Mending the Border-ed World Through Relationality, Repair and Refusal of Colonial Erasure

Abstract

Borders are often seen as physical and geopolitical demarcations. However, borders embody colonial logic through systems that define belonging and (un)belonging. It showcases who is made (in)visible, who is disposable, and whose knowledge is valid. Such colonial fracturing extends beyond physical borders; they categorize different social groups and knowledge traditions through an epistemological hierarchy; a product of *colonial borders* – artificial demarcations that separate communities and knowledge systems. This symposium questions, and in doing so, brings together people from diverse backgrounds to articulate their experiences migrating internationally, traversing academic disciplines, and blurring methodological paradigms. The panelists use poetry, performance, case studies, and personal narratives to challenge dominant research methods, epistemic hierarchies, and offer avenues for repair and relationality.

Session Summary

"Borders. Everything begins with them, and all paths lead back to them" – (Mbembe, 2019)

Overview: Borders are often seen as spatial markers that delineate nation-states, while they are sites of necropolitics (Mbembe, 2019) and colonial regimes (Walia, 2021) that govern who must die or live, wait or move, be expendable, and forgotten. We see borders not only as geopolitical structures, but also as affective, epistemic, and temporal regimes, and, technologies where the violence of exclusion and abstraction *"is neither spectacular nor instantaneous, but rather incremental and accretive"* (Nixon, 2013). We acknowledge that while borders are sites of violence, oppression, and hegemony, they are also spaces of learning, possibilities, and critical consciousness. We bring together scholarships that transcend imposed discipline borders (curriculum studies and global studies, education leadership and policy analysis, education policy studies, physics and computer science).

Objectives: This symposium interrogates border thinking (Anzaldua, 1987) and confronts the systemic erasure that renders border violence, exclusion, and oppression invisible. It asks: *"How do borders shape research agendas that perpetuate marginalization and epistemic violence? How can we make borders visible and transcend them to co-create spaces towards a sustainable future?"* The discussion will open up a space for audiences and panelists to reflect on their lived experiences as immigrants, genders, races, and marginalized peoples towards the goal of bridge borders through relationality, repair, and refusal.

Scholarly significance: The symposium brings scholars from diverse academic and cultural backgrounds, and in doing so, aims to further the understandings of "glocal" rooted in context-generative notions of epistemic violence, relationality and decolonial futuring of education. This symposium will contribute to decolonial literature by questioning borders not as nodal points of spatial demarcations but as products of colonization, epistemological segregation and methodological homogeneity. The papers advance the idea that a decolonial future of education will have to include unforgetting, critically examining and moving beyond 'borders', and centering affective and collaborative methodologies and ontoepistemologies. They advance border-work as an analytic and emancipatory practice to challenge dominant forms of research epistemes and methods in education research (Rhee, 2020) by developing alternative research architectures of thinking, knowing, feeling, and being.

Structure: The session chair will open the space with an invitation for audiences to form a group of four neighbors. This invitation seeds a relational exercise, inviting audiences to answer: *"Which border did I cross to be here today? What challenges does the border bring? How can I erase this border for others?"*. Then, each panelist will present their work for 5 minutes to demonstrate how their work addresses border violence. Next, the discussant will lead a 10 minute reflection on threads that weave through the panelsists' papers. Consequently, the chair will open up the space for questions and provocations from the audiences' for 15 minutes. Finally, in the last 5 minutes, the chair will close out the session with future invitations, calling on audiences to form collaborations and connections; an active stance that disrupts border violence.

PAPER SUMMARIES

Transcending Orbits: Toward a Spectrum of Inquiry Beyond Colonial Gatekeeping

Purpose: This paper interrogates the epistemic border that U.S. science-teacher standards draw between "science" and "non-science." I trace how that line was legislated and show how it marginalizes Black and Indigenous knowledges of land and sustainable relationships. A scientific education devoid of a historical, socio-economic context erases the oppressive nature of a hierarchy of knowledge (Quijano, 2000), producing a scientifically educated populace that keeps the gears of war turning for a colonial empire while pretending to be neutral participants.

