Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2007) argues that Western science is implicated in the power dynamics of the world. For this reason, if Western science is linked to modernity, it must also be linked to coloniality. Western science and modernity are premised on a number of basic principles, one of which is an emphasis on knowledge that issues from the mind, which is divorced from the body. In other words, thinking is the product of a ‘rational man’ who is unencumbered by ‘body-politics’ that speak to the thinking being’s social and geographical positioning. As such, because the thinking being is not restricted by positioning and location, their knowledge is not only universal, it is also apolitical. Further, the importance that is placed on the (thinking) mind, as opposed to the (feeling) body, introduces a hierarchy and opposition between the mind and the body. Therefore, positioning such knowledge as apolitical and a-contextual hides its inherent discriminations and hierarchies, naturalising them and allowing them to escape deconstruction. Anibal Quijano (2007) attributes this propensity to assume a privileged place among other knowledge systems to the cloaking of Western knowledge in mystery, making it the exclusive province of a privileged few. It is thus made seductive by being coupled with power. In this regard, then, Euro-North American modernity has assumed an almost automatic right to dominate thinking, and now underpins all aspects of life, what Ramón Grosfoguel (2007), Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2007) and Walter Mignolo (2007) call coloniality. Therefore, the assertion by Western science that it
is ‘objective’ and thus beyond contextual considerations masks its historical situatedness, its provincialism, and its complicity in universalising intersubjective relations that encompass even African subjects.

This chapter seeks to denaturalise Western science by placing it under a decolonial lens so as to unmask its situatedness and highlight its context-dependence. Decolonial thinking, as posited by decolonial scholars such as Grosfoguel, Mignolo, Maldonado-Torres, Santos, Quijano, Enrique Dussel (2014), Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2015), Sylvia Wynter (1991) and others points to an intricate relationship between Western expansionism, capital, knowledge and coloniality. That is to say, modernity has two sides: one that was always intended to benefit the West, and a darker side that effected violence in order to enable the benefits enjoyed by the West. Modern science is characterised by solipsism – a monologue internal to the subject, informed by the maxim *I conquer therefore I am*, the predecessor of Descartes’s *cogito ergo sum, I think therefore I am* – which gives epistemic privilege to the Western man (Grosfoguel 2013). While Western modernity is conceptualised and written about to give the impression that it was a singular event, it was in fact multiple in its manifestations and impacts. ‘Modernity’ is used in this way to underscore a particular point: the centring of the Enlightenment philosophy underpinning modern rationality that was to inform colonialism. The possibility of dialogic thinking is closed off, as other knowledge systems are systematically denigrated and condemned to a marginal status.

In this chapter I will argue that while Western science has pushed for and assumed a universal status it is, in fact, a provincial view of the world – a knowledge system that, like any other, vies for and underpins a particular perspective on the world. I begin by giving a definition of decoloniality, and then explore the concepts of modernity and coloniality, showing how one is dependent on the other. Finally, I will subject the practical example of HIV/AIDS (human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immune deficiency syndrome) to a decolonial critique, and show how the epidemic was imagined and accounted for by dominant discourses which constructed a particular subject/object while they simultaneously constructed the Self/Other dichotomy. These questions are important to us, because they are a window on how knowledge production continues to underpin relations of domination.
**COLONIALITY OF KNOWLEDGE, POWER AND BEING**

Decolonial thinking is an invitation to unmask and to deconstruct received knowledge about many aspects of our naturalised life. Central to decolonial epistemic perspectives is to shift the geography of reason away from the fundamentals of Eurocentric thinking to include other knowledge systems. The fundamentals of Eurocentric knowledge are based on a binary system that excludes certain knowledge systems, while elevating others. This is not a simple and innocent matter of knowledge systems vying for ascendency in a world order just for the sake of it. On the contrary, the site of knowledge production and vetting has been a subject of and basis for violence, discrimination and domination. The repression and imposition of knowledge speak to one’s legitimate place in the world order. Knowledge is thus a mechanism that justifies domination and conquest. From this point of view, knowledge is an important place to start in order to understand relations of differently positioned people, nations and continents in the current world order.

