American Journal of Public Health Research, 2026, Vol. 14, No. 6, 177-193
Available online at http://pubs.sciepub.com/ajphr/14/6/2
Published by Science and Education Publishing
DOI:10.12691/ajphr-14-6-2

The Pathogenic Episteme: Addressing Public Health Underdevelopment in Africa

Begna F. Dugassa*

Public Health Team, Oromo Studies Association, Laurel, U.S. A
*Corresponding author: Begna.Dugassa@gmail.com

Received October 02, 2026; Revised November 03, 2026; Accepted November 11, 2026

Abstract **Background:** Health and disease are socially constructed phenomena, shaped by the interplay of knowledge and power that determines the distribution of social determinants of health. The underdevelopment of public health in Africa is rooted in both historical and contemporary injustices. Racist policies, founded on beliefs in racial and cultural superiority, established frameworks of moral inclusion and exclusion that designated African people as "outsiders" and subjected them to exploitation. Achieving the core mission of public health requires a critical examination of the pathogenic effects of the racist episteme that informed the theories and practices enabling subjugation. **Objectives**: Existing research on Africa's experience under slavery and colonialism has primarily focused on themes of exploitation, assimilation, and power. Analyses within public health have largely examined factors such as military mobility and the transmission of infectious diseases. However, the influence of foundational knowledge systems has received limited attention. This study investigates the impact of racist epistemologies on public health in Africa by employing the framework of upstream thinking. **Methods:** The "upstream" metaphor is utilized to analyze and understand the complex landscape of public health issues in Africa, drawing connections between historical and contemporary contexts. By examining the racist episteme as the foundational source of numerous public health challenges, this approach demonstrates how entrenched racism functions as a root cause, shaping public health outcomes across the continent. **Findings:** A racist episteme shapes policy decisions that exploit African populations, thereby exacerbating poverty, food insecurity, and water scarcity, and generating pathogenic social conditions. Eliminating the pervasive and harmful racist episteme and promoting Afrocentric knowledge production represent significant steps toward empowering populations across Africa.

Keywords: *Epistemic Racism, Indirect colonialism, public health in Africa*

Cite This Article: Begna F. Dugassa, "The Pathogenic Episteme: Addressing Public Health Underdevelopment in Africa." *American Journal of Public Health Research*, vol. 14, no. 6 (2026): 177-193. doi: 10.12691/ajphr-14-6-2.

1. Introduction

There is a broad consensus that many of the challenging social conditions in African countries arise from a complex interplay of the racist episteme that legalized the slave trade, colonialism, and neocolonial policies, which have weakened the capabilities of the people and impeded their resilience [1,44,45]. Racist episteme used as a strategy designed to exploit, silence, and dismiss the voices and worldviews of the people [2]. As such, it influences our understanding of health and diseases, preventive strategies and treatments. For example, when the colonialists defined their motive as a "civilizing mission," they mimicked the role of healers and presented their crimes in a positive light. Furthermore, it made the formal education systems established in Africa closely resemble those in Europe and the Americas, propagating their systems of thought and advancing their interests. Instead of equipping African students with the tools to understand the strengths and weaknesses of their own societies, and to build on their advantages while addressing their challenges, these education systems primarily emphasize European and American history, sociology, and epistemology. A misplaced, focused education system has hindered students from developing a critical understanding of their social realities and natural environments, thereby limiting their capacity to tackle these issues meaningfully [3].

The literature within the knowledge system reveals complex, interwoven issues in our understanding of knowledge [4]. One perspective holds that knowledge is fundamentally grounded in belief, thereby positioning it as a mental state. Belief constitutes a deeply settled and societally accepted worldview. Another viewpoint indicates that knowledge is constructed from prior knowledge, with new information being synthesized. In this context, both beliefs and prior knowledge significantly shape our reasoning processes. A third perspective posits that knowledge is also constructed through testimony, where

meaning is derived from accounts that serve as empirical[1] evidence, verified for the reliability of both the individual and the collective [5].

All three perspectives indicate that knowledge is constructed upon foundational elements, a concept effectively conveyed through an architectural metaphor. These foundations are described as infallible, incorrigible, and indubitable [5]. There is general agreement that experience, belief, prior knowledge, testimony, and reasoning are directly and closely interconnected. Within this context, a critical question arises: Given Africa's historical experiences with human trafficking and colonialism, as well as ongoing racist social policies such as proxy wars and inequitable trading practices, what measures are required to shape the continent's future in a manner that fosters social harmony, sustainable development, and progressive improvements in public health?

In the process of knowledge production, researchers ask questions in the belief that the correct answer is not there. When researchers hypothesize, they draw on prior knowledge, and the literature review serves as testimony from reputable sources [6]. Belief, prior knowledge, and testimony are instrumental in contemporary knowledge production. The central issue in equity, fair distribution of wealth, and sustainable development is whose beliefs, prior knowledge, and testimony are taken as standard and whose are not. For example, from the Oromo people's perspective, everyone needs to seek peace and health for themselves, their families, their communities, and the natural environment [7]. In contrast, the viewpoint prevalent in Western Europe emphasizes the pursuit of wealth and power. These differing perspectives significantly influence researchers and policymakers, shaping the questions they ask, the data they gather, and their interpretations of that data.

To provide a deeper understanding of these key points, we must consider them through an African lens. The European colonial agenda, driven by an insatiable quest for wealth and power, was steeped in a profound sense of entitlement. This mindset was informed by historical precedents that suggested domination would enhance their choices and opportunities. Furthermore, it was bolstered by pervasive racist ideologies, such as Social Darwinism, which sought to rationalize their actions. The foundational beliefs of those who sought to expand their empires have not fundamentally changed[2]; they continue to shape contemporary perceptions of Africa, influencing modern policies and trade practices. These approaches are, at their core, remnants of a historical context that continues to shape interactions and relationships. As a result, the outcomes of this legacy remain entrenched in injustice, inequity, and detrimental effects for the African continent and population health.

Moreover, there is a broad belief that the social injustices affecting conditions in Africa have detrimental effects; however, the underlying root causes are not sufficiently analyzed. Critical issues, such as the racist frameworks of thinking that provided theoretical justifications for colonial and neocolonial policies and social ills and contributed to the underdevelopment of public health, warrant further investigation [8]. This paper aims to raise awareness of these critical social forces and to expose the harmful influence of the prevailing racist episteme that perpetuates and creates pathological social conditions. Not only raises awareness of the problem, but it also proposes a shift in policy and practices.

Considering the prevailing social conditions in Africa, the policy brief seeks to stimulate scholarly discourse on the epistemological frameworks that underpin theories and practices of domination, exploitation, and environmental degradation, and to propose alternative policy directions that center on Afrocentric ideas. For instance, pursuing peace, health and social and environmental justice consistent with the Oromo perspective [8,9]. However, racist episteme legalized cultural assimilation, exploitation of human and natural resources, environmental degradation, poverty and malnutrition and contributed to the underdevelopment of public health. Public health fosters thinking at the "upstream level" and addresses social, economic, political, cultural, and environmental factors that affect health, ensuring the opportunity to live a healthy and dignified life. To fully understand the impact of this racist episteme on health outcomes, it is essential to adopt a public health framework. This approach enables us to explore and address the underlying social factors that contribute to ill health at the population level.

2. Objectives

Two distinct academic fields have examined the experiences of African populations during the slave trade and colonialism. Political theory has extensively analyzed the exploitation, assimilation, and structuring of power relations by the slave trade and colonial policies. In contrast, social science disciplines, including political economy and policy studies, have primarily addressed the costs imposed on the colonized and the benefits gained by the colonizers. Analyses of the public health impacts of colonialism have generally focused on issues such as military mobility and the transmission of infectious diseases. Nevertheless, the knowledge systems that supported slavery and colonialism have not been named and delegitimized. The primary objective of this research is to address this critical gap by investigating the ongoing influence of racist episteme on public health outcomes in Africa. Using the public health framework of “upstream thinking,” this study examines both the long-term and short-term effects of racist epistemologies on public health in Africa.

3. Methods

[1] The empirical world includes both social and natural environments that we experience through our senses: sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell. We use deductive logic to turn empirical data into knowledge.

[2] As the UK gathered its diverse colonies to strengthen the Association of Commonwealth Countries, France pursued a similar path with the Association of Francophone countries. Both colonialists are motivated by their colonial histories and the effects of indirect colonialism that still influence their relations today. During the Brexit campaign, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson argued that the UK could gain more from Commonwealth relationships than from the EU. The words represent the desire to reconnect with former colonies, reshaping their relationships to favour the UK.

The "upstream" metaphor is utilized to analyze the complex landscape of public health issues in Africa, drawing connections between historical and contemporary contexts. By examining the racist episteme as the foundational source of numerous public health challenges, this approach demonstrates how entrenched racism functions as a root cause, shaping public health outcomes across the continent.

4. Definitions

To ensure clarity, it is necessary to begin with a definition. Public health is defined as the art and science of safeguarding and enhancing the health of populations, with a continual focus on identifying the root causes of disease and the social determinants that influence health outcomes [10]. The field aims to act promptly to mitigate these risk factors. Public health comprises programs, services, and policies designed to maintain population health and prevent disease, injury, and premature death [11]. By promoting healthy lifestyles, favourable social conditions, and supportive social relationships, public health seeks to foster overall well-being. Researchers in this discipline work to uncover the underlying causes of social issues and develop strategies to prevent their emergence or recurrence. However, the fields of disease prevention and health promotion have frequently neglected to challenge the legitimacy of racist frameworks that enable dominant groups to control and exploit marginalized communities, resulting in adverse social conditions. Given the prevailing social challenges in Africa, such as food insecurity, water scarcity, environmental degradation, poverty, instability, and inadequate public health infrastructure, this paper aims to stimulate scholarly discourse that interrogates the epistemic frameworks underlying theories and practices of domination and exploitation. This research seeks to elucidate the mechanisms of knowledge systems and power dynamics, and their implications for public health underdevelopment in Africa.

Knowledge and power are inextricably linked, working together to shape and reinforce the distribution of privileges and risks within society. Knowledge and power define the character of moral inclusion and exclusion and assign moral authority [12]. They function within a complex social framework characterized by shared institutions, collective meaning-making, and mutual expectations to exert social control. This dynamic is articulated through what Miranda Freicker described as the mechanism to "inflate or deflate the credibility" of various groups [13]. In this context, Eurocentric knowledge has historically bestowed a "credibility excess" upon European experiences and their proponents, while concurrently inflicting a "credibility deficit" on African narratives and knowledge. The portrayal of Africa as "the Dark Continent" and North and South America as "the New World" illustrates this deeply seated bias. Such labels imply that without European acknowledgment, the lands and peoples in question are rendered invisible and unrecognized [3]. This framing positions Europeans as the rightful arbiters of knowledge, presuming an entitlement to define and credit other cultures. Ultimately, the pervasive racist prejudice directed toward African people is not merely a coincidental occurrence but a socially constructed reality, steeped in epistemological culpability that demands examination and critique.

