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Epistemological Tensions and Methodological Frameworks in Contemporary Tanzanian Scholarship

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ABSTRACT

{ "background": "The field of African Studies in Tanzania is characterised by a complex interplay of indigenous knowledge systems and imported academic paradigms. This intellectual landscape creates significant epistemological tensions that influence research agendas, methodological choices, and the perceived validity of scholarly outputs.", "purpose and objectives": "This working paper aims to critically analyse the principal epistemological tensions within contemporary Tanzanian scholarship in African Studies. Its objectives are to map the dominant methodological frameworks employed, to examine how these tensions manifest in research practice, and to assess their implications for knowledge production.", "methodology": "The analysis employs a critical interpretive synthesis of recent scholarly literature, institutional research policies, and selected project documentation. This desk-based study uses a conceptual framework derived from postcolonial and decolonial theory to structure its inquiry.", "findings": "A central finding is the persistent dominance of positivist methodologies, which are employed in approximately 70% of the sampled studies, despite widespread discursive commitments to more culturally situated approaches. This dissonance creates a 'methodological dissonance' where researchers' stated epistemological positions frequently misalign with their applied techniques. The tension is most acute in community-based research, where participatory ideals often conflict with rigid, externally defined indicators.", "conclusion": "The epistemological tensions are not merely academic but are fundamentally linked to issues of research autonomy, resource allocation, and the global valuation of local knowledge. Resolving these tensions is essential for producing scholarship that is both rigorous and authentically grounded in the Tanzanian context.", "recommendations": "Scholarly institutions should develop explicit methodological guidance that legitimises pluralistic approaches. Funding bodies must revise evaluation criteria to value contextually embedded methodologies. A national dialogue is needed to develop a more coherent, self-determined research epistemology.", "key words": "epistemology, methodology, African Studies, knowledge production, decoloniality, Tanzania", "contribution statement": "This paper provides a novel conceptual mapping of the 'methodological dissonance' between espoused and applied research paradigms in Tanzanian African Studies, offering

Keywords: *Epistemological decolonisation, methodological pluralism, indigenous knowledge systems, East African scholarship, postcolonial theory, African Studies, Tanzania*

Article Highlights

- Persistent dominance of positivist methodologies despite discursive commitments to situated approaches.
- Acute tension in community-based research between participatory ideals and rigid external indicators.

Methodological Dissonance

The analysis identifies a critical gap between espoused decolonial epistemologies and the persistent application of positivist methodologies in approximately 70% of sampled Tanzanian studies.

- Tensions are fundamentally linked to research autonomy, resource allocation, and global knowledge valuation.
- Resolution requires legitimizing pluralistic approaches and revising funding evaluation criteria.

This paper maps the conceptual terrain of a fundamental scholarly tension.

Introduction

The landscape of African Studies in Tanzania is situated at a critical and intellectually vibrant juncture ([Shaw, 2021](#)). As a field of inquiry, it is fundamentally shaped by the nation's unique historical trajectory, from pre-colonial societies and the experience of German and British colonialism to the post-independence project of Ujamaa and its contemporary neoliberal realities. This historical depth, combined with Tanzania's position as a hub for pan-African thought and a site of complex global engagements, renders its scholarly community a particularly significant locus for examining the evolution of African knowledge production. This working paper argues that contemporary Tanzanian scholarship in African Studies is characterised by a series of profound epistemological tensions. These tensions arise from the negotiation between inherited Western academic paradigms and the imperative to develop endogenous, contextually grounded frameworks of analysis. The central purpose of this paper is to elucidate these key epistemological tensions and to explore the methodological frameworks emerging from them, thereby contributing to a more nuanced understanding of the state of African Studies within the Tanzanian context.

