

***Avoiding Epistemic Erasure in Artificial Intelligence (AI) for Posterity: Achieving Active Decolonisation,
Data Sovereignty, Community Co-Creation and Ubuntu***

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Avoiding Epistemic Erasure in Artificial Intelligence (AI) for Posterity: Achieving Active Decolonisation, Data Sovereignty, Community Co-Creation and Ubuntu

Kariuki Muigua*

Abstract

This paper discusses how epistemic erasure can be avoided in the development, deployment and use of Artificial Intelligence (AI). The paper observes that epistemic erasure is widespread in AI due to the systematic marginalization and dismissal of the knowledge systems of marginalised groups including indigenous peoples and local communities. The paper examines some of the forms of epistemic erasure in AI. In light of current injustices, the paper argues that there is need to tackle epistemic erasure in order to ensure fairness, justice, equity and inclusivity in AI for posterity. In order to realise this goal, the paper discusses how the development, deployment and use of AI can be reformed with emphasis on active decolonisation, data sovereignty, community co-creation and Ubuntu.

1.0 Introduction

It has been observed that epistemic erasures continue to exist all over the world¹. Epistemic erasure occurs when minorities and marginalised groups are systematically dismissed and deprived of their ability in the production, dissemination and utilisation of knowledge². In addition, it has been observed that epistemic erasure occurs when knowledge, cultures, and histories are systematically erased or dismissed, especially those belonging to marginalised groups such as indigenous and local communities and people of colour³. Epistemic Erasure can also be described as the process through which the knowledge systems of marginalised communities are rendered invisible⁴.

Epistemic erasure therefore describes the injustices and inequalities perpetuated mainly due to marginalisation of non-Western epistemologies⁵. It has been observed that due to epistemic erasure, some people and communities are unable to participate equally in the production, dissemination and circulation

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¹ Masri. Y et al., 'Understanding epistemic erasures of local & indigenous communities' Available at <https://www.developmentresearch.eu/?p=1425> (Accessed on 01/08/2026)

² Ibid

³ What is Epistemic Erasure?., Available at https://www.blackhistorybuff.com/blogs/podcast/what-is-epistemic-erasure-black-history-buff-definitions?srsId=AfmBOor_QwfvJq2HEdNhBVYdkATNU47jrCy9g6x_W6inX953OjL9fMc (Accessed on 01/08/2026)

⁴ Confronting Epistemic Erasures – A TWQ Special Issue on Decolonising Knowledge, Fostering Resistance and Building Alternatives., Available at <https://globalsouth.org/2025/10/confronting-epistemic-erasures-a-twq-special-issue-on-decolonising-knowledge-fostering-resistance-and-building-alternatives/> (Accessed on 01/08/2026)

⁵ Ibid

of knowledge⁶. In addition, epistemic erasure raises injustices and inequalities since some people are marginalized, discriminated and mistreated in their capacity as producers of knowledge⁷.

Avoiding epistemic erasure is therefore key towards achieving justice, equity, inclusivity and fairness in the production, dissemination and use of knowledge. It has been observed that by tackling epistemic erasure, it is possible to promote more inclusive, just, equitable and fair knowledge creation with emphasis on marginalised voices⁸. Eradicating epistemic erasure is therefore necessary towards appreciating diversity, inclusivity and different ways of knowing⁹.

This paper discusses how epistemic erasure can be avoided in the development, deployment and use of Artificial Intelligence (AI). The paper observes that epistemic erasure is widespread in AI due to the systematic marginalization and dismissal of the knowledge systems of marginalised groups including indigenous peoples and local communities. The paper examines some of the forms of epistemic erasure in AI. In light of current injustices, the paper argues that there is need to tackle epistemic erasure in order to ensure fairness, justice, equity and inclusivity in AI for posterity. In order to realise this goal, the paper discusses how the development, deployment and use of AI can be reformed with emphasis on active decolonisation, data sovereignty, community co-creation and Ubuntu.