Knowledge is built on belief and prior knowledge [5]. If knowledge is a wholly mental state, it is diverse. The concept of a racist episteme refers to a historical system of knowledge, ideas, beliefs and assumptions, often embedded in science and culture, synthesized to advance racial hierarchy and exploit the human and natural resources of racially marginalized groups [14]. It is responsible for establishing and maintaining racial hierarchies—specifically the notion of an inherent superiority of one race (historically, whiteness) over others and advancing enslavement of people, colonialism and neocolonialism. Discreditation of people based on their skin colour and culture is self-righteous. This framework determines what constitutes valid knowledge, who is considered an authoritative knower, and what is regarded as accurate about the experiences of racialized groups [13]. Colonial policies were developed on such a racist episteme legitimized to impoverish, dehumanize, widen food insecurity and neglect the needs of the people [15]. Racist episteme enslaving and colonizing and accumulating wealth and impoverishing them from generation to generation and hindering the development of the social ecology of learning, acceptable and inevitable. Racist episteme impoverishes, colonizes, and degrades human dignity, making it invisible to the perpetrator's lens [16]. As such, racist episteme is an example of pathogenic episteme.

Epistemology refers to the study of knowledge: the systems and methods through which we come to know, what can be known, the validity of different ways of knowing, who is entitled to knowledge, and who holds authoritative status as a knower [5]. By implication, there is epistemic contestation between different cultural/racial groups. In knowledge contestation, when one group validates its knowledge and invalidates others', it devalues the groups' interests and aspirations and compromises their needs in the process. Those knowledge rules are often implicit and tacitly racialized. Consequently, the experiences and insights of marginalized groups are often classified as inferior, exposing them to dehumanization, subjugation, control, and exploitation. This credibility deficit highlights the theoretical underpinnings of unfair trade practices, epistemic power dynamics, and the systemic victimization of African peoples.

Allow me to illustrate this with a specific example. European empire builders have historically imposed stringent requirements on African countries, compelling them to cultivate products that are marketable in Europe. Take coffee, for instance. These countries purchase raw coffee beans from African farmers at notoriously low prices. Once they import these beans, they roast and grind them, branding them with enticing labels like "French Vanilla" and "Irish Cream." They then sell these premium products back in Africa at exorbitantly inflated prices. In this transactional cycle, profits skew dramatically, with European companies earning far more from roasting, grinding, and packaging than African farmers do from the fundamental work of growing and harvesting crops. This exploitation not only highlights the imbalanced economic

relationships but also underscores a broader pattern of colonial practices that continue to affect global trade dynamics today epistemically. If we make a closer examination of their rationales, it becomes evident that they are effectively pursuing what O'Brien refers to as "their a priori knowledge and reasoning" [5]. Their core rationale is that their work is worth more than that of Africans, and they are entitled to exploit them.

The term pathogen is derived from the Greek words pathos and logy. Pathos refers to sorrow, sadness, suffering, tragedy, misery, harm, and grief. Logy means study and understanding [17]. In this paper, pathogenic episteme refers to a racist framework that systematically validates, supports, and commercializes Euro-American knowledge while invalidating and marginalizing Indigenous and African experiences and compromising the needs and aspirations of people. Pathogenic episteme presents Euro-America as the producer of knowledge and Africa as a passive consumer. This marginalization of Indigenous African knowledge erodes the essential social, economic, political, cultural, and environmental well-being of these communities. It also erodes the ecology of knowledge production. It devalues African knowledge, depreciates the value of their products, delegitimizes their aspirations, and diminishes self-esteem and epistemic curiosity. Suppressing epistemic curiosity stifles the drive to seek and acquire new knowledge and to solve problems, ultimately hindering the learning process [8]. Devaluing African knowledge and hindering learning causes sorrow, sadness, suffering, tragedy, misery, harm, and grief. Epistemic curiosity is an intellectual hunger that fosters learning and problem-solving skills and depends on the individual's and groups' understanding of their social and natural world [13]. Hindering it negatively impacts social and cultural safety, governance, and erodes the social fabric that serves as protective factors, ultimately hindering the development of public health. Consequently, a knowledge system that invalidates Indigenous African knowledge while privileging Euro-American perspectives not only enables control but also disempowers and exploits communities, creating pathogenic social conditions [8]. In this article, such a knowledge system is referred to as "pathogenic episteme."

Public health scholarship underscores for researchers and policymakers the importance of identifying the root causes of health-related issues. It promotes the metaphor of "upstream, midstream, and downstream thinking" to facilitate this understanding [18]. However, insufficient attention has been given to the epistemic racism that directly and indirectly contributes to the creation of detrimental social conditions. Instead of creating a safe and supportive environment where Afrocentric questions are asked and knowledge is produced, public health focuses more on Euro-American ways of understanding the African problems. To foster healthier social environments, academics, researchers, students, and policymakers need to confront this pathogenic episteme and advocate for a more inclusive framework of knowledge [8].

Rudolph Virchow, often hailed as the founding father of colonial public health, conducted thorough investigations into the recurring outbreaks of typhoid fever in Upper Cecilia, a region predominantly inhabited by Polish people yet governed by German authorities. His meticulous research illuminated the profound connection between colonialism and public health crises, underscoring the importance of freedom and autonomy as cornerstones for advancing public health initiatives. Virchow famously asserted, "Medicine is a social science, and politics is nothing else but medicine on a large scale," encapsulating the idea that health cannot be detached from social and political contexts [19]. In the later stages of his career, Virchow's groundbreaking work was effectively used to articulate the dire social conditions afflicting Western European working-class communities and impoverished communities. However, despite his compelling arguments, the Euro-American scientific communities essentially ignored the intertwined dynamics of colonialism and public health, neglecting their responsibility to advocate for justice and equity [17].

Providing a theoretical foundation to public health, Virchow proposed that health science, being fundamentally a science rooted in the study of human beings, bears a significant duty to identify societal challenges and pursue theoretical solutions. He believed that health professionals should naturally act as advocates for marginalized groups, particularly the poor and colonized, striving to confront the social injustices they endure. However, when colonizers invaded Africa and fostered devastating social conditions—described hauntingly as a "deadly ghost" [20]—the Euro-American public health sciences remained hauntingly silent, failing to address the urgent needs and suffering of those impacted [18].

Public Health Conditions in Africa

Upon closer examination, it becomes evident that both colonial and neocolonial policies have fostered deeply entrenched social conditions that are detrimental to public health in Africa. The colonial and neocolonial policies create social conditions and allow infectious diseases and non-communicable diseases (NCDs) to go under the skin and contribute to the mortality and morbidity of people. These policies create an environment where infectious diseases and non-communicable diseases affect population health, taking root and exacerbating the challenges people face. The far-reaching consequences of these oppressive systems contribute significantly to the rising rates of mortality and morbidity, underscoring a troubling pattern of neglect and vulnerability in the region. As societies strive to understand and solve the problems they face, they build the capacity to solve them; however, when they are controlled and exploited, their efforts are hindered. Having that in mind, let us closely look at the ten major public health problems in Africa.

Major Public Health Problems in Africa

Malaria is the most prevalent public health problem in Africa. While malaria has been eradicated in many regions globally, it continues to be a leading cause of illness and death among children under the age of five. Currently, 95% of global malaria cases and 96% of related fatalities occur in Africa [21]. Although malaria is one of the oldest infectious diseases, efforts to prevent it remain inadequate. The disease remains neglected, partly because of its prevalence in Africa, where colonial and neocolonial policies have weakened local capacities. HIV/AIDS is the second most significant public health crisis in Africa.

Africa bears the highest burden of HIV, with two-thirds of new infections worldwide occurring on the continent. Poverty and social instability contribute to increased HIV rates. The lack of profit from disease prevention for Euro-American corporations leads to inadequate prevention efforts in Africa [8].

Tuberculosis (TB) is Africa's third major public health problem. It is a widespread infectious disease, with a significant proportion of new cases and related deaths occurring in Africa. Additionally, TB remains the leading cause of death among those living with HIV. Lower Respiratory Tract Infections (LRTIs) are the fourth most pressing public health problem in Africa. Diseases like pneumonia and bronchitis significantly contribute to illness and death among children under five. Poor living conditions—such as air pollution, overcrowding, and malnutrition—directly increase the risk of these infections, intensifying their prevalence and severity in this population. Diarrheal diseases are Africa's fifth leading public health concern and are particularly prevalent among children under five. This high incidence is primarily caused by limited access to safe drinking water, inadequate sanitation, and poor hygiene practices, which increase children's exposure to pathogens that cause diarrhea.

Cardiovascular diseases (CVDs) are the sixth leading cause of death in Africa and a major contributor to deaths from Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs). These conditions increasingly affect younger populations compared to other regions of the world. Maternal and neonatal conditions are the seventh leading cause of mortality and morbidity in Africa, with alarmingly high rates of maternal and infant mortality and morbidity across the continent [22]. Diabetes mellitus is the eighth leading cause of disease in Africa. Its prevalence is projected to rise markedly, driven by urbanization and changes in diet and lifestyle, which will add to the growing burden of NCDs.

Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs) are Africa's ninth significant public health issue. NTDs encompass a variety of parasitic, viral, and bacterial illnesses prevalent in tropical and subtropical regions. These diseases, including Schistosomiasis, Lymphatic Filariasis, and Leishmaniasis, represent a significant health challenge in Africa [23]. Chronic malnutrition and nutritional deficiencies rank among Africa's 10 major public health concerns. Elevated rates of undernutrition, especially among children, pose long-term challenges to both physical and cognitive development. Meanwhile, Western countries face rising obesity rates, illustrating another dimension of malnutrition that exists alongside undernutrition in Africa.

Historical and Contemporary Manifestation of Pathogenic Episteme

The widely held belief that knowledge is neutral and universally applicable is a fallacy [46,47]. This paper presents evidence demonstrating that knowledge is socially constructed and examines how racist epistemologies, propagated through colonial and postcolonial policies, have contributed to harmful social conditions across Africa [24,25]. These forms of knowledge facilitate the exploitation of human and natural resources, degrade the environment, and undermine the cultures and institutions that sustain local communities. In this context, the following analysis addresses the importance for public health scholars to explore the intersections of racism and harmful epistemologies.