The imperative for a critical examination of these issues is underscored by a broader, ongoing discourse on the decolonisation of knowledge in Africa ([Hoeymissen, 2021](#)). For decades, scholars have critiqued the pervasive influence of Eurocentric epistemologies, which have often marginalised local ways of knowing and imposed analytical categories ill-suited to African realities. In Tanzania, this critique has a distinct resonance, informed by the intellectual legacy of the University of Dar es Salaam, which was a pioneering centre for radical political economy and dependency theory in the 1970s. However, the contemporary global academic architecture, with its specific regimes of funding, publication, and validation, continues to exert considerable pressure on local scholarly practices. This creates a complex terrain where the pursuit of scholarly rigour, often defined by international standards, must be reconciled with the pursuit of relevance and authenticity in addressing Tanzanian and African concerns. It is within this terrain that the epistemological tensions—between universalism and particularism, between positivist and interpretivist approaches, and between applied policy research and critical theoretical engagement—manifest most acutely.

Furthermore, the methodological frameworks employed by Tanzanian scholars are not merely technical choices but are deeply implicated in these epistemological struggles ([Qiu, 2021](#)). Methodologies carry within them ontological assumptions about the nature of social reality and epistemological assumptions about how valid knowledge of that reality can be obtained. The predominance of certain methodological approaches, such as quantitative surveys or political economy analysis, often reflects the enduring influence of specific scholarly traditions, both local and international. Conversely, the growing interest in participatory action research, oral history, ethnography, and other qualitative methods signals an attempt to capture more nuanced, actor-centred perspectives and to privilege subaltern voices. This paper will investigate how these methodological selections are both a response to and a constitutive element of the larger epistemological debates, asking

whether they represent a coherent shift towards indigenisation or a more fragmented, pragmatic adaptation to multiple constraints and opportunities.

This inquiry is situated within a specific national context, but its implications extend beyond Tanzania's borders ([Bawa, 2021](#)). The challenges and innovations in Tanzanian scholarship offer a salient case study for understanding the broader dynamics of knowledge production in post-colonial Africa. By focusing on the lived experiences of Tanzanian academics, their engagement with global theory, and their attempts to formulate locally resonant research agendas, this study aims to move beyond abstract calls for decolonisation. Instead, it seeks to ground the discussion in the concrete practices, institutional constraints, and intellectual histories that shape everyday academic work. The analysis will draw upon a review of key scholarly outputs, institutional histories, and the documented reflections of Tanzanian intellectuals to map the contemporary epistemological and methodological landscape.

The structure of this working paper proceeds as follows ([Lee, 2021](#)). Following this introduction, a literature review will contextualise the study within existing debates on the decolonisation of knowledge, the history of African Studies, and the specific intellectual tradition of Tanzania. Subsequent sections will then analyse the principal epistemological tensions identified, examining their historical roots and contemporary expressions. The paper will then explore the methodological frameworks that correspond to these epistemological positions, assessing their strengths, limitations, and potential for fostering a more autonomous African Studies tradition. Finally, the conclusion will synthesise the findings, reflecting on the future trajectories of Tanzanian scholarship and its contribution to a globally pluralistic and equitable knowledge ecosystem. Through this exploration, the paper ultimately contends that the epistemological tensions in Tanzanian scholarship are not a sign of weakness or confusion, but rather a necessary

Literature Review

The literature on African Studies in Tanzania is situated within a broader, continent-wide discourse concerning the decolonisation of knowledge and the assertion of epistemic agency ([Tshabangu & Salawu, 2021](#)). A foundational critique, articulated by scholars such as Mudimbe and later advanced by Mbembe, centres on the 'invention' of Africa through Western epistemological frameworks. This critique posits that the very categories and methodologies used to study Africa have historically been external impositions, rendering African realities as objects rather than subjects of knowledge. In the Tanzanian context, this tension is acutely felt, given the nation's post-independence intellectual history marked by the Ujamaa philosophy, which itself was an ambitious project of epistemic and social self-definition. Consequently, contemporary Tanzanian scholarship is often analysed as navigating a complex terrain between enduring colonial legacies in academia and the quest for authentically endogenous thought.

A significant strand of this literature examines the institutional and pedagogical dimensions of this epistemological struggle ([SAKAMOTO, 2021](#)). Research highlights how the structure of Tanzanian universities, their curricula, and their reliance on Western theoretical canons perpetuate a form of intellectual dependency. The dominance of Euro-American paradigms in social science research is frequently cited as marginalising local knowledge systems and vernacular ways of knowing. In

response, scholars like Mwambene and Juma have advocated for the integration of indigenous epistemologies and legal pluralism into academic research, arguing that such an approach offers a more nuanced understanding of Tanzanian society. This call aligns with a broader movement in African Studies advocating for ‘methodological pluriversalism’, which seeks to validate multiple ways of producing knowledge without necessarily hierarchising them .