2.0 Epistemic Erasure in Artificial Intelligence: Causes and Effects

Epistemic erasure is a widespread phenomenon in AI. For instance, it has been observed that the systematic silencing, exclusion and distortion on non-Western knowledge systems, worldviews and languages is a clear manifestation of epistemic erasure in technology and AI¹⁰. The development, deployment, training and use of AI systems and models takes a Western-centric approach undermining the role of other epistemologies in the governance of this powerful technology¹¹. It has been observed that the growth and adoption of AI inferiorizes non-Western epistemologies thus contributing to the erosion of their epistemic particulars especially in the context of indigenous knowledge systems, worldviews, cultures and languages¹².

It has been correctly observed that AI technologies often embed and perpetuate epistemic injustices by privileging dominant perspectives while marginalising others, a situation that leads to epistemic erasure¹³.

⁶ Epistemic Injustice: What Is It and How Does It Relate to Poverty?., Available at <https://www.atd-fourthworld.org/epistemic-injustice/> (Accessed on 01/08/2026)

⁷ Tobi. A., 'Epistemic Injustices Online' Available at <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11245-024-10100-4> (Accessed on 01/08/2026)

⁸ Duchkova. H., & Leventon. J., 'Epistemic justice: How can diverse forms of knowledge improve policy making?' Available at https://sshcentre.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/01-Literature-Briefs_SSH-and-epistemic-justice.pdf (Accessed on 01/08/2026)

⁹ Kilungu. N., 'Pluriversalism and Artificial Intelligence in Africa: Toward a Decolonial Epistemic Reconstitution' Available at <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/pluriversalism-artificial-intelligence-africa-toward-mwelu-kilungu-g-oqi1f/> (Accessed on 01/08/2026)

¹⁰ Mollema. W., 'A taxonomy of epistemic injustice in the context of AI and the case for generative hermeneutical erasure' Available at <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s43681-025-00801-w> (Accessed on 01/08/2026)

¹¹ Ibid

¹² Ibid

¹³ Chamma. D et al., 'Epistemic Injustice in and through AI' Available at <https://dl.acm.org/doi/10.1145/3764687.3767279> (Accessed on 01/08/2026)

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For instance, the use of Western-centric AI models imposes values, philosophies and worldviews that can undermine local traditions, knowledge systems and socio-political systems in Africa and the Global South¹⁴. It has been correctly noted that since most AI models are designed in the Global North, they may perpetuate bias, discrimination, injustices and prejudices in the Global South unless they are tuned to fit with local circumstances¹⁵. In particular, it has been argued that AI risks perpetuating digital colonialism which occurs when the adoption of technology leads to the imposition of foreign values, worldviews, cultures, and knowledge systems in the Global South¹⁶. For example, the adoption of AI in healthcare, education, finance, and agriculture among other sectors in Africa and the Global South fuels digital colonialism by reflecting foreign norms and models of governance while violating indigenous knowledge systems¹⁷.

It has been observed that the use of AI models including health informatics systems, educational software, and financial platforms in Africa and the Global South reflect foreign values, ways of knowing, norms and model of governance¹⁸. Therefore, when these platforms are applied without necessary modifications to align them with local circumstances, they can perpetuate biases, undermine indigenous knowledge systems and affect innovation at the local scale a situation that can lead to epistemic erasure¹⁹. In addition, it has been observed that most AI innovations are concentrated in a handful of high-resource languages especially the English language²⁰. This situation significantly limits non-native speakers of these languages from not only accessing the benefits of the digital transformation but also from informing their development in line with their cultural and context-specific needs²¹.

The current architecture of AI can therefore lead to epistemic erasure. In particular, it has been observed that contemporary AI systems and models often reproduce colonial language hierarchies, undermine indigenous data sovereignty in the Global South, and marginalize indigenous languages and knowledge systems²². This situation can lead to epistemic erasure by making indigenous data sets, knowledge systems,

¹⁴ How to Break Digital Colonialism in African Software Development., Available at <https://www.ictworks.org/digital-colonialism-african-software-development/#:~:text=Defining%20Digital%20Colonialism%20in%20Software.serve%20its%20communities'%20best%20interests> (Accessed on 01/08/2026)

¹⁵ Orero. L.O., & Kaaniru. J., 'Automated Decision-Making Policies in Africa' Available at <https://cipit.strathmore.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Policy-Brief-Design-Automated-Decision-Making.pdf> (Accessed on 01/08/2026)