First, we learn through our five sensory organs. Our five sensory organs—eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and skin—collect data from our surroundings constantly. These organs contain specialized cells that detect stimuli such as light, sound vibrations, chemical substances, and physical pressure, converting them into nerve signals that are transmitted to the brain for interpretation and processing. Consequently, our brain is constantly engaged in a process of connecting, analyzing, and interpreting this data. It interprets information through the lens of accumulated knowledge, continuously shaping our perception of the world. Based on our lived experiences, when our brain analyzes the interconnectedness of the African social and natural worlds, it enhances our understanding, fosters problem-solving skills and helps cultivate positive relationships. Knowledge is socially constructed and different [4]. For this reason, comprehending African social issues from an African perspective is not merely appropriate and accurate; it empowers them to understand the root causes of their problem and helps them correct the wrongs. Eurocentric knowledge is often ill-equipped to understand and address African social problems [48]. Imposing Eurocentric knowledge upon African people legitimizes the interests and aspirations of the imposers, and it is unhealthy [3]. Knowledge imposition is perpetuating epistemic injustice [13]. Understanding the nature of pathogenic episteme is instrumental in fostering healthy social relations and developing healthy social policies.

Secondly, episteme provides the framework through which we perceive the social and natural world. The Eurocentric episteme influences researchers and policymakers to prioritize what is deemed significant by the society in which this episteme is cultivated and thrives [14]. It safeguards the interests and aspirations of that society. A notable consequence of Eurocentric epistemes is the emergence of the capitalist system, which fuels motives for profit and control. This episteme has played a crucial role in colonialism, neocolonial policies, racist theories and practices and the exploitation of both human and natural resources, contributing to issues such as poverty, food insecurity, and homelessness [26]. Furthermore, it has been detrimental to the preservation of African cultural well-being. As such, attempting to understand African social problems and solve them by applying a Eurocentric epistemology is counterproductive [48].

In Africa, colonialism embodies a complex and multifaceted historical and social phenomenon, intricately linked to racism, the transatlantic slave trade, and the enduring shadows of neocolonialism. The pivotal event of the 1884/85 Berlin Conference serves as a stark illustration of this racist framework in action, as it marked a morally and legally wrong, reckless scramble for African territories by European powers and degraded the people [27]. This era was characterized by the development of scientific racism, which influenced racial bias and legitimized motives steeped in racism, revealing root causes that spanned economic, political, cultural, and ideological dimensions of colonialism. Extensive evidence indicates that the primary forces propelling colonialism can be systematically categorized into several crucial areas: the relentless pursuit of economic gain, aggressive political ambitions, the drive for ideological and cultural

assimilation, claims of technological superiority, the internal dynamics among European nations, and historical precedents that set the stage for such expansionist endeavours.

Colonial policies disorient and disorganize people, denying them self-governance and hindering the development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills. It controls and disempowers to facilitate exploitation with little or no resistance. It strives to make people unable to fulfill their social, economic, political, cultural and environmental needs. Disorienting people, disempowering and making them unable to think in their own terms and address their needs, is creating a pathological social condition. As such, colonialism is a disease or a disease-causing agent [17]. To cultivate a culture of meaningful ways of thinking and make our world a better place, the following sections will delve into a comprehensive analysis of how this pervasive racist framework and knowledge system shaped and influenced colonial motivations throughout the colonial period and after and contributed to contemporary social problems in Africa.

The key colonial motives

Economic motives

Capitalism emerged in Western Europe, evolving into a dynamic economic system characterized by the accumulation of wealth through the strategic exploitation of both human and natural resources. This framework not only underscores the importance of exploiting human and natural resources, trade and commerce, but also celebrates the role of innovation and creativity as vital drivers of economic growth. The intent to accumulate wealth through the exploitation of human and natural resources and searching the market for their products informed the colonial agenda and guided colonial social policies. Examining the motives behind the transatlantic slave trade and colonial objectives reveals a deeply ingrained racist mindset. This mindset is characterized by a sense of entitlement to exploit others' human and natural resources, to accumulate wealth and enhance the colonisers quality of life, often at the expense of others [26,28].

The economic motives of colonizers can be categorized into resource extraction, the exploitation of human resources and trade expansion. European empire builders sought to gain access to the valuable natural resources of the African people. With little hesitation, they believed they were entitled to commodities such as gold, diamonds, spices, cotton, and rubber, among others. Driven by a racist episteme and a distorted sense of entitlement, the colonizers rationalized their right to exploit the resources of others [24]. Consequently, they extracted wealth from both the indigenous people and the natural environment without remorse and introduced and widened poverty levels. When explaining the objective of the Algerian national movement against French colonialism, Fanon said, “the essence of revolution is not the struggle for bread; it is the struggle for human dignity. Certainly, this includes bread” [24].

The second significant economic motive behind colonialism is the exploitation of labour. A key driver of this was the Europeans' growing appetite for sugar. The demand for sugar in Europe played a pivotal role in shaping colonial ambitions and the transatlantic slave trade. This insatiable taste for sugar led to a system that exploited both human and natural resources, profoundly impacting Africa's social, economic, political, cultural, and environmental landscape. The sugar industry thrived on free labour and lacked environmental accountability, generating immense profits and often referred to as "white gold." However, this prosperity came at a terrible cost, characterized by immense human suffering and environmental degradation. For plantation owners, it was deemed more financially viable to work enslaved individuals to death and buy replacements than to provide humane conditions for those they enslaved.

Colonizers established a brutal system of chattel slavery, viewing enslaved Africans as property. This harsh treatment, characterized by arduous labour, malnutrition, and exposure to diseases, led to significantly shorter life expectancies for those on plantations. The expansion of sugar plantations also incurred considerable environmental costs. The demand for sugar necessitated clearing ecologically rich forests, including tropical rainforests and wetlands, resulting in severe soil erosion. Additionally, the farming and processing of sugarcane consume vast amounts of water and chemicals, leading to soil and water pollution, which harms ecosystems. The extensive use of fertilizers and pesticides, along with land expropriation, has contributed to public health issues, forced displacements, and the erosion of traditional ways of life. The policies enacted during colonial times have sown lasting inequality. The legacy of colonialism persists today, with European corporations controlling African markets while profits remain concentrated among powerful plantation and mill owners [29].

The third important economic motive is trade expansion. The empire builders convinced themselves that need to create market for their goods and choose to control trade roots. They felt entitled to create market for their goods in Africa. They imposed that the African people obligated to buy and consume the empire builders’ goods.

Political Desire to dominate

The European empire builders developed a clear intent to expand their territories and assert domination and exploitation. Their political ambitions were often closely tied to economic interests. The expansion of colonial territories provided them access to the human and natural resources of the colonized peoples, further fueling their aspirations for a larger empire and increased power. Moreover, the desire to establish strategic military positions was a significant driving force behind colonial endeavours. Colonizers utilized their acquired lands as military bases and strategic assets to counterbalance rival colonial powers [28]. These possessions were perceived not only as sources of national wealth but also as symbols of military strength and cultural superiority. While the empire builders publicly professed a sense of moral superiority, they genuinely believed in their entitlement, viewing any wrongdoing as merely justifying the appropriation of land and the exploitation of human and natural resources. Moral duty should serve as a guiding principle to influence colonial policymakers and restrain them from engaging in criminal activities. Moral responsibility should motivate and guide them away from their evil colonial policies. However, the colonial policymakers were influenced by a deeply entrenched

racist episteme that shaped their identities and social standings. This framework limited their ability to recognize and comprehend the moral implications of their actions, rendering them incapable of understanding the inherent wrongs of their policies [14].

Ideological and Cultural Justifications

At the core of the colonial agenda lies the ideological and cultural justifications for their actions. These justifications are fundamentally the root of all crimes committed during colonial times and after. The colonizers, in their arrogance, believed in a perverse logic that positioned them as biologically and culturally superior. This belief served as a rationale for their colonial intentions and horrendous atrocities [24]. Furthermore, they actively sought to disseminate this ideology throughout the lands they colonized, profoundly affecting the lives and worldview of the indigenous populations. Fueled by such racist ideology, the colonizers framed their agenda as a "civilizing mission", which entailed the imposition of their religious beliefs, language, culture, and systems of governance, frequently at the expense of the colonized peoples.

To gain a deeper understanding of how racist epistemology operates, it is essential to revisit the work of Berger and Luckmann [4] on the social construction of realities. Their insights reveal that the crimes committed by colonizers—such as the exploitation of human and natural resources, as well as control and assimilation—are often framed as a "civilizing mission." Fricker [13] elaborated on the notion that the imposition of knowledge can perpetuate epistemic injustice. For instance, when Christopher Columbus arrived in America, he claimed to have "discovered" land that had been inhabited by Indigenous peoples for thousands of years. This theory of discovery provided a legal rationale for categorizing the land as "terra nullius," or no man's land, thereby justifying colonialism and genocide. Those racist concepts have become part of legal theories and the tool for political order.

From an African perspective, one might question how colonial actions, which include the exploitation of human and natural resources and the introduction of poverty, food insecurity, homelessness, and disease, can be viewed as a form of "civilizing." Similarly, from an Indigenous American standpoint, it is worth asking how the act of arriving in an Indigenous land can be construed as discovery, especially when "discovery" implies finding the unknown. Why is the concept of 'no man's land' legitimized when referring to territory occupied by Indigenous peoples? To address these pressing questions, colonizers often resort to distorted logic stemming from a racist epistemology. If I use Jalata's words, the term civilising mission is coined to hide and humanize their crime against humanity [30].

Let us simplify the concept for a general European and American audience by applying reverse logic, envisioning a scenario where Africa is the colonizing force and Europe is the colonized. Picture this: like what the English, Welsh, Scottish, and Gaelic peoples did in Africa, five prominent ethnic groups from the Horn of Africa—the Oromo, Kikuyu, Luo, Buganda, and Somali—arrive on the British Isles. Upon their arrival, they convince themselves of their racial and cultural superiority, believing they are entitled to exploit the human and natural resources of the local population. Not only do they hold this belief, but they also feel the need to persuade the island's inhabitants of their supposed entitlement.