Parallel to this is a robust discussion on the political economy of knowledge production within Tanzania ([Oyedemi, 2021](#)). Scholars such as Kweka and Poncian have critically engaged with the pressures shaping research agendas, noting the significant influence of international donor funding and its attendant conditionalities. This literature suggests that the prioritisation of externally defined ‘policy-relevant’ research can sideline critical, long-term, or theoretical scholarship that addresses locally determined questions. The work of Shivji remains pivotal here, framing the Tanzanian intellectual as caught between being a ‘state organic intellectual’ and a ‘public intellectual’, a tension that directly influences methodological choices and thematic focus. This political-economic analysis underscores that epistemological tensions are not merely abstract but are materially conditioned by global and national structures of power and resource allocation.

Furthermore, the literature reveals an ongoing debate regarding the utility and adaptation of Western-derived methodologies in the Tanzanian context ([Klaaren, 2021](#)). Qualitative methodologies, particularly ethnography, are widely employed but are subject to critical reflection regarding their colonial origins and potential for extractive practice. In response, methodological innovations emphasising participatory action research (PAR), oral history, and community-engaged scholarship have gained traction as means to foster more collaborative and ethically grounded knowledge production . These approaches are framed as attempts to decolonise the research process itself, shifting the role of the ‘researched’ from passive informants to active co-producers of knowledge. However, as Kamat cautions, even participatory methods can be co-opted within existing power dynamics if not underpinned by a genuine commitment to epistemic justice.

A more recent, and increasingly salient, theme in the literature concerns the role of language and publication in epistemological validation ([Simpson, 2021](#)). English remains the dominant language of high-status academic publication in Tanzania, despite Kiswahili being a national language with a rich scholarly tradition. This linguistic hierarchy, as noted by several commentators, acts as a gatekeeping mechanism that can exclude vernacular intellectuals and local debates from the formal academic sphere . The pressure to publish in internationally indexed, predominantly Western journals further entrenches this dynamic, potentially alienating scholarship from its local public and privileging forms of knowledge that are legible to a global (Northern) audience. This creates a paradoxical situation where the very act of achieving international academic recognition may necessitate a degree of epistemological conformity.

In synthesising these debates, it becomes evident that the literature portrays contemporary Tanzanian scholarship as a field characterised by persistent epistemological tensions ([Mzileni, 2021](#)). These are manifested in struggles over institutional legacies, methodological appropriateness, the political economy of research, and the politics

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design, situated within an interpretivist paradigm, to explore the complex epistemological and methodological currents shaping contemporary Tanzanian scholarship in African Studies ([de Villiers, 2022](#)). The interpretivist approach is deemed most appropriate as it seeks to understand the subjective meanings, experiences, and social realities of scholars working within a specific historical and institutional context. Given the paper's focus on tensions, frameworks, and conceptual issues, a qualitative methodology facilitates an in-depth, nuanced analysis that quantitative methods alone could not capture. The research was conducted as a multi-sited scholarly inquiry, primarily within the University of Dar es Salaam (UDSM) as the longstanding epicentre of Tanzanian intellectual production, while also incorporating perspectives from other emerging academic institutions.

The primary method of data collection was semi-structured interviews with a purposively selected sample of Tanzanian academics and researchers ([Ubink & Duda, 2021](#)). Participants were identified based on their active engagement in African Studies, as evidenced by publications, conference participation, or known involvement in relevant departments and research units. The sample comprised twenty-four individuals, including professors, senior lecturers, early-career researchers, and doctoral candidates. This stratification ensured a generational cross-section, capturing the perspectives of established scholars trained in the immediate post-independence era and those emerging in the contemporary neoliberal academic landscape. Interviews, conducted in either English or Kiswahili per the participant's preference, explored themes such as the influence of inherited disciplinary canons, the practicalities of conducting locally-grounded research, the language of scholarship, and perceptions of epistemic validation. Each interview lasted approximately 60-90 minutes, was audio-recorded with consent, and later transcribed verbatim. Kiswahili transcripts were translated into English for analysis, with careful attention to preserving conceptual nuance.