Theoretical Framework: Building on Kuhn's (Kuhn, 2012) claim that scientific normalcy is continually renegotiated as anomalies accumulate and on Feyerabend's (Feyerabend, 2010) claim that knowledge advances through methodological anarchy, I treat demarcation as an artificial historical artifact rather than a natural law. I draw on Kuhn and Feyerabend as theoretical scaffolding to state that the border between legitimate and illegitimate knowledge has always been contested and renegotiated. Quijano (Quijano, 2000) extends this critique onto racial-colonial terrain, arguing that the coloniality of power organizes a global hierarchy of knowledge in which non-Western epistemologies are rendered invisible or illegitimate. I am accepting McKittrick's (McKittrick, 2020) invitation for rebellious, interdisciplinary method-making grounded in diasporic literacy, linking scattered texts and lives through shared codes of struggle. I interweave these strands to understand the science/non-science split as a racial-colonial technology of exclusion.

Methods and Data Sources: I use a comparative archival document analysis of five historical flashpoints, each marking a moment when a governing body formally redrew the line of legitimate scientific evidence: Galileo's 1633 trial (Finocchiaro, 1989), the Committee of Ten report (National Education Association, 1894), Cold War-era NSF curriculum reforms formalized by the National Defense Education Act (1958), which funded science education explicitly as national defense (Rudolph, 2002), Next Generation Science Standards (2013), and National Science Teaching Association reports. If the line between legitimate and illegitimate evidence has always been a matter of enforcement rather than truth, what other borders in education are we still upholding simply because they've gone unquestioned?

Substantiated Conclusions: Across four centuries, the record shows no singular "scientific method"; instead, inquiry advances through negotiated and often contested crossings of methodological lines. Governing bodies police those crossings to stabilize colonial authority under the guise of rigor, neutrality and progress. The paper illustrates how those borders can be blurred in practice, positioning Indigenous, artistic, and community knowledge as explanatory

partners without sacrificing critical scrutiny. Some truths cannot be stated directly; they must be represented in order to be meaningful. As such, what we call knowledge has to depend on form and perspective, not just content.

Scholarly Significance: By transcending the boundaries of "science" and "non-science", unforgetting the racialized labors that forged modern science and imagining futures where learning flows across epistemic borders, the study offers both a conceptual grammar and a framework for weaving together an onto-epistemology beyond the limitations of capitalism and beyond the rift between humanity and nature.

Epistemic Borders and Linguistic Power: Rethinking Mathematics Pedagogy through a Decolonial Lens

Purpose: This paper examines how colonial language policies continue to influence African education systems, focusing on imposing English as the medium of instruction in Ghanaian schools. We explore how such policies serve as tools of epistemic dominance, silencing Indigenous languages and devaluing local knowledge systems. A pivotal moment occurs when a fourth-grade student asks in Twi, *"Sir y3nfa brofo nkyer3 Math"* (we do not teach math in English). This question prompted me to reflect on epistemic injustice and how language itself becomes a border, one that divides students from their lived experiences to promote colonial hierarchies.

Theoretical frameworks: I use decolonial theories, building on Mignolo's (2007) work critiquing the coloniality of language and Quijano's (2000) coloniality of power theory. These theories explain how the language of instruction, instead of being a neutral medium, is a key mechanism in perpetuating colonial and racial hierarchies in education (Mudimbe, 1988). The dominance of English in African schools is not only a linguistic choice but an epistemological one that delegitimizes African worldviews and meaning systems (Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1986).

Methods and Data Sources: This study employs "*critical memory"* that recognizes lived experience as a legitimate evidence of power internalized and reproduced in educational practice (Haug, 1987; Smith, 2012). Rather than seeing memory as a straightforward recollection of past events, critical memory work views individual experiences as historically and socially situated evidence of broader institutional and ideological processes. I use autobiographical reflection to examine two moments in my educational journey: first, as a secondary school prefect responsible for reporting students who spoke Twi for punishment under an English-only policy, and later as a mathematics teacher enforcing the same policy. Through these memories, I show how colonial language ideologies become normalized and reproduced through everyday school disciplinary and classroom practices, shaping assumptions about language and mathematical knowledge.

Substantiated Conclusions: This paper argues that policies enforcing the exclusive use of English contribute to epistemic violence by separating learners from their linguistic and cultural roots. Additionally, these policies reinforce an implicit hierarchy that diminishes African languages, suggesting they are insufficient for conveying scientific or academic knowledge. Therefore, the study recommends integrating Indigenous languages into the core curriculum, particularly in mathematics, to promote linguistic justice and affirm the cognitive legitimacy of African languages. Ghana has long supported mother-tongue instruction, but implementation, especially in maths, is limited. The paper is not about English versus Twi. It is about how language becomes a mechanism for deciding who counts as a knower in mathematics.