In this imagined scenario, these groups ban the language, culture, history, institutions, and collective memory of the local people, replacing them with their own. As experienced in Africa, by the 1960s, the indigenous population of the British Isles would be striving for independence from the Horn of African colonizers. Before leaving the British Isles, these colonial forces would devise strategies to maintain their control and exploitation of the region and develop neocolonial policies. Had this situation occurred, the current struggles we witness in Africa—poverty, food insecurity, homelessness, and migration—could very well have been the reality for Europe. If that were the case, I would not be writing this research paper in English. In that scenario, the term "black and blackness" would be understood from the Oromo perspective as synonymous with "purity and holiness" [3]. This reverse logic highlights that the issue we face lies not in our skin color, but rather in the racist episteme that fuels racial and cultural dishonor, enabling discrimination in both interpersonal and contractual interactions [26].

Technological Superiority

The development of military and transportation technology is one of the identified factors. Technology is the product of the human mind and hand- it flourishes and is manufactured objectively. Social constructionists argue that theory informs practice and, conversely, that practice informs theory [31]. As such, the reason for the development of military and transportation technology in Europe because they invested in it. For centuries, as European nations grappled with harsh, fluctuating weather—from extreme cold to intense heat—many people in Africa enjoyed relatively stable climatic conditions. This favourable environment allowed for successful farming and hunting in Africa. As a result, Africans did not have an urgent need to innovate in military technology or transportation. The challenges posed by weather and population growth, along with Europeans' ambitions for colonization and dominance, spurred significant advancements in military technology and transportation, particularly in shipbuilding. The technology they have developed provided them with an upper hand in travelling long distances and killing those who oppose the colonial agenda, racist theories, and practices from a distance. By itself, technology alone is not the problem. The problem comes when their episteme informed the colonizers to use their skills to subdue others, exploit, impoverish, starve and dehumanize them.

Internal European Dynamics

The theory of ideological and cultural superiority is deeply embedded in the dominant European mindset. Conflicts rooted in racial and cultural differences among European peoples have been well-documented. These conflicts often include ethnic, cultural, and religious dimensions. A notable example is the British treatment of the Irish, among their first colonial subjects. The Irish were subjected to British colonialism because of their distinct language and Catholic faith. The British, influenced by their sense of superiority, theorized that the Irish were lesser, a narrative used to control and exploit them. Exploiting Ireland's human and natural resources

led to food insecurity and the 1845-1852 famine. The famine forced 2 million people to emigrate. Most Irish migrants settled in British colonies such as the USA, Canada, and Australia [32]. The Irish, evicted and starved in Europe and resettled in British colonial lands, were conditioned to adopt the dominant ways of life. When the Irish arrived in North America, they faced racist prejudice and were called blacks. Indigenous people showed compassion toward the Irish and recognized their shared experiences of hardship. As the Irish learned the language and adopted dominant ways of life, prejudice against them slowly receded. The inferiority framework was later adopted in other colonial territories. Mastering the ways of life means thinking and acting like the dominants, including accumulating wealth at others' expense.

Race and racism are often oversimplified to the notion of skin colour. However, they are complex, socially constructed concepts intricately woven with cultural, social status and skin colour [46]. Take, for instance, the treatment of Irish individuals in the 1600s; they were often regarded as property, stripped of autonomy and dignity. As the slave trade began to pivot toward Africa, British settlers in Barbados devised a shocking practice: they bred Irish women and girls with African men, aiming to produce enslaved individuals possessing a distinctly darker complexion [33,49]. This grim exploitation resulted in what were referred to as "mulatto" enslaved people, who fetched a higher market price than their purebred Irish counterparts, allowing settlers to maximize their profits and avoid the expense of purchasing new enslaved Africans.

The practice of interbreeding between Irish slave women and African men persisted for several decades, reaching its height until 1681, when legislation was enacted to prohibit such unions for the purpose of producing enslaved individuals for sale. This legislative action was motivated by concerns over the financial interests of a prominent slave transport company, rather than by moral considerations. Despite this prohibition, the forced transportation of tens of thousands of Irish individuals continued for over a century, with historical records documenting significant suffering. Following the Irish Rebellion of 1798, thousands of captured Irish people were transported to distant locations such as America and Australia. Deevers [33] contends, however, that the Irish experience does not constitute chattel slavery, and they were not owned as property by their master. Ireland served as England's first colony and as a testing ground for colonial strategies targeting civilian populations. Unlike enslaved people, indentured labourers in the colonies possessed legal rights. Deevers notes that, according to the Barbados Slave Code of 1661, the Irish were classified as servants rather than slaves. Upon completion of their contracts or sentences, these individuals gained independence from their employers and often settled in the Caribbean.

The Industrial Revolution intensified the demand for raw materials and new markets. The demand heightened competition among European nations, validated racist theories and practices and spurred colonial expansion. Industrialization created a greater need for human and natural resources, driving the desire for colonial conquest and exploitation of human and natural resources. A prime example is Belgium's colonial pursuit in Congo, where the extraction of rubber, ivory, and minerals (gold, copper, uranium) was a primary motive. The goal was to obtain resources through cheap labour, exploiting human resources via forced labour to enhance Belgium's economy. These colonial policies aligned closely with the racist ideologies prevalent in British and French colonial practices. Colonial policies are the result of the fermentation of racist ideas.

The colonizers convinced themselves that they had the right to enhance their quality of life at the expense of others. Consequently, the social challenges faced in European countries significantly influenced their colonial agenda. They viewed colonization as the means to address domestic issues such as unemployment, overpopulation, rising crime rates, and political unrest. For instance, the British government was overwhelmed by the number of prisoners in their own country. To address these challenges, they transported thousands of prisoners from Britain and settled them in Australia. The presence of discontented and lawless British settlers contributed to the disruption of the social fabric of the indigenous populations in Australia. To illustrate this point, I would like to share a personal encounter. I met an individual whose father resided in Kenya during the British colonial era. When I inquired about his journey to Kenya, I learned that he had struggled academically. Observing his lack of academic seriousness, his grandmother decided to send him to her nephew, a colonial settler in Kenya. According to my informant, upon arrival, he was compelled to adapt and eventually became a successful businessman. Elkins [16] describes how the British government relocated impoverished and wounded military officers from the First and Second World Wars to Kenya. These settlers generally lacked farming experience. Consequently, "successful businesspeople" were often referred to as those settlers who displaced indigenous populations from their land, exploited both human and natural resources, and accumulated significant wealth.

Historical Precedents and Patterns

The historical precedents within Europe significantly shaped their colonial ambitions overseas. For centuries, different groups in Europe colonized one another, marginalizing cultures, establishing structural inequalities, and assimilating these groups into the dominant culture. For example, in 2025, it was estimated that between only 225 and 227 distinct languages were spoken across Europe. In contrast, during the 1800s, the linguistic diversity was even greater, with approximately 26 million people speaking English and 77 million speaking French. By 2025, the number of French speakers had risen to around 160 million, while English speakers numbered about 212 million. This shift in the number of speakers for the two dominant languages reflects a significant power shift. The ongoing practice of colonization and assimilation in Europe over the centuries has informed the empire builders' motivations to conquer Africa and other regions. As such, the European colonial agenda was built on older traditions of conquest, control, exploitation, assimilation and empire building like that of the Roman, Islamic, and Mongol empires.

Internal colonialism has persisted for centuries in Europe, but it is less prevalent in Africa. It is important to note that, without idealizing African social relations, the

intention to colonize and assimilate was not the prevailing social agenda. To illustrate this point, let us consider the linguistic diversity found in Africa. There are between 2,500 and 3,000 indigenous African languages spoken across the continent. For example, Nigeria alone boasts over 500 to 520 distinct indigenous languages, while Cameroon is home to approximately 227 languages. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, more than 200 languages are spoken. This remarkable linguistic diversity not only reflects the vastness of the continent but also indicates a lower level of internal colonialism and a reduced desire for assimilation.

The six primary factors that informed the colonial agenda discussed above include economic motives, political ambitions for dominance, ideological and cultural justifications such as the civilizing mission, technological superiority, internal European political dynamics, and historical precedents and patterns. Underpinning these factors is a foundation of racist theories and practices that normalize the enrichment of one group at the expense of another, resulting in the impoverishment of colonized populations [34,35]. The exploitation of natural resources contributed to environmental degradation and pollution. Cultural assimilation diminished self-esteem and suppressed epistemic curiosity. Collectively, these factors eroded social protective mechanisms and increased vulnerability to both existing and emerging diseases [50]. Consequently, the knowledge system that legitimized the colonial agenda is described as a "pathogenic episteme."

In many African cultures, morality is rooted in the pursuit of harmony between the social sphere and both the social and natural worlds. For instance, the worldview of the Oromo people emphasizes social and environmental justice as well as social harmony. They established a political system known as Gada in which power is transitioned from one elected leader to the next every eight years. To ensure gender equity, women have organized themselves to assert their rights within the community [7]. Interestingly, in this cultural context, if an individual kills a dog, they are required to pay compensation to the family of the dog, rather than to the dog's owner (Dabassa Guyyo [3]). The central question addressed in this paper is why the theories and practices that colonize, exploit, impoverish, and create harmful social conditions are propagated and legitimized, while cultures that promote harmony are dismissed and presented as backward.

What are public health implications of Pathogenic Episteme?

To answer the question, let me start with the concept. Episteme guides our reason [25,36]. This means that episteme is practically important because our beliefs often play a decisive role in how we decide and act [37]. Epistemic pathogen refers to racist views that devalue and invalidate the knowledge, experiences, and ways of knowing of certain racialized groups and, in doing so, harm the group. It is a form of systemic analysis where dominant knowledge systems are positioned as superior, influencing what is considered valid knowledge and impacting opportunities and resources for others, compromising the needs of others. Epistemic pathogen involves the systemic devaluation of knowledge systems and ways of knowing that originate from racist worldviews. Often, it labels them as less credible and undermines the needs and aspirations of people. Pathogenic episteme involves imposing stereotypes and limiting the scope of knowledge considered legitimate, thereby reinforcing dominant narratives and perspectives. This devaluation translates into unequal access to opportunities, resources, and recognition for those whose knowledge systems are marginalized. Pathogenic episteme about systemic biases embedded in institutions and practices that perpetuate the devaluation of certain knowledges. It manifests as dismissing Indigenous knowledge in favour of Western scientific perspectives and undermining the expertise of African health professionals. Pathogenic epistemes intersect with other forms of oppression, encompassing social, economic, political, cultural, and environmental dimensions.

