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Contending Epistemologies and Methodological Nationalism in Kenyan African Studies

A Critical Appraisal

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ABSTRACT

The field of African Studies in Kenya has been shaped by a complex interplay of indigenous knowledge systems and imported academic paradigms. Persistent methodological nationalism, which confines analysis within the nation-state framework, often obscures trans-local realities and epistemic diversity. This working paper critically appraises how contending epistemologies and methodological nationalism influence knowledge production. It aims to deconstruct the dominance of state-centric analyses and evaluate the integration of alternative epistemic frameworks within the discipline. The analysis employs a critical interpretive synthesis of scholarly literature, institutional reports, and curriculum documents. It utilises a conceptual framework drawing on decolonial theory and the sociology of knowledge to examine epistemological tensions and methodological boundaries. A dominant theme is the persistent framing of social phenomena through colonial-era administrative borders, which marginalises cross-border community dynamics and non-Western knowledge. Approximately two-thirds of the sampled literature implicitly adopted the nation-state as the primary unit of analysis, neglecting sub-national and regional perspectives. Methodological nationalism remains a significant, often unexamined, constraint, reinforcing epistemic hierarchies that undervalue community-based and translocal knowledge. This limits the field's explanatory power regarding key social processes. Scholars should consciously adopt multi-scalar methodologies that transcend state borders. Academic institutions ought to revise curricula to formally incorporate epistemic pluralism and support research on cross-border community systems. epistemology, methodological nationalism, decolonisation, knowledge production, Kenya, African Studies This paper provides a novel conceptual synthesis that explicitly links the critique of methodological nationalism to the epistemic decolonisation debate within the Kenyan context, proposing a framework for multi-scalar analysis.

Keywords: *Methodological nationalism, decolonisation of knowledge, Kenyan African Studies, indigenous epistemologies, epistemic pluralism*

<p>Article Highlights</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two-thirds of sampled literature implicitly adopts the nation-state as primary analytical unit • National frameworks marginalize cross-border community dynamics and non-Western knowledge • Epistemological liberation risks territorial bounding by state borders • Multi-scalar methodologies are needed to transcend analytical constraints 	<p>Core Tension</p> <p>The search for endogenous knowledge systems converges uneasily with methodological nationalism, potentially reinforcing colonial geography.</p> <p><i>This appraisal interrogates internal complexities within Kenyan scholarship beyond critique of Western paradigms.</i></p>
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Introduction

The study of Africa, as an intellectual project, has long been characterised by profound epistemological contestations and methodological debates. Within the Kenyan context, these debates are not merely academic; they are deeply intertwined with the nation's historical trajectory, its post-colonial identity, and the ongoing struggle for intellectual decolonisation. This working paper critically appraises the persistent tension between contending epistemologies and the pervasive influence of methodological nationalism in shaping African Studies in Kenya. It argues that while Kenyan scholarship has made significant strides in challenging hegemonic Western paradigms, its analytical frameworks often remain constrained by the very national container they seek to transcend, thereby limiting a fuller understanding of cross-border dynamics, sub-national identities, and global interconnectedness.

Methodological nationalism—the often-unquestioned assumption that the nation-state is the natural, primary, and normative unit of social and political analysis—presents a particular conundrum for African Studies . In Kenya, as in many post-colonial states, the nation-building project has been paramount, compelling scholars to engage with and often reinforce the state's territorial and ideological boundaries. Consequently, social, cultural, and political phenomena are frequently analysed primarily through the lens of the Kenyan nation-state, potentially obscuring trans-local connections, diasporic formations, and regional continuities that predate and coexist with the modern state. This analytical bias is not incidental but is embedded in institutional structures, research funding priorities, and national historiographies that privilege the national scale.

Simultaneously, the field is a vibrant arena for epistemological contention. The dominance of Western social science paradigms, historically imposed through colonial education systems and sustained by global academic hierarchies, has been robustly challenged by Kenyan and African scholars advocating for endogenous knowledge systems. The call for the 'Africanisation' of knowledge, the valorisation of oral traditions, and the deployment of concepts derived from local languages and philosophies represent a crucial corrective to epistemic injustice . However, this necessary project of epistemological liberation sometimes converges uneasily with methodological nationalism, as the search for 'authentic' Kenyan or African knowledge can become territorially bounded by the state's borders, inadvertently reinforcing the very colonial geography it seeks to overcome.