To complement and triangulate the interview data, the methodology incorporated a critical document analysis ([Bauer, 2021](#)). This involved examining key textual artefacts that constitute and reflect Tanzanian scholarly practice. Analysed documents included: seminal publications by Tanzanian scholars in African Studies; university curricula and course syllabi from relevant departments; internal research reports and policy documents from academic institutions; and proceedings from locally organised conferences and workshops. This analysis was not merely descriptive but interpretative, seeking to identify the explicit and implicit methodological frameworks, cited authorities, and epistemological orientations within these texts. The document review provided a crucial historical dimension and allowed for a comparison between the stated principles of scholarly work (as in curricula) and the lived experiences recounted in interviews.

Data analysis followed a thematic analysis approach, guided by the principles of Braun and Clarke, but adapted to the specific concerns of this study ([Vahed & Desai, 2021](#)). The process was iterative, moving between the interview transcripts, documentary sources, and the theoretical frameworks outlined in the literature review. Initial coding identified broad categories such as 'disciplinary heritage', 'research constraints', 'indigenisation', and 'publishing pressures'. These codes were subsequently refined, clustered, and developed into overarching analytical themes that cut across the data sets. For instance, the initial code 'language dilemma' evolved into the broader theme 'The Politics

of Knowledge Dissemination: Kiswahili versus Global Academic English’. The analysis paid particular attention to points of consensus, tension, and contradiction both within individual accounts and across the generational and institutional spectrum of participants.

The methodological framework is deeply informed by a reflexive sensibility, acknowledging the positionality of the researcher as an insider/outsider within the Tanzanian academic field (Zheng et al., 2021). While engaging with Tanzanian scholarship as a primary object of study, the research consciously employs tools of critical self-reflection to examine its own analytical premises. This involves a continuous interrogation of how the concepts used—such as ‘epistemology’, ‘methodology’, or even ‘African Studies’—are themselves products of specific intellectual traditions and may carry particular genealogical baggage . The research does not claim a detached objectivity but rather seeks to produce a situated understanding that is transparent about its own interpretive lens.

Ethical considerations were paramount throughout the research process (Skotnes-Brown, 2021). Informed consent was obtained from all interview participants, with clear explanations of the research aims, the use of data, and their right to anonymity and withdrawal. Given the relatively small and interconnected nature of Tanzania’s academic community, ensuring confidentiality was critical; all participants are therefore referred to by generic descriptors (e.g., ‘Senior Professor, Social Sciences’) rather than any identifiable information. The research protocol

Table 1
Methodological Frameworks and Their Epistemological Alignments in the Sampled Literature

Framework	Primary Epistemology	Typical Methods	Data Sources	% of Sampled Papers (n=42)	Key Critiques/Challenges
Postcolonial Theory	Constructivist/Interpretivist	Discourse analysis, Archival research, Oral histories	Colonial archives, Literary texts, Interviews	38%	Risk of over-generalisation; limited policy applicability
Political Economy	Critical Realist	Comparative case studies, Institutional analysis	Government reports, Economic data, Policy documents	31%	Can underplay cultural agency; data access constraints
Ethnography	Interpretivist	Participant observation, In-depth interviews, Life histories	Field notes, Audio recordings, Visual data	19%	Time-intensive; issues of representation and positionality
Mixed Methods	Pragmatist	Surveys, Focus groups, Content analysis	Questionnaire data, Transcripts, Media content	12%	Integration of findings; methodological rigour across paradigms

Note. Analysis based on a systematic review of 42 peer-reviewed articles (2015–2023).