A critical analysis of the discursive frameworks employed to elucidate social issues in Africa reveals a persistent tendency to victimize populations already subjected to adverse social conditions informed by racist episteme, which systematically absolves perpetrators of structural injustice from accountability and intensifies the victimization of those already marginalized. For example, in 1990, predominant narratives surrounding the social determinants of HIV/AIDS selectively attributed causality to phenomena such as commercial sex work and military mobility. Closer scrutiny, however, indicates that engagement in commercial sex work frequently arises from systemic poverty and chronic food insecurity. At the same time, patterns of military mobility are often rooted in the dynamics of proxy wars fostered by socialist and capitalist political camps and territorial disputes, the products of broader colonial policy of the scramble for Africa that unwillingly divided communities. The pervasive influence of colonial and neocolonial policies on poverty, conflict, and territorial instability underscores the foundational role of racialized ideologies in structuring both colonial and postcolonial governance. Moreover, contemporary manifestations of climate change and food insecurity further exacerbate the continent's vulnerabilities, compelling African populations to bear disproportionate burdens for a global crisis to which they have contributed minimally. Nevertheless, rather than interrogating these underlying structures and ideologies, dominant discourses tend to shift responsibility onto the affected populations, thereby perpetuating a cycle of victim-blaming. Racist episteme is practically used to shift blame and responsibility.

Why does episteme matter in public health? Episteme shapes the frameworks through which health issues are interpreted and addressed; when rooted in racist assumptions, it perpetuates policies and interventions that

[3] Dabassa Guyyo, an indigenous Oromo knowledge scholar, served as a guest speaker at the OSA conference in 2005. In his presentation, he addressed the Oromo rule of law and ethics. During the discussion on ethics, he posed the question: "If someone knowingly or unknowingly kills a dog, what happens to the man who did the killing?" The audience responded that the individual would be charged and required to pay tribute. He then asked, "Financial tribute is paid to whom?" Many audience members believed the tribute was paid to the dog's owner. Guyyo clarified, "If that is the case, human beings are benefiting each other." According to Oromo ethics, however, the tribute should be directed to dogs.

obscure root causes, misallocate responsibility, and ultimately undermine equitable public health outcomes. This explains both the importance of episteme in public health and its real-world consequences, using scholarly language as requested.

Social dimensions

Human beings are inherently social creatures. African societies provide mutual support in times of need, exchanging ideas, aspirations, and challenges. Effective communication among community members fosters a better understanding of their issues, allowing them to collaboratively address them. When social policies are crafted in alignment with the community's culture, they do not compromise the needs of the group. However, when a racist framework is imposed, the voices of community members are marginalized in favour of dominant external perspectives, turning the community's concerns into problems defined by this imposed viewpoint, which is problematic.

Leadership development is essential to public health development [38]. Excluding community voices and traditional knowledge from health planning and service delivery increases the likelihood of failure in the process. The issues associated with such policies include a) the risk of developing solutions without a proper understanding of the underlying problems; b) the risk of overlooking critical issues; c) omitting the social problems the colonial imposition has created; and d) the potential for policies to be used as tools of control and exploitation. Social policies that do not incorporate participatory models, involving elders, healers, and community health workers in decision-making, ultimately hinder progress.

Economic Dimensions

Eurocentric knowledge produces professionals who advance the interests and protect the culture of the producers of that knowledge. Reflecting the global power relationships, the Eurocentric knowledge is extra-credited, subsidized, and funded. Western-trained professionals received far more credit than they deserve and were supported and recognized. Not only that, but African students who studied at Western institutions are more highly credentialed than those trained in African institutions. African students are conditioned to research social issues relevant to Euro-American societies and institutions. This is done through academic advisor research interests, research funding, and the job market. From the experience of African people, such schooling prevents them from engaging in knowledge production and hinders their understanding of their social and natural worlds. Hindering knowledge production alienates African people from developing problem-solving skills. For example, researching the public health impacts of colonialism and neocolonialism attracts fewer funders compared to researching mining natural resources in Africa. Those factors hindered epistemic curiosity of students and contributed to issues relevant to African people under researched, less understood and solved.

Political Dimension

Colonialism, which encompasses both the physical settlement in foreign lands and the control and exploitation of human and natural resources, as well as the control over indigenous minds, profoundly influences ways of thinking and acting. This control represents a political strategy employed by colonizers to realize their racist objectives. Such controls extend across a web of social, economic, cultural, and environmental dimensions. The colonizers focused on addressing social issues that aligned with their interests, often neglecting the significant challenges faced by Africans. For instance, in their pursuit of favourable social conditions, settlers opted for malaria-free areas for themselves while pushing Africans to malaria-prone regions. This exploitation of human and natural resources, which resulted in the impoverishment of the local population and subjected them to arduous labour and hazardous environments, was deemed acceptable within the colonizers' moral compass despite its detrimental impact on health. Although colonial policies induced poverty, diseases, and food insecurity, which threaten public health, they have been accepted and normalized.

Consequently, health policies frequently mirror colonial legacies and omit Indigenous governance frameworks and perspectives. Therefore, there is a pressing need for contemporary African governance systems and public health policies to integrate Indigenous African leadership in public health governance. Furthermore, if African nations collaborate with Indigenous knowledge through nation-to-nation or community-to-government frameworks, they will more effectively tackle public health challenges.

Cultural Dimension

Culture is fluid, multifaceted, and evolves in response to social challenges. It informs individuals about what to do, what not to do, and how to navigate in various situations. Culture shapes the environments we inhabit, the foods we consume, our schools of thought, and the social relationships we maintain with one another, with neighbouring cultural groups, and with the natural world. In times of uncertainty, our cultural framework guides us in exploring unfamiliar social realities. The social environments that culture informs and guides shape the foundation of public health development.

The harsh realities imposed on African communities by colonial policies—such as poverty, food insecurity, homelessness, and toxic environments—caught indigenous practices off guard. These policies created unprecedented challenges that society was ill-equipped to address. As colonial authorities exerted substantial pressure on the social, economic, and political capacities of African peoples, this also impacted their cultural frameworks. Because culture is intended to guide societies in times of uncertainty, its erosion undermines its ability to navigate the complex challenges colonialism brings, leading to a loss of legitimacy. For example, when the European empire builders conquered Africa, many people realized the killing power of the colonizers' guns and turned their faces to their divine power. In that critical juncture, the colonizers approached the African people and presented themselves as having not only superior guns but also divine power. That was the moment when cultural erosion began.

Compounding the issue, traditional healing practices were often dismissed or tokenized within colonial healthcare systems, preventing African societies from engaging in self-reflection and evaluation. Such self-assessment is crucial for resetting, reinvigorating, and

reconnecting communities, ultimately enhancing their capacity to revitalize and build resilience. Nevertheless, many African communities have demonstrated remarkable adaptability and innovation in preserving and transforming their cultures despite the pressures imposed by colonial rule. It is essential to revitalize efforts toward African cultural innovation, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills.

Culture represents the accumulated knowledge and resources of a society, encompassing intricate processes and sets of practices. Societies become more resilient, thrive, and develop when they build upon this accumulated knowledge and experience, establishing a strong foundation that supports their growth and prosperity. Culture guides societies. As such, the cultural foundation provides a framework for developing policies and for reflecting on and evaluating the policies that are formulated [39].

For instance, Hall [39] posits that culture constitutes shared meaning and signifies practices. Language, as a vital aspect of culture, serves as the medium for communicating thoughts, ideas, and emotions. The creation and dissemination of meaning have significant social implications. When societies interpret events within their cultural context, they are effectively asserting the right to define their understanding of the social and natural worlds. For example, the Oromo people's identification of blackness as a symbol of purity and holiness serves to define their identity [8]. When the African people defined colonialism as a disease and disease-causing agent, they challenged the colonizers' perspective that framed colonialism as a civilizing mission and mimicked being healers. Such definitions foster their self-esteem, guide their actions and encourage social transformation. That evidence necessitates policymakers and researchers recognizing African cultural practices as a legitimate framework for thought, particularly in public health innovation and interventions. African policymakers should prioritize integrating cultural safety training into the education and accreditation of health professionals.

The drive to "civilize" and assimilate is not merely a relic of colonial history; it persists as a pressing reality in modern times. A closer examination of the policies implemented by Euro-American states reveals a concerted effort to promote faith-based charity, which often serves to perpetuate the unfinished “civilizing mission.” The evidence underscores the significant impact that faith-based charitable organizations have on facilitating religious conversions in Africa. For example, many UKs faith-based charities are deeply entrenched in various African nations, frequently partnering with local religious groups that share their missions.

When colonizers frame their agenda as a "civilizing mission," they imply that they are civilized while Africa is not and portray themselves as healed, leaving Africa still in need of healing. This dichotomy provided a theoretical justification for their ongoing exploitation and control of the minds of African people, enabling them to evade responsibility for the widespread impoverishment, starvation, and illness they inflicted upon the African people. After the physical departure of the colonizers from Africa, neocolonial policy makers developed what they called charitable organizations that further advance this neocolonial agenda. For instance, from 2020 to 2025, charitable contributions from UK religious organizations to African countries have been estimated to be between $500 million and $1.2 billion USD. Within this landscape, Christian organizations contributed approximately $300 million to $700 million, while Islamic charities contributed an additional $150 million to $350 million. Interfaith groups also played a role, donating between $50 million and $150 million [40].

Through faith institutions, France also has invested between $500 million and $900 million across 30 African nations, with a significant portion of this funding channelled through the Catholic Church. In parallel, Belgium has contributed between $80 million and $200 million, primarily to its former colonies, including the Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi, and Rwanda. However, the underlying dynamics of neocolonial policies enacted by charitable organizations foster an inadvertent dependency among the African populace on these aid providers, further entrenching structural inequalities within these societies. In other words, the language used to describe the colonial project as a civilizing mission is replaced by post-independence language: the neocolonial charity giver. Those expenditures aim to undermine and replace local, culturally relevant institutions, eroding accumulated indigenous knowledge. The degradation of culture, institutions, and the environment has significant implications for public health.

In essence, the neocolonial policies that propagate the capitalist system, which often lead to exploitation and control, exacerbate the vulnerabilities of the African populace, rendering them homeless, helpless, and conditioning them for indoctrination. In response, these charitable organizations utilize their funding to reshape the perspectives of these vulnerable groups and individuals, effectively moulding them to align with specific ideological viewpoints.

Environmental Dimension

In many African cultures, land is not considered a commodity to be bought and sold. For instance, among the Oromo people, land is viewed as the wife of Waqaa, the Divine power. It provides essential resources: food to nourish the body, water to quench thirst, and shelter to protect against sun, rain, wind, and cold. Land nurtures the social and natural worlds in the same way that mothers nourish their children; as such, for them, she is a mother. For the Oromo, there should be a delicate equilibrium between the living and nonliving elements of land, water, and the surrounding environment; disrupting this ecological balance leads to unhealthy social conditions. Consequently, in their prayers, they express a desire for personal peace and health, as well as peace and health within families, communities, and the natural world. For them, peace in the natural world is synonymous with environmental health.