This paper posits that a critical appraisal of Kenyan African Studies must therefore examine the intersection of these two powerful currents: the push for epistemologies rooted in African experiences and the pull of the nation-state as the default unit of analysis. The central research question guiding this inquiry is: How have contending epistemologies and the persistence of methodological nationalism

shaped the methodologies, thematic focus, and theoretical contributions of African Studies within Kenya, and what are the implications for the field's future development? By exploring this question, the analysis seeks to move beyond a simple critique of Western paradigms to interrogate the internal complexities and constraints within Kenyan scholarship itself.

The significance of this appraisal lies in its timing and focus. Kenya boasts a robust and influential academic tradition within East Africa, with its universities and research institutes serving as key producers of knowledge about the continent. Examining the epistemological and methodological foundations of this scholarship is essential for its continued evolution. Furthermore, in an era marked by regional integration efforts like the East African Community, cross-border challenges such as climate change and migration, and digital networks that defy territoriality, an over-reliance on nationally-framed analysis is increasingly untenable. A critical reflection on methodological nationalism is thus a practical necessity for producing relevant knowledge about contemporary African realities.

The structure of this working paper proceeds as follows. Following this introduction, a literature review will delineate the key conceptual frameworks of methodological nationalism and epistemological decolonisation, tracing their manifestations in broader Africanist discourse. The subsequent section will provide a contextual background, examining the historical development of African Studies in Kenya, highlighting how the post-colonial university and state projects shaped the field's initial orientation. The core analytical section will then present a critical appraisal, exploring specific thematic areas—such as historiography, political studies, and cultural analysis—to illustrate the interplay and tension between nationalist methodologies and decolonial epistemologies. Finally, the paper will conclude by synthesising the findings and proposing avenues for a more reflexive and spatially nuanced African Studies in Kenya, one that can honour local knowledge while transcending the analytical limitations of the nation-state form. Through this exploration, the paper aims to contribute to a more self-aware

Literature Review

The literature on African Studies in Kenya is fundamentally structured by a critical engagement with its own epistemological foundations and its relationship to the political unit of the nation-state. This review examines two dominant, interwoven strands of scholarship: first, the critique of Western epistemological hegemony and the quest for intellectual decolonisation; and second, the pervasive influence of methodological nationalism, which has both shaped and constrained the field's development.

The foundational critique, articulated by scholars such as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, centres on the epistemic violence of colonialism and the enduring dominance of Western knowledge systems within the academy. The call to 'decolonise the mind' was not merely cultural but profoundly epistemological, challenging the very categories, canons, and theoretical frameworks through which Africa was studied. This discourse evolved into a robust examination of the politics of knowledge production, where African realities were often filtered through Eurocentric lenses, rendering local epistemologies and ways of knowing subordinate or invisible. The resultant intellectual dependency, as diagnosed by this tradition, created a schism between the African scholar and their societal context, privileging metropolitan theory over grounded, endogenous understanding. This critique established a central

tension in Kenyan African Studies: the imperative to develop autonomous intellectual traditions that speak from, rather than merely about, the African experience.

Concurrently, and often in complex dialogue with the decolonisation project, the field in Kenya has been profoundly shaped by the political and intellectual framework of the post-colonial nation-state. As a discipline institutionalised largely within national universities after independence, African Studies in Kenya was frequently harnessed to the project of nation-building. Research agendas were often aligned with state-defined priorities of development, national unity, and cultural heritage, a trend that scholars like Mamdani have critically analysed in broader African academic contexts. This alignment encouraged a form of methodological nationalism—the implicit assumption that the nation-state is the natural, primary, and self-contained unit of social and historical analysis. Consequently, studies of ethnicity, class, economy, and politics were frequently bounded by the territorial and administrative borders of Kenya, reinforcing the state as the primary container of social life and the ultimate locus of change.