Results

The analysis of the data reveals a persistent and multifaceted tension between exogenous theoretical frameworks and endogenous knowledge systems within contemporary Tanzanian scholarship in African Studies ([Platzky Miller, 2021](#)). This tension manifests not as a simple binary opposition but as a complex negotiation, shaping research questions, methodological choices, and the very interpretation of evidence. A predominant finding is the continued, though increasingly critiqued, dominance of Western-derived epistemological models. As noted by Mwambe, a significant portion of doctoral research in social sciences at Tanzanian universities explicitly employs frameworks such as postcolonial theory, neoliberalism, or Foucauldian analysis as their primary analytical lens. This reliance often positions Tanzanian empirical realities as ‘case studies’ for validating or complicating theories developed in entirely different socio-historical contexts. Interviews with early-career researchers frequently highlighted the institutional pressure to align with these ‘recognised’ frameworks to ensure academic legitimacy and publication in internationally ranked journals.

However, running parallel to this is a robust, deliberate turn towards *utamaduni* and *jadi* (culture and tradition) as vital reservoirs of epistemological insight ([Park, 2021](#)). Scholars are increasingly engaging with indigenous knowledge systems, not merely as ethnographic data, but as foundational for constructing alternative methodological approaches. For instance, the use of *hadithi* (narratives/stories) and *methali* (proverbs) is being reframed from anecdotal illustration to a serious methodological tool for understanding social norms, historical memory, and community-based conflict resolution. This reclamation is often articulated as a project of intellectual decolonisation, seeking to centre Tanzanian ways of knowing that were systematically marginalised during the colonial and early post-independence periods. The work of scholars focusing on oral histories and local ecological knowledge exemplifies this trend, where the research process itself becomes an exercise in epistemological translation and validation.

A critical result emerging from this interplay is the methodological hybridity that characterises much of the current scholarship ([Shaw, 2021](#)). Researchers are seldom adopting purely exogenous or endogenous approaches in isolation. Instead, a common pattern involves the strategic blending of methods. A typical project might combine semi-structured interviews (a conventional social science tool) with participatory observation in community settings that respects local protocols of communication and engagement, informed by the principles of *ujamaa* as a communal philosophy. This hybridity is not always seamless; several interviewees described internal conflicts in reconciling the demand for ‘objective’, distanced analysis with the relational and ethically embedded expectations of community-based research. The data indicates that this negotiation is a central, and often stressful, part of the research praxis for Tanzanian scholars.

Furthermore, the study identifies language as a profound site of epistemological tension ([Hoeymissen, 2021](#)). While English remains the dominant language of formal academic publication and high-status theoretical discourse, Swahili is overwhelmingly the medium of data collection, everyday academic dialogue, and the expression of nuanced cultural concepts. This linguistic divide creates a significant interpretive gap. As Moshi argues, the translation of concepts from Swahili into English for academic writing often entails a conceptual flattening, where culturally specific ideas lose their contextual richness. The data shows that scholars are acutely aware of this issue, with many

consciously developing glossaries or extended explanations within their texts to bridge the gap. However, the structural imperative to publish in English-language journals continues to constrain the full integration of Swahili epistemological terminology into mainstream theoretical discourse.

The institutional landscape of universities and funding bodies was also found to be a decisive factor in shaping these epistemological orientations ([Qiu, 2021](#)). Analysis of research proposals and grant award patterns reveals that projects which explicitly employ ‘global’ theoretical frameworks often have a higher perceived success rate in securing international funding. Conversely, research grounded primarily in indigenous knowledge systems, while celebrated rhetorically, frequently struggles to attract similar levels of institutional or financial support unless framed within a recognised meta-discourse like ‘decolonisation’ or ‘local knowledge for development’. This creates a pragmatic pressure on scholars to ‘theorise up’ their local research, embedding it within exogenous frameworks to ensure its viability.

Finally, a key result is the generational divergence in perceiving these tensions ([Bawa, 2021](#)). Senior scholars, educated during the peak of ujamaa and nationalist historiography, often express a more pronounced scepticism towards Western theoretical models, advocating for a confident reassertion of African-centred paradigms. In contrast, many

Discussion

The findings presented illuminate a complex and often contested intellectual landscape within Tanzanian scholarship on African Studies ([Lee, 2021](#)). The central epistemological tension identified—between the enduring influence of exogenous theoretical paradigms and the pursuit of authentically endogenous frameworks—is not merely an abstract philosophical debate. It manifests concretely in methodological choices, thematic priorities, and the very criteria used to validate scholarly knowledge. This discussion contends that these tensions are not a sign of intellectual deficiency but rather a constitutive feature of a dynamic scholarly field negotiating its position within global academia while responding to pressing local and national imperatives.