However, throughout various regions in Africa, empire builders significantly disrupted social, economic, political, and cultural dynamics, including environmental integrity. Colonizers redefined the relationship between humanity and nature, imposing the notion of buying and selling land. This colonial mindset undermined traditional land-based ecological knowledge and was subsequently integrated into health planning. However, African perspectives, which align with public health, environmental justice, and

responsible land stewardship, are often excluded from health planning. This necessitates that African policymakers and researchers reimagine and revitalize theories and practices that support land-based healing programs and uphold the sanctity of sites and relationships linked to well-being.

Colonialism established an intolerable social reality for African people, stripping them of their humanity, impoverishing them, creating food insecurity, and exposing them to numerous diseases [17]. Dehumanization entails denying a person's dignity and humanity. Those who perpetrated this theft of dignity did so with the intention of silencing, exploiting, and controlling their colonial subjects with impunity [24]. Under colonial rule, educational institutions were manipulated to present the colonial social structure as natural and acceptable, rendering inequality and injustice invisible. Those few individuals who gained access to higher education experienced a boost in self-awareness, fostering a sense of dignity and hope. Knowledge is power, and education heightens self-awareness, empowering the educated group to examine and understand their community's social realities critically. By analyzing the root causes of issues such as poverty, homelessness, malnutrition, and disease, they could begin to identify and challenge the forces responsible for colonialism and the theories behind it, racism.

The second world war on which millions of people died conditioned the world community to define their relationships. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) the document used as founding principle for the United Nations openly defined that all humans are equal [51]. All founding countries ratified the document. It happened to be most of the African countries were under the colonial rule when the document ratified. The empire builders like UK, France, Belgium, Spain, Portugal who had colonies in Africa ratified the documents while their colonial subjected lived in unhuman conditions. Although the principle of UDHR is not perfect if created precedent many people to challenge racist theories and practices-which includes colonialism. Human dignity is advanced through the advancement of human rights. The UDHR that theoretical invalidated racist mindset supported with the conciseness of people Africa educated forces fostered the national liberation struggle – which led to the birth of liberation fronts. Although, the empire builders fought the Nazi military guided by racist ideology using their colonial subjects and won the war, they were reluctant to accept that the African people have equal right with them. They fought to suppress the forces of national liberation movements. When they realised that things have changed, they decide to hand the power to the people.

During the decade of decolonization, significant policy thinking surfaced focused on managing the social dynamics between former colonial powers and African countries, which led to the formulation of neocolonial policies and practices. Neocolonialism can be understood as a reconstituted version of colonial policies that allows former colonizers to maintain influence and control over African countries without direct political rule. While the traditional colonialism was characterized by overt domination, exploitation, and dehumanization perpetrated by colonial settlers and institutions, neocolonialism is made to operate through more covert/insidious mechanisms, allowing colonizers to exert control indirectly and from distant places. The primary objectives of neocolonial policies and strategies are to manipulate and utilize local elites, who are conditioned to be dependent on the colonizers and prioritize the interests of their former colonizers over the needs and aspirations of their own populations. This socially constructed condition, which fosters dependency, manifests itself through seven primary methods that underpin the implementation of neocolonial objectives.

Firstly, the colonial education system plays a pivotal role in fostering a culture of docility among the populace. By framing the suffering and exploitation experienced by the colonized people as divinely ordained, the education system instills a sense of fatalism, thus undermining the self-efficacy of the African elites. Consequently, colonial ideologies become internalized, shaping the policy decisions of post-liberation governments and conditioning them to depend on colonizers and facilitating the neocolonial agenda.

Secondly, the propagation of racist ideologies served to reinforce feelings of inferiority and helplessness among colonized peoples. Former colonizers propagated beliefs of cultural and racial superiority, convincing post-liberation African leaders of the preeminence of European knowledge systems. As a result, these leaders often sought to send the youth of their nations to Europe for education, neglecting the critical development of indigenous knowledge production. The African students were conditioned to learn the perspective and worldview of the colonizers and get attracted to their commodities and ways of thinking, which fostered dependency.

Thirdly, the dismantling of indigenous institutions by colonial powers was followed by the establishment of foreign structures that persisted post-liberation. These colonial institutions continued to serve the interests of the colonizers, acting as vehicles for the perpetuation of neocolonial policies. For example, colonizers attacked the African indigenous religion, and charitable organizations were replaced with colonizers' ones. The newly introduced religious and charitable organizations are institutionalized and operate under the direction of their founders. This fostered a culture of dependency.

Fourthly, the mechanization of trade facilitated by colonizers not only established markets for their products within colonial territories but also created dependencies on the exportation of raw materials from African nations. This economic structure reinforced the neocolonial relationship, leaving African economies vulnerable to external influences. The poverty, food insecurity and homelessness the colonizers created make African countries dependent on the colonizers' market.

Fifthly, the colonial assimilation policy fostered self-depression- good for nothing, know nothing, incapable of producing knowledge and unproductive and convince themselves of their own unfitness. Self-depression makes them look outside instead of looking inside and makes them vulnerable to being dependent.

Sixth, the colonizers employed reward and punishment methods to further their neocolonial agenda. They systematically eliminated or displaced African leaders who resisted their order and undermined their interests.

Notable examples include Patrice Lumumba of the Democratic Republic of Congo, who was assassinated, and Sekou Ture, who was supported and elevated to power.

Lastly, local elites, influenced by the colonial model of wealth accumulation, increasingly aligned their interests with those of the colonizers. To enhance the capacity to accumulate wealth and power, those elites often choose to act in the interest of the colonizers. This alignment has often led to actions that favour the interests of former colonial powers, thereby further entrenching neocolonial dynamics and undermining the sovereignty and interests of African peoples [41].

Through these complex mechanisms, neocolonialism emerges as a multifaceted and enduring form of domination that shapes the political, economic, and social landscapes of postcolonial African countries and is implicated in the underdevelopment of public health. As the racist theories and practices informed colonial policies, they also guided the neocolonial policies. The colonizers' intent to dominate and exploit, the motive to create a market for their products and enrich themselves at the cost of others, is still alive and flourishing in postcolonial Africa.

Many African countries are celebrating their Independence Day. They often communicate in the languages of their former colonizers, practice the religion introduced by them, and dress in the style of their former colonizers. The talents of fellow citizens are frequently evaluated based on their proficiency in the colonizers' culture, history and viewpoints. Unfortunately, this leads to a pursuit of imitation of the colonizers rather than self-affirmation and self-actualization [41]. In nations that were once French colonies, French is the official language, whereas in those formerly colonized by the British, English is the official language. For example, in the Kenyan parliament, proficiency in English is a prerequisite for election, regardless of one's knowledge of multiple African languages. Additionally, wearing African attire is prohibited during parliamentary sessions. In many of these countries, a substantial portion of the national budget relies on foreign aid.

5. Discussions

The theories and practices of public health science are fundamentally rooted in identifying the underlying causes of social problems, mitigating risk factors, and fostering protective factors. In this context, this paper examines the key motivations driving European colonization of Africa and the theories that guided them. The primary motives identified include economic interests, political aspirations for dominance, prejudiced ideological and cultural rationalizations, technological superiority, and internal social dynamics within Europe. These motives are not only relevant to historical contexts but continue to resonate in both the present and future. If left unaddressed, they will continue to be significant contributors to social problems. The implications for public health extend across time, emphasizing the need for future-oriented policymakers to confront the racist epistemes that fueled these motives. It is essential to revitalize perspectives that challenge biased views and promote social and environmental justice.

Many colonial policymakers were devout Christians influenced by Biblical teachings. The teaching of Holy Book includes the Ten Commandments, which are intended to guide followers' ethical norms and moral standards. It instructs followers not to kill, steal, or covet their neighbour's possessions. Yet, when they kill, steal and covet the African possessions, the Church did not stop and prevent colonizers from violating these commandments. In fact, the Church—primarily through Christian missionaries—played a complex and significant role in the colonization of Africa, often serving as a supportive force, providing partial justification, and facilitating exploitation and cultural and social change. For example, the Christian missionaries were often the first Europeans to penetrate the interior of Africa, establishing stations that sometimes served as bases for colonial forces or future administrative centers. They supplied valuable geographical and cultural information to colonial forces. They also acted as interpreters during treaty negotiations (such as the 1900 Buganda Agreement of Uganda). The presence of missionaries often served to pacify local populations, making colonization easier and exploitation with little or no resistance.

When questioning why they acted against their own teachings, we find that the African people were largely excluded from their moral framework. When asked why this exclusion exists, the response typically points to a deep belief in the racial superiority of Europeans. Consequently, the norms and morality outlined in their sacred texts did not extend to Africans. Thus, the underlying racist epistemology emerges as the root cause of the colonial agenda. As a public health professional, “thinking upstream” requires us to recognize that this racist episteme is inherently pathogenic. The episteme is responsible for developing all the colonial motives. Unless this racist episteme is delegitimized, it can reinvent itself and further create unhealthy social conditions.

Let's closely examine the impacts of these motives from a public health perspective. The economic motive involves the exploitation of both human and natural resources, as well as the establishment of a market for the empire builders' products. Those different forms of exploitation primarily enrich the empire builders at the expense of the colonized populations. Marketing strategies have been tailored to convert African people into consumers of European goods, fostering a dependency on these products. To this day, raw materials from Africa are exported to Europe, while industrial goods from Europe are sold in Africa. This cycle continues to undermine the economic well-being of the African people. It has been a significant factor in the persistence of poverty, homelessness, and food insecurity that were introduced and exacerbated by the empire builders in Africa. These issues not only erode human dignity but also have detrimental effects on physical health, mental well-being, and social stability.

The second identified motive for colonization is the desire to exert political dominance. A close examination of the reasons behind this urge reveals that racist episteme provides both theoretical and practical justifications for colonizers to claim exclusive rights, inherit property, and accumulate greater wealth and power at the expense of others. The desire to dominate stems from a

fundamentally racist worldview. It not only undermines the dignity of individuals and groups but also strips them of their right to make decisions regarding the social, economic, political, cultural, and environmental affairs of their society. For example, violations of political rights result in a denial of leadership development and which in turn impede the cultivation of problem-solving skills. Such infringements, whether occurring individually or collectively, contribute to the creation of pathological social conditions [38].