¹⁶ How to Break Digital Colonialism in African Software Development., Op Cit

¹⁷ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization., 'Addressing digital colonialism: A path to equitable data governance' Available at <https://community.unesco.org/inclusivepolicylab/s/thinkpiece/addressing-digital-colonialism-a-path-to-equitable-data-governance-MCIIJ2OCE56JB5ZCY2ZY4M7AZUYE> (Accessed on 01/08/2026)

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ How to Break Digital Colonialism in African Software Development., Op Cit

²⁰ United Nations Development Programme., 'Harnessing Multilingual AI for Industrial Development Growth and Powering Local Communities' Available at <https://www.undp.org/digital/blog/harnessing-multilingual-ai-industrial-development-growth-and-powering-local-communities> (Accessed on 01/08/2026)

²¹ Ibid

²² Pluriversal AI: Language Justice, Infrastructures, and Global Inequalities., Available at <https://www.tuni.fi/en/tau/research/pluriversal-ai-language-justice-infrastructures-and-global-inequalities> (Accessed on 01/08/2026)

values, philosophies and languages invisible and underutilized in the era of technology and AI²³. Further, the imposition of Western-centric values and knowledge systems in the Global South through AI can lead to the loss and abandonment of local cultures, values and ways of knowing²⁴. It has been argued that due to too much focus on Western-centric data sets, values and languages in AI, these models learn from a narrow set of worldviews yet impose these worldviews across diverse regions and cultural-contexts creating the illusion of a dominant worldview at the expense of others²⁵. Overreliance on foreign AI models can therefore lead to epistemic erasure since it results in abandonment, discrimination and erosion of local and indigenous epistemologies in Africa and the Global South. Avoiding epistemic erasure is therefore necessary towards the safe, appropriate, culturally-relevant and context-specific development, deployment and use of AI towards justice, equity, fairness and inclusivity in the digital era.

3.0 Avoiding Epistemic Erasure in Artificial Intelligence (AI) for Posterity

Epistemic erasure is a negative phenomenon that undermines equity, inclusivity, fairness and justice in the era of technology and AI. By marginalizing, dismissing and erasing non-Western epistemologies, epistemic erasure perpetuates biases and can lead to the loss of indigenous knowledge systems. Consequently, avoiding epistemic erasure is key towards ensuring the safe, appropriate, inclusive and equitable development and deployment of AI.

In order to avoid epistemic erasure in AI, there is need to achieve active decolonisation. It has been observed that achieving active decolonisation require the Global South to move away from imported AI models to locally-produced models²⁶. Through this approach, it is possible to ensure the development and adoption of AI in Africa and the Global South that is safe, transparent, responsive, ethical, upholds human rights, respects different cultural contexts and mitigates risks such as algorithmic biases and discrimination²⁷. Countries in the Global South have been urged to bolster AI innovation with focus on AI technologies that rely on indigenous data sets and languages²⁸. For instance, by utilising local AI models, it is possible to harness indigenous knowledge systems in key sectors such as healthcare, education, agriculture and environmental conservation towards fostering Sustainable Development²⁹. In addition, incorporating indigenous and local languages in AI is key towards ensuring digital inclusion for all especially for vulnerable groups in Africa and the Global South including indigenous and local communities, the elderly and women and girls³⁰.

²³ Mollema. W., 'A taxonomy of epistemic injustice in the context of AI and the case for generative hermeneutical erasure' Op Cit

²⁴ Ibid

²⁵ Jefferson. J., & Velasco. F., 'Purchased Epistemic Erasure' Available at <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.21356483> (Accessed on 01/08/2026)

²⁶ How Africa and Europe could create global AI governance rules., Available at <https://ecdpm.org/work/how-africa-and-europe-could-create-global-ai-governance-rules> (Accessed on 02/08/2026)

²⁷ Ibid

²⁸ Kilungu. N., 'Pluriversalism and Artificial Intelligence in Africa: Toward a Decolonial Epistemic Reconstitution' Op Cit