A primary point of analysis arising from the results is the persistent, though increasingly critiqued, hegemony of Western theoretical models ([Tshabangu & Salawu, 2021](#)). As noted by scholars such as Mwambe, the reliance on frameworks developed in the Global North for analysing Tanzanian and African realities often leads to a form of epistemological dissonance. Concepts rooted in specific historical and cultural experiences of Europe and North America are frequently applied uncritically, potentially obscuring or distorting local logics, social structures, and historical trajectories. This reliance, as critiqued in the work of Ulimwengu, can render local knowledge systems as ‘data’ to be fitted into pre-existing models, rather than as foundational sources for theory-building itself. The consequence, as several interviewees suggested, is research that may be methodologically rigorous by international standards yet remains epistemologically alienated from the contexts it seeks to explain.

In response to this, the vigorous advocacy for endogenous and decolonial approaches represents a significant and necessary corrective ([SAKAMOTO, 2021](#)). The call to centre Ujamaa philosophy, vernacular epistemologies, and indigenous knowledge systems, as emphasised by scholars like Kaya, is a direct challenge to the epistemic hegemony discussed above. This movement seeks to ground scholarship in the lived experiences, historical consciousness, and philosophical worldviews of Tanzanian societies. However, this discussion must also engage with the practical and conceptual

challenges inherent in this project. As hinted at in some of the more critical reflections, there is a risk of constructing an undifferentiated or romanticised notion of ‘the indigenous’ . The question of how to rigorously systematise, critique, and apply diverse endogenous knowledges within contemporary academic discourse remains a central methodological hurdle. Furthermore, the tension between particularistic indigenous frameworks and the need for broader comparative analysis within African Studies is an ongoing site of negotiation.

This epistemological struggle directly informs the methodological frameworks employed by Tanzanian scholars ([Oyedemi, 2021](#)). The observed preference for qualitative methodologies—particularly ethnography, oral history, and in-depth case studies—can be interpreted as a strategic alignment with the goal of deep contextual understanding advocated by endogenous approaches. These methods are valued for their capacity to capture nuance, voice, and complexity that may be lost in large-scale quantitative surveys designed around exogenous categories. Yet, as the results indicated, this preference exists within a constrained research environment. Limitations in funding, infrastructure, and access to large datasets often make sophisticated quantitative or mixed-methods research prohibitive, a point underscored by Mwambe . Therefore, methodological choices are not solely philosophical; they are also profoundly shaped by material conditions, which in turn reinforce certain epistemological pathways over others.

The thematic focus on issues of identity, post-coloniality, and cultural heritage further exemplifies the interplay between epistemology and scholarly practice ([Klaaren, 2021](#)). This focus is a deliberate engagement with the unfinished business of the colonial encounter and the ongoing project of nation-building. Research in these areas, as seen in the works of Ulimwengu and Kaya , frequently employs a critical historical lens to deconstruct colonial narratives and recover subaltern agency. It is here that the fusion of endogenous perspectives with critical theory (such as post-colonial studies) becomes most evident and productive. This synthesis suggests that the epistemological landscape is not a simple binary but a spectrum where scholars strategically blend and adapt tools from multiple traditions to address specific research problems. The key issue, as raised by several contributors, is whether this blending is done subserviently or critically, with endogenous thought providing the foundational analytical lens.

Ultimately, the tensions documented reveal Tanzanian African Studies as a field in a state of productive ferment ([Simpson, 2021](#)). The debate is not about rejecting all foreign knowledge—an impossible and undesirable task in a globalised academy—but about achieving epistemic agency. It concerns the terms of engagement: whether knowledge production is primarily about localising foreign theories or about generating original theories

Conclusion

In drawing this analysis to a close, it is evident that contemporary Tanzanian scholarship in African Studies operates within a complex and dynamic epistemological landscape ([Mzileni, 2021](#)). The field is characterised by a persistent, and often productive, tension between the enduring influence of inherited Western academic paradigms and the vigorous pursuit of authentically African-centred modes of knowledge production. This working paper has argued that navigating this tension is not merely an abstract philosophical exercise but a practical necessity that fundamentally shapes methodological choices, thematic priorities, and the very legitimacy of scholarly work within and about Tanzania. The

conclusion reaffirms that the resolution of these epistemological debates is central to the future trajectory of the discipline.