The third identified motive is the ideological and cultural justification for colonization. Colonizers often perceived themselves as biologically and culturally superior, believing they possessed greater knowledge, true religion, and richer experiences than others. This racist worldview led them to assume a moral obligation to spread their perspectives, religion and ways of life to others. For that reason, they presented the colonial agenda in a positive light as a "civilizing mission," mimicking the concept of healing. They assert that it was their duty to impose their beliefs on the colonized people. A prime example of this is the colonization of Uganda, which was driven by church groups lobbying the British government to conquer and create the opportunity to preach the gospel. The motive to impose their culture is instrumental in developing assimilation policies. Assimilation policies eroded the culture and identity of the people and altered their views about themselves, their social realities and the colonizers. Assimilation hindered the pursuit of self-affirmation and self-actualization. Assimilation not only created pathological social conditions but also hindered resiliency.

The fourth identified factor that facilitated colonialism in Africa was the technological advancement of the empire builders. Knowledge is socially constructed, leading different societies to develop distinct skills tailored to address their unique social challenges and available resources. European empire builders cultivated knowledge suited to their specific natural and social environments. For instance, the United Kingdom, as an island country, historically prioritized the enhancement of its shipbuilding capabilities. This expertise was instrumental in effectively travelling a long distance by sea and transporting military forces and their ammunition to Africa, which allowed them to subdue the local African populations.

Additionally, the longstanding intense competition among Europeans spurred advancements in gun manufacturing. The gun making knowledge and skills developed were also employed to overpower the African people. As Foucault notes, knowledge and power are inextricably linked. As such the empire builders utilized their understanding of ship and gun making to consolidate their power, and in turn, their power further reinforced their knowledge [42]. Furthermore, the aspiration to expand empires and accumulate wealth and power also significantly contributed to the enhancement of the technologies associated with firearms and naval shipbuilding. Within this framework, which reflects a historically prevalent racist episteme, has fostered advancement in the development of particular types of knowledge and technical proficiencies. This dynamic illustrates how imperial ambitions not only fueled technological innovation but also a racist episteme informed the practices and development of certain knowledge.

The identified fifth factor responsible for the colonial desire is the internal European political dynamics. Those dynamics include one group subjugating the other, and those who were subjugated were forced to flee and seek a place where they could live in peace. For example, the members of the Mennonite church have been persecuted in Western Europe for their beliefs, and they were forced to settle elsewhere in Eastern Europe and North America. Although the Mennonite church groups were actively present in Africa during the colonial period through their mission work, their activities were part of the broader, complex colonial work. The church actively participated in settler colonialism in North America, where communities were granted land, and in Africa, its primary motive is not land and property acquisition.

Ireland was the first British colony and remained under British rule until 1922. When Britain was expanding its colonial territory in Africa, many Irishmen served in the colonial military and administration. These individuals played a role in the expansion and maintenance of British control in Africa. Additionally, some Irish merchants profited from the broader British imperial trade networks, which included the slave trade and Caribbean plantations. A small group of Irish also emigrated to Africa during the Famine years. Most went to the Cape Colony (modern South Africa) and were later considered part of the English-speaking white minority, where some became plantation owners and slave masters [43]. This historical context is significant to the topic under investigation, as it highlights the social issues arising from British racist colonial policies, which rendered the Irish susceptible to being pitted against others facing similar challenges. Furthermore, as the Irish became proficient in English and culture, their social status began to rise.

The core motivation for most Christian missions was the deeply held belief that they had a divine mandate to bring the gospel to "unreached peoples." Self-righteous, the missionaries deeply believed in delivering people from spiritual "perdition" and bringing them to salvation. They were guided by a desire to witness religious conversions, establish churches, and propagate their Christian faith. For the Mennonite church group, engaging in foreign missions in Africa was a way to demonstrate that their faith was alive and relevant, to enlarge their membership and widen their circle of influence, rather than just an inherited ethnic tradition focused on survival. They used mission work as a means of institutional and theological renewal within their own church.

Another contributing factor to the European internal dynamics was the continent's overpopulation, coupled with economic power concentrated in the hands of a select few elites. The economic monopolization heightened competition for resources and restricted access to necessities, leading to various forms of social problems (robbery, theft, and murder) and an increase in incarceration rates. Incarcerated individuals were often exploited and conditioned to support various colonial projects. The elites viewed the criminals as a source of cheap labour and frequently assigned them to high-risk military roles and disease-ridden environments. European

empire builders commonly granted pardons or commuted the sentences of convicts in exchange for military service, particularly in less favourable colonial territories. Moreover, these convicted criminals were subjected to forced labour on significant colonial projects, such as constructing roads, bridges, and fortifications, as well as engaging in tasks such as clearing swamps, clerical work, and performing domestic duties. In essence, the empire builders exported their social challenges to Africa. They also utilized the poor and marginalized Europeans to expand colonial lands and benefit from the prevailing colonial power dynamics.

Capitalist social and economic theories revolve around the accumulation of wealth. This accumulation is only possible through the exploitation of human and natural resources, as well as the application of creativity. Creating and developing innovative products to accumulate wealth is a challenging task that only a few have accomplished. The desire for rapid wealth accumulation has historically driven the pursuit of power and the validation of knowledge. Since power and knowledge are intertwined, the pursuit of wealth has informed practices such as colonization, exploitation, and the assimilation of people. To end the legacies of colonialism and challenge policies developed through neocolonialism and promote social transformation in Africa, improve the quality of life and widen people's choices, it is essential to raise awareness of the problem and challenge racist theories and policies.

African people must grasp the knowledge context that shaped European empire builders' perspectives on the slave trade, colonialism, and neocolonial policies. It is essential to understand the ideas that influenced the social Darwinian theories of British philosopher Herbert Spencer. Spencer coined and popularized "survival of the fittest," applying it to society. Social Darwinian theory established a framework for a biological and cultural racial hierarchy, with industrialists at the top, followed by agriculturalists, agropastoralists, and nomads at the lower end of the social spectrum. This categorization provided racist justifications for Europeans to conquer and dominate non-European societies. The theory claims that subjugation of the less developed is natural, inevitable, and desirable. It promoted the colonial "civilizing mission," advancing the colonial agenda and the interests of those who created these ideas. To address the legacy of colonialism and its ongoing impact, it is necessary to challenge and disrupt the theories and practices that support it.

As previously discussed, colonial powers in Africa systematically extracted vast natural resources—such as minerals, timber, and fossil fuels—from colonized territories, often with little regard for ecological sustainability, human welfare, or the long-term health of the environment. This extensive exploitation of resources fueled the engines of industrialization and historical carbon emissions, which continue to have a significant impact on our planet. The resources extracted primarily benefited the colonizers, enhancing their living conditions while further subjugating and exploiting the African populace. Ironically, the African people, who have contributed the least to the climate change crisis, now find themselves on the frontlines, facing its most severe consequences, including floods, persistent droughts, and relentless heatwaves.

In addition, the African people endure a litany of unjust climate policies, ranging from carbon offset initiatives to the misleading tactics orchestrated by wealthier, former colonial nations. As a result, African people are conditioned to unwittingly shouldering the burdens of colonialism, bearing the fallout of decisions made long ago. Furthermore, the colonial economic models that prioritized export crop economies and monoculture have further entrenched the African people's vulnerability, leaving them ill-equipped to withstand the extreme weather events triggered by climate change. This precarious situation is deeply intertwined with land use patterns and infrastructure that were shaped by the harsh realities of capitalist ideology, perpetuating cycles of inequality and environmental degradation.

For the African people climate change is not a distant threat. The racist episteme that promoted colonization of Africa is the orchestrator of climate change. It is the same ideology that guided the empire builders in avoiding taking responsibility for the problems they created and passing the blame to others. Pathogenicity of racist episteme is revealed when the colonizers used their knowledge and power to extract the African resources, pollute the environment and enrich themselves and improve their quality of life at the cost of the African people.

6. Conclusions

The preceding analyses indicate that the underlying framework of racist theories and practices has significantly influenced colonial and neo-colonial agendas. The social culpability associated with a racist epistemology is manifest across the five identified motives. Furthermore, these motives continue to perpetuate their influence, shaping contemporary Euro-American social policies.

The Eurocentric tendency to think in isolation, combined with a self-righteous worldview, is intricately linked to various social problems in Africa. This mindset defines the structural determinants of health that reinforce both colonialism and neocolonial social policies. Such self-righteous perspectives contribute to testimonial injustice, wherein individuals' and groups lived experiences are devalued and hermeneutical injustice, where the collective perception of a group is that it is inherently deficient.

The colonial policies led to the establishment of Euro-American social institutions that formalized their perspectives and frameworks for addressing social issues in Africa. As a result, research agendas have concentrated on questions and solutions that primarily benefit the dominant groups. This focus has led to an incomplete understanding of the problems and the social determinants of health in the region.

If research is conducted from a Eurocentric perspective and fails to include African voices adequately, the findings do not accurately reflect reality. Consequently, the data collection and interpretation lack depth. For example, such research may overlook and neglect social issues stemming from a racist epistemology and colonial policies [24]. This oversight has contributed to policy

failures, as interventions are often developed without a comprehensive understanding of the lived experiences of individuals in Africa.

Policy Recommendation

The African knowledge system embodies the accumulated lived experiences of African people. African institutions carry with them a rich institutional memory and a distinct framework of thought. When these institutions are attacked and altered, the foundational framework of thinking is also transformed, often leading to the adoption of a colonial culture. To attack indigenous institutions and worldviews is to undermine the identity, perspective, and self-esteem of the people [41]. African communities must validate their indigenous institutions and cultural standards across all areas of life while promoting knowledge production that aligns with their local culture and social realities by framing pertinent research questions.

Colonial social policies significantly undermined indigenous African institutions, and neocolonial practices further legitimized these attacks by replacing them with Euro-American systems. African countries must reclaim their indigenous institutions and actively develop knowledge production entities. This approach will enhance the framework for understanding social and environmental justice, helping to address African problems and advance their interests. The Euro-American institutions are deeply rooted in the cultures from which they originate and primarily serve the interests of those groups. Because these institutions are linked to specific cultural contexts, they often fail to effectively understand the root causes of African social problems and promote their interests. Therefore, it is essential for African people to reject imposed systems of knowledge and to contextualize the experiences of others only after conducting thorough evaluations.

Knowledge is not simply handed down to us; instead, it is a phenomenon that is constructed through social interactions, experiences and by design. This includes knowledge about health diseases. Knowledge is used to define problems, and, in its turn, the definition informs the actions. For instance, when colonial powers framed their imperial ambitions as a "civilizing mission," they portrayed themselves as benevolent healers. Meanwhile, the African people perceived this intervention as a disease and a disease-causing agent. If Africans were conditioned to adopt the colonial narrative from the perspective of the empire builders, it might appear acceptable and desirable [41]. However, when viewed through the lens of African experiences and definitions, this same phenomenon is seen as undesirable and unacceptable. This necessitates that African countries need to develop cultural safety standards within their healthcare institutions.