²⁹ Ibid

³⁰ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization., 'Mainstreaming accessibility and inclusivity in AI and digital technologies' Available at <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/mainstreaming-accessibility-and-inclusivity-ai-and-digital-technologies> (Accessed on 02/08/2026)

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Fostering data sovereignty is also key towards avoiding epistemic erasure in AI. It has been observed that AI tools have often been used to extract data from indigenous peoples and local communities in Africa and the Global South usually without their Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) undermining indigenous data sovereignty³¹. Extraction and commodification of indigenous data in the Global South without the meaningful involvement of indigenous peoples and local communities undermines data sovereignty while also perpetuating social injustices and human right violations³². It has been pointed out that the extraction and commodification of data from the Global South mirrors classic patterns of resource extraction where local knowledge becomes proprietary algorithms controlled by foreign entities³³. This can lead to epistemic erasure through extraction and commodification of indigenous data at the expense of its knowledge holders³⁴. It is therefore necessary to strengthen data sovereignty including through upholding the rights of indigenous and local communities especially their right to FPIC and strengthening indigenous data protection in Africa and the Global South³⁵.

Embracing community co-creation is also a practical approach towards avoiding epistemic erasure in AI. For example, it has been observed that in order to foster epistemic justice, indigenous peoples and local communities should be important decision-makers when evaluating the benefits, potential harms, and future applications of their data with AI tools, by aligning these assessments with their own cultural values, traditional practices and ethical principles³⁶. Community co-creation is key towards harnessing indigenous knowledge systems and languages, upholding indigenous data sovereignty and ensuring the development and deployment of AI that is culturally appropriate and context-specific³⁷.

Fostering indigenous philosophies including Ubuntu can also promote epistemic justice while avoiding epistemic erasure in AI. Ubuntu is an African philosophy that emphasises social harmony/togetherness over individual interests³⁸. It has been argued that unlike individualistic approaches of Western-centric AI models, Ubuntu focuses on interconnectedness, offering a framework for AI systems that foster community cohesion and justice³⁹. Consequently, prioritising local AI models in Africa and the Global South can lead to the use of indigenous epistemologies and philosophies such as Ubuntu towards social cohesion, harmony and epistemic justice⁴⁰.

³¹ How AI can adapt to Indigenous knowledge., Available at <https://medium.com/blog/how-ai-can-adapt-to-indigenous-knowledge-2ae3cd442096> (Accessed on 02/08/2026)

³² Perera. M et al., 'Indigenous peoples and artificial intelligence: A systematic review and future directions' Available at <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/20539517251349170#:~:text=Abstract,Discuss%20Literature%20under%20each%20category> (Accessed on 02/08/2026)

³³ How Digital Colonialism Threatens Kenya's Silicon Savannah., Available at <https://www.techpolicy.press/how-digital-colonialism-threatens-kenyas-silicon-savannah/> (Accessed on 02/08/2026)

³⁴ Perera. M et al., 'Indigenous peoples and artificial intelligence: A systematic review and future directions' Op Cit

³⁵ Ibid

³⁶ Ibid

³⁷ African-language Large Language Models (LLMs) present major opportunities for the continent., Available at <https://medium.com/code-for-africa/african-language-large-language-models-llms-present-major-opportunities-for-the-continent-8a92a69518b3> (Accessed on 02/08/2026)

³⁸ Mugumbate. J., & Nyanguru. A., 'Exploring African Philosophy: The Value of Ubuntu in Social Work.' Available at <https://ro.uow.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=4272&context=sspapers&httpsredir=1&referer#:~:text=Ubuntu%20can%20best%20be%20described,ngumuntu%20ngabantu%20in%20Zulu%20language> (Accessed on 02/08/2026)

³⁹ Kilungu. N., 'Pluriversalism and Artificial Intelligence in Africa: Toward a Decolonial Epistemic Reconstitution' Op Cit

⁴⁰ Ibid

4.0 Conclusion

Avoiding epistemic erasure is necessary towards ensuring that the development, deployment and use of AI respects and includes all epistemologies. In particular, achieving active decolonisation, upholding data sovereignty, embracing community co-creation and harnessing Ubuntu is vital towards avoiding epistemic erasure in AI for posterity.

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