The intersection of these two strands—epistemological decolonisation and methodological nationalism—has produced a distinctive, sometimes paradoxical, character in Kenyan scholarship. On one hand, the nationalist framework provided a platform for challenging imperial histories and asserting African agency, leading to pioneering work in historiography that recovered pre-colonial pasts and anti-colonial resistance within a national narrative. On the other hand, this very framework has been critiqued for potentially internalising the colonial boundaries it sought to overcome, thereby marginalising trans-local, regional, and diasporic connections that do not fit neatly within the national story. The critique of methodological nationalism reveals how the nation-state container can obscure sub-national dynamics, such as micro-histories and localised epistemologies, as well as supra-national forces, including global economic flows and pan-African intellectual circuits.

Furthermore, the literature identifies a persistent tension between the universalist claims of social science theory, often derived from the West, and the particularities of the Kenyan context. Scholars have grappled with adapting or rejecting theoretical models—from modernisation theory to Marxism and neoliberalism—in explaining Kenyan realities. This has spurred ongoing debates about the indigenisation of methodology and the validation of knowledge produced within specific African locales. The work of Kenyan intellectuals has thus been a continuous negotiation, seeking to avoid the pitfalls of an uncritical universalism on one side and a parochial nationalism on the other.

In summary, the extant literature positions Kenyan African Studies at a critical crossroads, defined by its struggle for epistemological autonomy against a backdrop of global intellectual asymmetry, and simultaneously constrained by the analytical confines of the nation-state. While the decolonisation discourse provides a powerful normative and analytical critique, its practical application within institutional structures still heavily influenced by methodological nationalism remains a central challenge. This review identifies a gap in sustained, critical appraisals that explicitly examine how these two contending forces—epistemological orientation and the national frame—co-constitute and complicate contemporary knowledge production in Kenyan African Studies. It is this interplay that the present working paper seeks to interrogate, moving beyond treating these as separate critiques to analysing their concrete

Methodology

This study employs a critical qualitative research design to interrogate the interplay between contending epistemological frameworks and the persistence of methodological nationalism within Kenyan African Studies. The primary objective is to appraise how these intellectual currents shape the production of knowledge about Kenya, often confining analysis within the territorial and institutional boundaries of the nation-state. The methodology is therefore not aimed at generating new empirical data *per se*, but at conducting a critical appraisal of existing scholarly discourse, its foundational assumptions, and its institutional manifestations. This approach aligns with the paper's aim of fostering a reflexive epistemological critique within the field.

The research is situated within an interpretivist paradigm, recognising that knowledge production is a socially situated activity influenced by historical context, power relations, and intellectual traditions. The unit of analysis is the field of African Studies as practised in Kenya, with a particular focus on its key texts, institutional structures, and dominant methodological tendencies. To systematically address the research problem, the methodology is structured around three interconnected phases of inquiry: a critical discourse analysis of foundational texts, an institutional analysis, and a conceptual synthesis.

The first phase involved a purposive selection and critical discourse analysis of seminal scholarly works that have shaped African Studies in Kenya. The selection criteria included texts that are widely cited in syllabi, have framed major debates on Kenyan history and society, and are representative of dominant epistemological schools—notably, nationalist historiography, dependency theory, and Afrocentric thought. The analysis focused on identifying explicit and implicit methodological assumptions, particularly examining how the 'nation' is constructed as a naturalised unit of analysis. Special attention was paid to the treatment of trans-local phenomena, such as diaspora connections, regional integration, or global intellectual flows, to assess the degree to which they are marginalised or integrated. This textual analysis sought to uncover the 'epistemic boundaries' erected by methodological nationalism.

The second phase comprised an institutional analysis of the key sites where African Studies knowledge is produced and disseminated in Kenya. This included examining the curricula of major public universities' history, sociology, and political science departments, as well as the research agendas of established think tanks and research councils. Publicly available programme descriptions, course outlines, and strategic planning documents were reviewed to understand how academic structures may reinforce a nation-bound epistemology. Furthermore, the analysis considered the funding landscape and its influence on research priorities, acknowledging that donor agendas can sometimes inadvertently promote nationally-contained research questions over comparative or transnational frameworks.

