collaborative partnerships among educators, families, and communities can therefore help shape research agendas and educational practices that are grounded in local histories and forms of knowledge rather than externally imposed assumptions. Similarly, community-based participatory research emphasizes shared authority and reciprocal relationships between researchers and communities (Minkler & Wallerstein, 2008).

Institutionally, this orientation may also be expressed through revised criteria for promotion and tenure, recognition of community-engaged scholarship, and support for collaborative forms of knowledge production that extend beyond traditional academic metrics. In such cases, commitments to social justice influence how universities recognize expertise, define scholarly value, and share authority in the production of knowledge. These efforts seek not only to diversify participation but also to broaden the forms of scholarship considered valuable within higher education and to redistribute epistemic authority in more inclusive ways (Boyer, 1990; hooks, 2000; Smith, 1999).

Taken together, these four aims suggest that decolonization is not a discrete reform or a destination to be achieved, but an ongoing ethical, epistemological, and pedagogical undertaking. They call for critical attention to inherited narratives, openness to diverse ways of knowing, responsible engagement with historical harms, and the transformation of institutional practices that shape how knowledge and authority are organized. Such work requires intellectual humility and historical accountability, while inviting continual reflection on what it means to know, to teach, and to live responsibly in the enduring aftermath of empire.

At the same time, the resistance and ambivalence surrounding decolonization reveal a deeper difficulty. The effort to question colonial assumptions must itself proceed through habits of thought, languages, and institutions that have been historically shaped by coloniality. This tension does not render decolonization impossible, but it does suggest that the work remains incomplete, reflexive, and necessarily open-ended. These considerations point toward the concluding reflections that follow.

Conclusion: Dwelling within the Question

This study began as a phenomenological effort to observe how coloniality is perceived, rationalized, resisted, and reproduced within consciousness itself. Rather than treating decolonization as a program to implement or a doctrine to defend, this study approaches it as something people experience in everyday life. It looked at how decolonization shows up in consciousness: how we make sense of events, how we understand others, and how we decide what is right or just—often before we are fully aware of it.

From this perspective, the persistence of coloniality does not mean moral failure as much as cognitive and historical inheritances. The categories through which academics and scholars think—progress, development, rationality, merit, civilization, expertise—are not neutral instruments but sediments of a particular intellectual genealogy. To become aware of this inheritance is already to encounter a tension: one recognizes patterns of domination while simultaneously relying upon the very frameworks that made such recognition possible.

The phenomenological method employed in this study does not resolve this tension. Instead, it highlights and clarifies it. It shows how coloniality is sustained not only through institutions and policies, but through habits of perception, standards of credibility, emotional reflexes, and tacit hierarchies of value. The *undecolonized* mind, in this sense, is not an accusation directed outward to others, but a condition disclosed through phenomenological reflection – a shared situation in which critique and complicity coexist.

The preceding analysis suggests that decolonization is neither a final achievement nor a program that can be completed once and for all. Rather, it calls for sustained attentiveness to the ways coloniality continues to shape systems of knowledge, institutional arrangements, and everyday practices. Because these inheritances are often normalized, recognizing persistent structures of domination – external as well as internal – is necessary but not sufficient. Equally important is remaining attentive to the ways the dynamics of domination may be reproduced through language, curricula, professional norms, and even well-intentioned reforms. In this sense, decolonization becomes an ongoing practice of ethical witnessing and historical responsibility.

If a direction emerges from this study, it is not toward certainty but toward practice: the cultivation of sustained reflexivity, dialogical humility, and epistemic restraint. Decolonization, phenomenologically understood, becomes a manner of inhabiting uncertainty responsibly. It is about remaining open to being unsettled by others' knowledge, by historical wounds, and by contradictions within oneself.

Such an orientation does not promise liberation from coloniality in any final sense. It suggests, rather, the possibility of living more attentively within its shadows: naming its movements in thought, interrupting its automatic reproductions, and creating modest but meaningful spaces where other ways of knowing and belonging may appear. In this light, the task remains incomplete. It is ongoing, fragile, and relational – a form of ethical witnessing in which the work of decolonization begins with sustained attention to how patterns of exclusion, learned hierarchies, and identification with dominant norms take shape within lived experience, and how they are reinforced or unsettled in relation with others.

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