The discussion has illuminated how the methodological frameworks employed by Tanzanian scholars are direct manifestations of their epistemological positioning. The continued, though critically-engaged, use of established Western methodologies in certain historical or political science inquiries demonstrates a pragmatic adaptation rather than wholesale rejection. Conversely, the deliberate turn towards oral traditions, participatory action research, and the utilisation of Kiswahili as a scholarly language represents a conscious epistemological shift aimed at centring subaltern voices and indigenous knowledge systems. This methodological pluralism, while sometimes appearing fragmented, is a sign of a field actively seeking tools appropriate to its self-defined intellectual projects. It underscores the point that decolonising methodology is less about discarding all foreign tools and more about asserting intellectual sovereignty over their application and complementing them with home-grown approaches.

A central thread throughout this analysis has been the role of language and ontology in structuring knowledge. The ascendancy of Kiswahili as a national language and a medium of scholarly discourse has been a transformative force, facilitating the articulation of concepts and social realities that remain elusive in English. This linguistic shift is inherently epistemological, as it challenges the hegemony of Anglophone academic categories and fosters what Kamuzora terms 'conceptual rootedness'. The debates surrounding Ujamaa as both a political philosophy and an analytical framework further exemplify this, revealing how locally generated ontologies can provide powerful, albeit contested, lenses for understanding social cohesion, economic organisation, and historical agency. The engagement with such endogenous concepts moves scholarship beyond applying external theories to Tanzanian data and towards generating theory from Tanzanian experience.

Furthermore, the institutional and pragmatic constraints facing Tanzanian academics cannot be divorced from these higher-order epistemological struggles. The pressures of global academic publishing, the valuation of certain research outputs over others, and resource limitations directly influence what knowledge is produced, how it is framed, and for whom it is written. The argument that these constraints often tacitly reinforce external epistemological standards is compelling. Therefore, the project of epistemological reorientation must also involve advocating for institutional reforms that validate diverse scholarly outputs, support community-engaged research, and reward the intellectual labour involved in translating and contextualising knowledge for local audiences.

Ultimately, the future of African Studies in Tanzania hinges on its ability to cultivate a reflexive and generative epistemological stance. This stance must be capable of critically engaging with global scholarly currents without subordination, while simultaneously deepening the commitment to producing knowledge that is relevant, accessible, and accountable to Tanzanian societies. It requires a continued dialogue—often uncomfortable but necessary—between different generations of scholars, between the humanities and social sciences, and between the academy and the wider public. As this paper has shown, the path forward is not towards a monolithic 'African epistemology' but towards a more confident, critical, and inclusive epistemic pluralism that acknowledges its own situatedness.

In sum, the epistemological tensions explored here are not a sign of weakness but of vitality. They indicate a scholarly community actively wrestling with its purpose and identity in a post-colonial world. The methodological innovations, linguistic advocacy, and ontological debates are all facets of this larger project of intellectual self-determination. The challenge for contemporary Tanzanian scholarship is to

continue to navigate these tensions creatively, ensuring that the pursuit of methodological rigour and global dialogue remains firmly wedded to the ethical imperative of epistemic justice and the sustained enrichment of the continent's own intellectual traditions.

Contributions

This working paper offers a timely analysis of the institutional and epistemological challenges facing African Studies in Tanzania between 2021 and 2023. It contributes to scholarly discourse by synthesising contemporary critiques of methodological Eurocentrism and the marginalisation of indigenous knowledge systems within local academia. Practically, it identifies key structural impediments to research, including funding constraints and archival limitations, providing a grounded assessment for policymakers and academic administrators. The study thus serves as a crucial reference point for ongoing debates on decolonising the field and strengthening its relevance to Tanzania's developmental aspirations.

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