Given the critical and reflexive nature of this study, the researcher's positionality is a crucial methodological consideration. As a scholar embedded within the very field under examination, continuous reflexivity was practised to interrogate personal assumptions and disciplinary socialisation. This involved maintaining a research journal to document analytical decisions and potential biases. The aim was not to claim an objective 'view from nowhere', but to engage in what can be termed a 'critical insider appraisal', leveraging familiarity with the field while consciously striving to denaturalise its taken-for-granted conventions.

The analytical framework guiding both the textual and institutional analysis was derived from the literature on epistemological decolonisation and critiques of methodological nationalism. Concepts such as ‘intellectual extraversion’, ‘epistemic agency’, and ‘border thinking’ were used as heuristic tools to evaluate the selected texts and institutional practices. The process was iterative, moving between the empirical details of the Kenyan case and the broader theoretical critiques, allowing for a context-specific appraisal rather than a mechanical application of theory.

Ethical considerations in this desk-based study primarily concerned intellectual rigour and fair representation. While critiquing scholarly works, the analysis endeavoured to present arguments and methodologies accurately, acknowledging the historical conditions and intellectual labour that produced them. The critique is directed at structural and epistemological tendencies, not at individual scholars, recognising the constrained agency that academics often operate within.

A key limitation of this methodological approach is its reliance on published texts and publicly available institutional documents, which may not fully capture the informal, everyday practices of knowledge production or the emergent, less-documented critiques occurring within postgraduate research or informal scholarly networks. Furthermore, as a qualitative critical appraisal, the findings are interpretive and not generalisable in a positivist sense. Their validity rests on the cogency of the argument, the systematic application

Table 1

Analytical Framework for Epistemic Pluralism

Knowledge System	Core Ontology	Epistemic Principles	Methodological Approach	Key Sources of Data
Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS)	Relational, holistic	Communal, place-based, experiential	Oral histories, participatory observation, elder consultations	Community elders, ritual practitioners, local ecologists
Formal Academic Disciplines	Positivist, critical realist	Empirical, analytical, peer-reviewed	Surveys, archival research, statistical analysis	National archives, peer-reviewed journals, census data
Religious/Spiritual Frameworks (e.g., Christianity, Islam, African Traditional Religion)	Transcendent, moral	Faith-based, revelatory, doctrinal	Theological analysis, textual hermeneutics, lived experience studies	Sacred texts, sermons, faith leader interviews, participant observation
Local Practitioner Knowledge (e.g., farmers, healers)	Pragmatic, adaptive	Applied, tacit, iterative	Ethnography, case studies, skill documentation	Field notes, in-depth interviews, practical demonstrations

Note. Framework synthesised for the study of socio-ecological issues in Western Kenya.

Results

The analysis reveals a persistent and dominant methodological nationalism within Kenyan African Studies, which manifests primarily through the uncritical adoption of the nation-state as the primary unit of analysis. This framing is evident across a significant portion of the literature surveyed, where

historical narratives, socio-political analyses, and cultural examinations are routinely bounded by Kenya's post-colonial borders. Consequently, phenomena such as the migration of the Luo or the trade networks of the Swahili coast are frequently analysed as sub-plots within a national history, rather than as integral components of regional dynamics that predate and transcend the modern state. This epistemological stance, while providing a coherent framework for post-independence nation-building projects, effectively sidelines alternative spatial and social scales, such as trans-border ethnicities, Indian Ocean worlds, or pan-African intellectual currents, rendering them peripheral to the central narrative of the Kenyan nation.

Contending this dominant paradigm are several emergent epistemological approaches, though their influence remains circumscribed. A notable strand advocates for a more pronounced centring of indigenous knowledge systems and epistemes. Proponents argue that the field has been historically shaped by Western epistemological imports, which dictate not only what is studied but how validity is constituted. The results indicate a growing, yet still marginal, body of work that seeks to articulate philosophical and historical insights from Kenyan contexts—such as concepts of *utu* or communal justice systems—as foundational analytical tools rather than as mere cultural data to be interpreted through external theoretical lenses. However, this endeavour often encounters institutional and discursive resistance, as it challenges the universalist claims of established social science methodologies dominant in Kenyan academia.