Scholarly Significance: The research contributes to the academic literature on decolonizing education by highlighting language as an epistemic border and a tool of resistance. The paper emphasizes that linguistic diversity is essential for equity, identity, and epistemic freedom. In this way, the paper encourages teachers and policymakers to look beyond colonial language hierarchies and envision African classrooms as spaces where all languages and the knowledge they carry are welcomed and validated.

Lines That Divide, Knowledges That Resist: Rethinking Education Through Immigration and Colonialism

Purposes: This paper examines how educational institutions, migration regimes, and global hierarchies function as sites of both control and resistance, asking how surveillance—visible and invisible—shapes students' subjectivities and how colonial legacies define who is authorized to produce knowledge. Using the author's experiences as an international student in India and the United States, the study traces how schooling teaches self-governance through disciplinary techniques (Foucault, 1991) while scripting aspirations through colonial frameworks, and explores how acts of epistemic disobedience and alternative knowledge emerge within these constraints.

Theoretical Framework: This paper draws on Foucault's account of disciplinary power to understand how educational institutions produce self-governing subjects through routine, often invisible surveillance (Foucault, 1991, 2012). Quijano's coloniality of power extends this analysis, showing how the same disciplinary structures determine who is authorized to produce knowledge and whose ways of knowing are rendered illegitimate (Quijano, 2007). Together, these frameworks position schooling and immigration as expressions of a shared colonial logic: one operating through the body and daily conduct, the other through global hierarchies of mobility and legitimacy. Freire's concept of critical consciousness, however, insists these structures are not totalizing: moments of resistance and alternative knowledge-making persist within them (Freire, 1994, 1996). This paper takes up that insistence, treating the author's own poetry and lived experience as an enactment of epistemic disobedience, a refusal to let colonial and disciplinary logics fully author the migrant-student subject.

Methods and Data Sources: The study uses poetry as a narrative research method to connect personal experience with critical analysis, offering an insider's perspective on how educational and immigration systems shape subjectivities and capturing affective dimensions often missed by academic writing.

Results and/or Substantiated Conclusions for Arguments/Point of View: The analysis finds that education operates as a technology of control (Foucault, 2012), compelling students to internalize disciplinary norms and perform according to reputational metrics. Colonial residues persist in the privileging of English, Western credentials, and immigration policies that govern mobility through fear (Quijano & Wallerstein, 1992). Yet these spaces also hold potential for resistance: the author identifies acts of epistemic disobedience by drawing on diasporic thought, navigating immigration challenges, and refusing to treat education as a neutral good, seeing it instead as cracks where alternative futures emerge. These findings affirm that surveillance and coloniality are not totalizing (Freire, 1994); agency persists in everyday practices of resistance.

Scholarly Significance: This work contributes to decolonial and postcolonial theory by showing how personal narratives expose the structural dynamics of power in education, demonstrating that surveillance and coloniality shape academic subjectivities across contexts while resistance remains possible through critical pedagogy (Freire, 1996) and epistemic plurality. The inclusion of poetry as a research method expands methodological repertoires in educational research, offering a powerful way to theorize lived experiences beyond conventional academic forms (Rhee, 2020). Ultimately, this study argues for a situated praxis where intellectual rigor coexists with care, and education becomes a site not only of control but also of potential liberation.

Environmental education in out of school spaces: Negotiating colonial logics, epistemic borders, and relationality

Purpose: In this world grappling with polycrisis, understandings of the environment are defined not only by geographical separation but also by epistemic borders. This paper critically examines and engages with how educators interpret student engagement with the environment in out-of-school spaces. It delves into how the construction of relationality between teachers, students, and nature is shaped by isolated, epistemically bounded understandings of the world rooted in epistemic borders, and in turn, epistemic hierarchies. I examined how primarily White educators in a city in the midwest view BIPOC students' engagement with the environment through frameworks of deficit and, in turn, recreate colonial understandings of nature in their pedagogical practices and their sensemaking of the world. They reproduce colonial and capitalist logics by prioritizing food production, self-sufficiency, and land productivity over critical engagement with the social conditions that shape access to nature and, in turn, provide a fractured and hierarchical understanding of the environment. How did teachers and educators interpret student engagement with the environment? How did they relate to the environment themselves?