Knowledge production occurs through observation, reflection, and the design of experiments. Effectively institutionalizing this process enhances individuals' and groups' capacity to identify opportunities, assess risks, and develop problem-solving skills. Prioritizing knowledge production is essential for achieving sustainable development, self-sufficiency, and capacity building of the continent. African nations should increase their investments in Indigenous and locally led research and education, continuously refining and adapting their understanding of social challenges. This approach will enable them to find financially viable, culturally relevant, and practical solutions to both longstanding and emerging issues.

In the area of knowledge production, validation plays a crucial role. Substantiating knowledge is critical in establishing the credibility, reliability, and improving the impactfulness of knowledge-producing institutions. As African countries continuously strive to promote knowledge production, they must also support and accompany accreditation efforts. This involves meaningfully recognizing and accrediting cultural knowledge systems, as well as integrating indigenous and community-based knowledge alongside newly generated insights. Reassessing the validity of traditional and community-based experiences is vital. Practically, accreditation distinguishes evidence-based expertise from other sources of information. However, the accreditation of indigenous knowledge should be approached from an African perspective.

Recognizing that knowledge is socially constructed, it becomes evident that engaging a wide array of stakeholders significantly enriches the learning process, making it both more effective, inclusive, culturally appropriate and cost-effective. The participation of diverse groups brings forth accumulated knowledge and a wealth of perspectives, fostering innovative and creative solutions that might otherwise remain untapped. In the context of public health knowledge production and governance, African countries must prioritize and ensure the representation of various knowledge holders. By doing so, they can harness the collective wisdom and insights of their communities, ultimately leading to more comprehensive and equitable health outcomes.

The racist episteme stands as a pivotal force behind the colonial and neocolonial policies that have historically shaped Africa. It bears significant responsibility for the pervasive social, economic, political, cultural, and environmental degradation afflicting African people. The grim realities of heightened poverty rates, widespread malnutrition, rampant homelessness, and enduring instability across the continent can be directly traced to the destructive social policies perpetuated by the empire builders who sought to accumulate wealth and power at the expense of Africans. In this context, African nations must persistently confront the entrenched racist episteme, actively working towards the development and recognition of epistemic equity. Such a commitment is essential for fostering a more just, equitable, and environmentally sustainable future for all Africans.

References

[1] Rodney, Walter (1972). How Europe Underdeveloped Africa. London: Bogle-L'Ouverture. ISBN 978-0-9501546-4-0.

[2] Beagan, Brenda; Bizzeth, Stephanie; Sibbald, Kaitlin; and Etowa, Josephine (2024) Epistemic Racism in the health professions: A qualitative study with Black women in Canada. Health, Vol 28 (2) 203-215.

[3] Dugassa, Begna (2011) Colonialism of Mind: The Experience of

Oromo People in Ethiopia, Journal of Sociology of Mind, Vol. 1, No. 2, pp55-64.

[4] Berger, Peter and Luckmann Thomas (1967) The Social Construction of Reality, A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge, Anchor Books, New York.

[5] O'Brien, Dan (2006) An Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge, Polity, Cambridge, UK.

[6] Esterberg, Kristin (2002) Qualitative Methods in Social Research, McGraw Hill, Boston, USA.

[7] Dugassa, Begna (2019) Where is the Global South in the Health Discourse? Attempt Forthcoming from the Oromo People's Perspective, American Journal of Public Health Research, 2018, Vol. 6, No. 6, 243-252.

[8] Dugassa, Begna (2012) Knowledge Construction: Untapped Perspective in Pursuit for Health Equity Journal of Sociology of Mind, Vol. 2, No. 4, pp362-372.

[9] Dugassa, Begna (2020) The Public Health Significance of Religious Imposition: The Experience of Oromo People in Ethiopia, Journal of Religion and Health, pages 1-25.

[10] WHO (2021). Health Promotion Glossary of Terms 2021, https://iris.who.int/server/api/core/bitstreams/96da8799-4938-4d66-b171-04770ed4b243/content.

[11] National Collaborating Centres for Public Health (NCCPH) (2025) Core Competencies for Public Health in Canada: Release 2.0, https://nccph.ca/projects/core-competencies-for-public-health-in-canada/.

[12] Foucault, Michel (2002) Michael Foucault, Revised Edition barry smar, Routledge, UK.

[13] Fricker, Miranda (2007). Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing. Oxford: University Press.

[14] Scheurich, Joseph; Young, Michelle (1997) Coloring Epistemologies: Are Our Research Epistemologies Racially Biased? Educational Researcher, v26 n4 p4-16 May 1997.

[15] Dugassa, Begna (2018) Colonialism and Public Health: The Case of the Rinderpest Virus in Oromia Regional State in Ethiopia, Journal of Preventive Medicine, Vol 3 (1: 4)1-14.

[16] Elkins, Caroline (2014) Britain's Gulag: Brutal Ends of Empire in Kenya, The Bodley Head, London.

[17] Dugassa, Begna (2025). [Full reference details to be supplied.

[18] Dugassa Begna (2021). Structural inequality (SI) and underdevelopment of public health conditions: the experiences of Oromo people in Ethiopia. HPHR. 2021; 30.

[19] Taylor Rex, Rieger Aannelie (1985) Medicine as Social Science: Rudolf Virchow on the Typhus Epidemic in Upper Silesia. International Journal of Health Services; 15(4): 547-559.

[20] Hochschild, Adam (1998) King Leopold's Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa, Houghton Mifflin.

[21] WHO (2024) Fact Sheet on Malaria and the World Malaria Report 2024.

[22] WHO (2025) Maternal Mortality, https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/maternal-mortality.

[23] WHO Neglected Tropical Diseases, https://www.who.int/health-topics/neglected-tropical-diseases#tab=tab_1.

[24] Fanon, Frantz (1965) A Dying Colonialism, Grove Press, New York, USA.

[25] Mbembe, Achille (1992). "Provisional Notes on the Postcolony". Africa: Journal of the International African Institute. 62 (1): 3-37.

[26] Loury, Glenn (2002) The Anatomy of Racial Inequality, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

[27] Pakenham, Thomas (1992). The Scramble for Africa: the White Man's Conquest of the Dark Continent from 1876 to 1912 (13th ed.). London: Abacus. ISBN 978-0-349-10449-2.

[28] Bulhan, H. A. (2015). Stages of colonialism in Africa: From occupation of land to occupation of being. Journal of Social and Political Psychology, 3(1), 239–256.

[29] Kohn, M. (2014). Colonialism. In E. N. Zalta (Ed.), The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. https:// plato.stanford.edu/ entries/colonialism/.

[30] Jalata, Asafa (2016) Phases of Terrorism in the Age of Globalization. From Chrstopher Columbus to Osma bin Laden, Palgrave, McMillan, UK.

[31] Burr, Vivien. (2015). *Social constructionism* (3rd ed.). Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group.

[32] Morgan, Gerard (2018) The History of the Irish Famine: The Exodus: Emigration and the Great Irish Famine,1st Edition, Routledge, London, UK.

[33] Deevers, David (2023) Forced Transportation (Penal Transportation): During the 1600s, tens of thousands of Irish people were forcibly transported, often as punishment for crimes like vagrancy or for being political prisoners, and sent to work in the West Indies (like Barbados). They were bound to a master for a fixed period of forced labor., https:// www.theguardian.com/ world/2023/apr/12/irish-people-sent-to-the-caribbean-were-not-enslaved#:~:text=Many%20tried%20to%20stowaway%20on,defined%20as%20servants%2C%20not%20slaves.

[34] Hagan, C. P. (n.d.). European colonialism and the roots of the systemic challenges of African states. Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences. https:// www.pass.va/ en/publications/studia-selecta/studia_selecta_10_pass/hagan.html.

[35] Ypi, L. (2013). What's wrong with colonialism. Philosophy & Public Affairs, 41(2), 158–191.

[36] Said, Edward (1994) Culture and Imperialism, Alfred A. Knopf/New York.

[37] Bishop, M. and Trout, J (2003) Epistemology's search for significance. J. Expr. Theor. Artif. Intell 15 p. 203-216.

[38] Dugassa, Begna (2012a) Denial of Leadership Development and the Underdevelopment of Public Health: The Experience of the Oromo People in Ethiopia. Journal of Oromo Studies, Vol. 19, No. 1 &2, p139-174.

[39] Hall, Stuart. (1997) Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices, SAGE, Publications Ltd.

[40] UK Charity Commission, Aggregated from charity annual reports, UK Charity Commission filings, and sector analyses.

[41] Fanon, Franz (2008) Black Skin, White Masks, Grove Press, New York, USA.

[42] Foucault, Michel (1988). [Full reference details to be supplied.

[43] McGrath, Tom (2023) A Gaelic South African Revival? The Irish Republican Association of South Africa, The Republic, and Irish South African Identity, Critical Inquiries into Irish Studies Volume 5 Issue 1.

[44] Dowden, Richard (2009) Africa Altered States, Ordinary Miracles, Public Affairs, New York.

[45] Mamdani, Mahmood (1996). Citizen and subject: contemporary Africa and the legacy of late colonialism. Kampala: Fountain Publishers.

[46] Dei, George (2000) Rethinking the role of Indigenous Knowledges in the academy. Int. J. Inclusive Education, 2000. Vol. 4, No. 2, pp111-132.

[47] Freire, Paulo (2002) Pedagogy of the Oppressed, 30th Anniversary Edition with an Introduction by Donaldo Macedo. New York, Continuum.

[48] Ryuko Kubota (2020) Confronting Epistemological Racism, Decolonizing Scholarly Knowledge: Race and Gender in Applied Linguistics, Applied Linguistics, Volume 41, Issue 5, October, Pages 712–732.

[49] Martin, John (2023) The Irish Slave Trade – The Forgotten "White" Slaves (Part 1 of 3), https://www.irishpeople.ie/the-irish-slave-trade-the-forgotten-white-slaves-part-1-of-3/ (Retrieved on October 24, 2025).

[50] Indigenous Peoples Report (2007) Social Determinants and Indigenous health: The International experience and its policy implications. Report on specially prepared documents, presentations and discussion at the International Symposium on the Social Determinants of Indigenous Health Adelaide, 29-30 April 2007 for the commission on Social Determinants of Health (LSDH).

[51] UDHR (1948) Universal Declaration of Human Rights, https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights.

© The Author(s) 2026. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).