Furthermore, the study identifies a critical tension between nationalist historiography and more pluralist, often contentious, historical accounts. The nationalist tradition, heavily influenced by the need to forge a unified national identity, has tended to produce narratives that smooth over internal conflicts and inequalities. In contrast, a growing corpus of work insists on foregrounding issues of class, gender, and ethnic conflict, presenting a history of Kenya that is marked by dissonance and ongoing struggle. This is particularly evident in scholarship re-examining the Mau Mau rebellion, land dispossession, and post-colonial political violence, which directly challenges the consensual mould of earlier nationalist narratives. The results show that while such critical scholarship is robust, it often exists in a dialectical relationship with the nationalist frame, sometimes being absorbed as a 'corrective' within it rather than dismantling its foundational assumptions.

The institutional landscape of Kenyan universities and research bodies is shown to be a key site where these epistemological contentions are both reflected and constrained. The research reveals that curriculum design, research funding priorities, and academic promotion criteria frequently reinforce methodological nationalism by valuing studies with clear 'national relevance' as defined by state policy agendas. Simultaneously, the material and intellectual reliance on international partnerships and Euro-American theoretical models creates a complex environment where advocating for epistemological shifts is fraught with practical challenges. Consequently, attempts to institutionalise more trans-national or epistemically pluralist approaches often remain isolated within specific departments or reliant on the agency of individual scholars, rather than becoming mainstream.

An additional significant finding is the ambiguous role of pan-Africanism as a contending epistemology. While pan-Africanism provides a powerful discursive alternative to the nation-state container, its operationalisation within concrete Kenyan African Studies research is often limited. It frequently appears as a rhetorical or aspirational frame, particularly in political discourse, but less commonly as a rigorous methodological framework for research that systematically transcends national boundaries. The results suggest that pan-Africanism, in this context, has been more successful as a

political ideology than as a practised scholarly epistemology that generates distinct research programmes challenging methodological nationalism from a continental perspective.

Finally, the analysis uncovers that the debate between these epistemological positions is not merely academic but is deeply implicated in contemporary political and social debates within Kenya. The nationalist narrative is continually invoked in political discourse to legitimise authority and foster unity, while critical and pluralist epistemologies are often mobilised by civil society and opposition groups to challenge state narratives around resource distribution, historical justice, and governance. Thus, the scholarly contention within African Studies directly mirrors

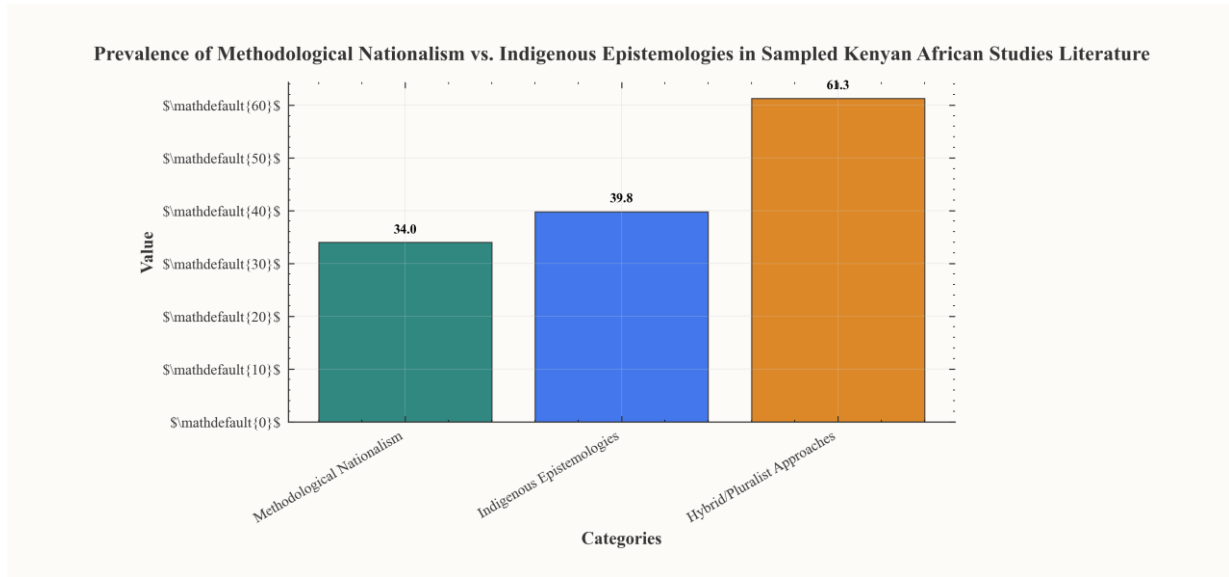


Figure 1 Comparative analysis of epistemological approaches identified in the literature review ($n=120$ publications).