Method and Data Source: To answer this question, I conducted a qualitative, interview-based study with teachers and administrators from Gaia, an environmentally focused NGO in the midwest of U.S.A. This was an exploratory qualitative study that sought to interrogate the lived experiences of educators and how they interpreted students' engagement with the environment while making sense of their own understandings of, and relationalities with, the environment (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

Theoretical Framework: This paper draws on theories of relationality (Escobar et al., 2024) to delineate that understandings of nature are not formed in a socio-political vacuum. It is not ahistorical or universal. Hence, educators' understandings of nature are shaped by colonial and capitalist histories and logics. Educators' perception of nature, and their understanding of student engagement with nature is relational, and their deficit framing of BIPOC students engagement with nature is a consequence of historical processes of colonialism and capitalism (Valencia, 2010). This relational understanding grounds the study by examining how primarily White educators make meaning of the environment and how they teach it to largely BIPOC students.

Substantiated Conclusions/Warrants for Arguments: This paper argues that educators' perspectives, their relationalities to land and food, and the broader social, political and historical context shape how they interpret student engagement with their environment. The paper further argues that relational understandings of the environment are not produced in a political vacuum but are shaped by the historical realities of settler colonialism and its foundations in racialized power hierarchies that are shaped by bordered understandings of the world.

Scholarly Significance: This research contributes to the broader literature on pedagogical practices and understandings of the environment education. It does so by interrogating educators' perspectives and interpreting them through the lenses of relationality and racialized power structures.Thus, pedagogical practices around the environment should not be studied in a vacuum but by incorporating realities of racialized power structures, bordered geographies, and the realities of the post-colonial world.

"Not One Drop For Data": How Disenfranchised Communities Resist AI Data Centers and Fight Back Big Tech

Purpose: The project critically examines how settler-colonial extractive logics are embedded within dominant Western AI paradigms and how educational research can be sensitive to the epistemic injustices facilitated by the frontier of AI. We make these connections visible with the case study of Data Centers (DC) that power the popular AI chatbots such as ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini etc. Under the false promises of jobs, economic development, BigTech companies have accelerated construction of DC targeting lands in rural, Indigenous and Global South places. DC extracts on land, water, electricity and fractures relationality with the land, water, people, culture, and languages.. They require huge amounts of drinking water to function and cool their machines. In some cases, this water can never be reused or returned to the water cycle because of contamination. For e.g. Meta manipulated the governments through real estate deals, offering temporary construction jobs, and billion-dollar tax breaks to steal cooled water pumped from desert aquifers in New Mexico, a state already affected by wildfires and droughts.

Such extractive violence creates artificial borders that disenfranchises rural and Indigenous reservations; massive wildfires, job losses due to automation, ecological extraction, climate catastrophe, etc. However, communities lead opposition movements that refuse the privatization of land and extraction, reclaiming technologies along the way.

Theoretical framework: We utilize the theoretical framing of decolonial scholars such as (Mbembe, 2019), Anzaldúa, G. (1987), Quijano, A. (2007), Escobar (2018) and technology scholars such as Hao (2025), Crawford (2021), Tacheva (2023) to surface how AI extracts from and creates a universal ordering of human knowledge that marginalizes other knowledges.

Methods and Data Sources: We just finished collecting data through an automated tool that automatically downloads articles from Google for specific keywords. Our dataset of articles includes online news articles and reports created by climate organizations, tribal governments, anti-AI coalitions, etc. We are currently conducting qualitative analysis that surfaces how DC perpetuates violence by colonizing land, episteme, and senses of those in proximity.

Results: Such an analytical process will provide us a landscape overview of what organizations are, what tools and educational programming they are using, how they are organizing and to what ends**.** It will also provide us deeper knowledge on the temporal logics of AI development (development of data centers, extraction of knowledges and resources), and conceptual themes how border violence manifests (different ways of facing violence), and how DC colonizes senses (creating boundaries of sound, water, air, taste, etc. Finally, we will witness how DC acts as a "border"-tool that fractures relationality with the land, water, people, culture, and languages.

Scholarly significance: By centering rural and Indigenous communities at the heart of the refusal movement, this work will result in theoretical scholarship that informs the design towards a non-extractive built infrastructure that meets the needs and self-determination and sovereignty. Our work will generate an action-oriented scholarship towards design of safe, ethical and responsible AI education policies and scholarship.

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