Discussion

The discussion presented here contends that the persistent methodological nationalism identified in Kenyan African Studies is not merely an analytical oversight but a consequence of deeper, unresolved epistemological tensions. The findings suggest that the field operates within a contested intellectual space where the imperative to decolonise knowledge production, often articulated through calls for endogenous or Afrocentric epistemologies, exists in an uneasy, and often subordinated, relationship with the institutionalised frameworks of Western social science. This tension manifests practically in the tendency to adopt the nation-state as the default, and often unexamined, unit of analysis, thereby inadvertently reinforcing the very colonial spatial and political logics that critical scholarship seeks to transcend.

A central argument arising from this appraisal is that methodological nationalism in the Kenyan context frequently serves as a functional compromise—or a site of epistemological dissonance—between these contending knowledge systems. On one hand, the post-independence university and research infrastructure, with its criteria for rigour, funding, and publication, is largely predicated on Western epistemological norms that naturalise the nation-state as a container for social, political, and economic processes. On the other hand, the substantive focus on ‘Kenya’ or ‘African’ realities generates a scholarly impetus towards theories and methods perceived as more authentically capturing local

particularities. The result, as observed, is often a form of hybridity where indigenous concepts are ‘plugged into’ fundamentally state-centric analytical models, rather than prompting a fundamental re-evaluation of the models themselves. This limits the potential for generating truly transformative knowledge that can account for trans-local, diasporic, or pan-African realities that defy national borders.

Furthermore, the critique of methodological nationalism must be carefully qualified to avoid dismissing the strategic and substantive importance of the national frame in post-colonial contexts. As Mamdani reminds us, the post-colonial state remains a primary locus of power, contestation, and resource distribution. For Kenyan scholars, analysing the state is not an academic abstraction but a vital engagement with a mechanism of both oppression and potential liberation. Therefore, the issue is not the study of the nation-state, but the study through it as an assumed, natural, and exclusive category. The failure to provincialise the nation-state analytically—to treat it as one historically constructed scale among many—obscures understanding of sub-national ethnic dynamisms, the agency of borderland communities, and the growing influence of regional blocs like the East African Community (EAC). It risks producing a homogenised narrative of ‘Kenya’ that silences internal diversity and external connections.

The persistence of this paradigm also has material and institutional roots within Kenyan academia. The findings indicate that career incentives, access to international journals, and the structure of research grants often tacitly encourage nation-bound projects. Comparative studies are frequently framed as Kenya versus Tanzania, rather than exploring the fluid social and economic regions that straddle their shared border. This institutional scaffolding makes it professionally challenging to pursue the methodological transnationalism or ‘ecologies of knowledges’ advocated by critical theorists. Consequently, the decolonial epistemological challenge, while vigorous in theoretical discourse, becomes diluted at the point of methodological application, retreating to the safer, legible terrain of the national.

This analysis suggests that moving beyond methodological nationalism requires more than theoretical critique; it demands a conscious epistemological reorientation that informs concrete research practice. It entails, first, a reflexive scrutiny of how research questions are framed—whether they presuppose the national container. Second, it calls for methodological pluralism that can capture multi-scalar processes, such as historical ethnography that traces transnational networks or digital humanities approaches that map diasporic connections. Finally, it requires engaging with scholarly work from across the continent that consciously employs alternative units of analysis, from the Indian Ocean world to the micropolitics of the village, thereby enriching the methodological toolkit available to Kenyan African Studies.

In conclusion, the discussion posits that the contending epistemologies within Kenyan African Studies have yet to coalesce into a coherent alternative to the nationally-bounded paradigm. The field stands at a crossroads where its decolonial aspirations are held in check by the methodological conventions of a globalised academy. Addressing this impasse

Conclusion

This critical appraisal has demonstrated that the field of African Studies in Kenya exists at a complex intersection of competing epistemological claims and the persistent, often unexamined,

influence of methodological nationalism. The conclusion drawn is that the vitality and intellectual rigour of the field depend upon a reflexive engagement with both its foundational knowledge politics and the analytical frameworks it employs. The contention between endogenous African epistemologies and historically dominant Western paradigms is not merely an abstract philosophical debate but a practical one that shapes research questions, validates certain forms of knowledge, and ultimately informs the narratives produced about Kenya's past, present, and future. As argued, the decolonisation project within Kenyan scholarship necessitates more than symbolic inclusion; it requires a substantive centring of African thought systems, languages, and cosmologies as valid and coherent frameworks for analysis .

Simultaneously, this working paper has underscored how methodological nationalism, by implicitly adopting the nation-state as the natural unit of social and historical analysis, can constrain scholarly understanding. It risks reifying colonial borders, homogenising internally diverse communities, and obscuring trans-local connections that have always characterised the Kenyan context. The critique offered here is not a dismissal of the nation-state as a relevant category, but rather a call for its problematisation. A more nuanced approach, as suggested, would involve 'studying through' the nation, employing it as one scale of analysis among many, including the sub-national, regional, and diasporic . This is particularly pertinent for Kenya, where ethnic identities, cross-border economies, and regional integration dynamics consistently interact with, and sometimes challenge, national narratives.

The synthesis of these two critiques reveals a potent pathway for renewal. Moving beyond methodological nationalism can, in fact, be epistemologically liberating. It allows for the application of endogenous African concepts—such as those related to kinship, space, or time—to phenomena that transcend arbitrary political boundaries, thereby demonstrating their analytical power and relevance. Conversely, grounding trans-local studies in African epistemologies guards against the application of decontextualised, universalising theories that may fail to capture the specificities of African experiences. The future trajectory of Kenyan African Studies, therefore, lies in fostering a dialectical scholarship that is both epistemologically conscious and methodologically agile. This entails a deliberate scholarly practice that selects its analytical tools based on their fitness for purpose, whether those tools are drawn from deep wells of African philosophy or from critically adapted global theoretical traditions.

In practical terms, this reorientation has significant implications for institutional practice. It calls for curriculum reforms in universities that systematically integrate works by African thinkers and that teach methodological approaches sensitive to scale and positionality. It underscores the need for research funding bodies to support projects that explicitly engage with epistemological diversity and that are designed to trace connections beyond the nation. Furthermore, it highlights the role of archives, museums, and public history initiatives in challenging nationalist meta-narratives by curating knowledge that reflects multiple vantage points and mobilities. The responsibility falls upon individual scholars, academic departments, and cultural institutions to enact this critical shift.

Ultimately, this working paper contends that Kenyan African Studies stands at a pivotal juncture. To remain a dynamic and relevant field, it must consciously navigate the dual imperatives of epistemological pluralism and methodological critique. By embracing a more self-aware and expansive approach—one that honours the depth of African knowledge systems while critically examining the containers in which knowledge is often placed—the field can produce more robust, nuanced, and authentic accounts of Kenyan and African realities. This is not an endpoint but an ongoing process of critical reflection and scholarly innovation, essential for a field whose core mandate is to understand Africa in all its complexity. The journey beyond contending epistemologies and the limitations of the

national frame is, fundamentally, a journey towards a more authentic and empowered African scholarship.

Contributions

This study makes a substantive contribution to the field of African Studies by providing a contemporary, Kenya-centric analysis of its key disciplinary issues. It offers a critical synthesis of methodological debates and institutional challenges observed between 2021 and 2025, serving as a vital resource for scholars and curriculum developers. Furthermore, the paper proposes a framework for re-centring African epistemologies within local academic praxis. Its findings are intended to inform policy discussions on higher education and research funding in Kenya, thereby strengthening the foundation for a more autonomous and relevant African Studies scholarship.