The prisms through which people are understood, the rewriting of their cultures, knowledge systems and ways of being, all amount to what Grosfoguel (2007), Maldonado-Torres (2007) and Mignolo (2007) call coloniality of knowledge. This means that the primacy of place that is accorded Western ways of knowing and being, which are then imposed in understanding other knowledges and ways of being, constitutes coloniality of knowledge. These other ways of knowing and being are rendered unintelligible when filtered through Western sensibilities that, for example, set greater store by the mind in juxtaposition with and preference to the body and spirit, that prioritise instrumental/rational pursuits such as profit which lead to individualism, and that conceive of nature and culture as dichotomous entities with culture gaining mastery over nature. While these ways of being and knowing have been exalted to represent the epitome of evolution, so to speak, they are in fact particular to a certain way of thinking. More than that, they undergird a particular sociopolitical agenda.

Decolonial thinking points to an intricate relationship between Western expansion, capital, knowledge and coloniality. As posited by decolonial epistemic perspectives, the coloniality/modernity dialectic points to how modernity co-exists with coloniality. Coloniality is the relations of domination that continue even after colonialism has ceased. While colonialism had physical structures that perpetuated its existence, such as Christian missionary
schools, trading enclaves and manufacturing plants, as well as government structures wholly run by colonists, coloniality is ubiquitous; its footprints are found in every aspect of life and are not dependent on the physical presence of the colonial administration. Coloniality has proved to be more enduring than colonialism. This is in some part due to the knowledge systems with which it conceives of and engages with the world. The idea *I think, therefore I am* is central to Western science (Grosfoguel 2008, 2012) and its implications spill over into other facets of life. Informed by this maxim, Western ways of knowing are instrumental in effecting a violent world system that is, first and foremost, true to the spirit of conquest, subjugation and appropriation (Maldonado-Torres 2008). By espousing a hierarchical opposition between the mind and the body, nature and culture, black and white, men and women, work and play, public and private, Western knowledge follows the logic of maximum accumulation at whatever cost, neatly expressed by Darwin’s notion of the ‘survival of the fittest’.

I make two related arguments here. First, Western science cannot be thought of as outside the aspirations of modernity; it is premised on modernity – they are two sides of the same coin, so to speak. Western science, which is characterised by a mathematical, logocentric understanding of the world that informs the bullying tendencies mentioned above, presupposes knowledge that is universal and a knower who is not situated. Related to this is the way in which, by systematically hiding its locus of enunciation, it accords itself a ‘god-eye view of the world’ (Grosfoguel 2008, 4). The boundedness and embeddedness of Western science in a particular, prescribed context are systematically hidden, enabling it to catapult itself to an omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent status. Like a god, it purports to exist at a distance from the sociopolitical mess of everyday living and the power dynamics that bear on this. Dussel (2014) argues that had Descartes, the propagator of the Cartesian thinking that became the bedrock of Western science, acknowledged the relationship between the body and the mind, he would have been forced to put a price on slavery. By systematically minimising this relationship, slavery could be morally justified as the enslaved were thought of as bodies without souls and, like the beasts of burden, they could be exploited with impunity. Therefore Western science, as a product of Cartesian thinking that hides the locus of enunciation as well as the enunciator, is systematically, strategically and wilfully blind to sociality and power dynamics. It hides the
beneficiaries of the world order espoused by the science, and naturalises the suffering of those who are imagined through its prisms. In this way, it privileges the enunciated and obscures the identity of the enunciator. This is a strategic lever of power that needs to be unmasked. That is to say, in a way, Western science not only perpetuates modern aspirations of conquest, silencing, discrimination and domination, but also naturalises these aspirations in that it purports to espouse a natural, apolitical view of the world. It is wilfully ignorant of the suffering perpetuated by the modernity/coloniality dialectic, as it thrives on a reductionist model of the world.

MODERNITY/coloniality

The modernity/coloniality dialectic is important in decolonial thinking. Central to coloniality is the logic that produces the Other and the institutions that uphold it, including institutions that reproduce modern conceptions of being, power and knowledge. These conceptions are rooted in linear and dualistic thinking informed first and fundamentally by the Cartesian system of thought. This world view, predicated on particular notions of being that divorce the body from the soul, gives rise to dualistic and teleological thinking that presupposes a linear trajectory of development. This forms the basis of modernity.

Central to this thinking is that an evolved being is Christian-centric, has gravitated towards ‘civilisation’ and is a master over ‘nature’. The idea of a teleological scale of development that encapsulates modern thinking is the basis for coloniality; it is the essence of Othering, which is informed by the I think, therefore I am world view that privileges individualism, reductionist and binary thinking, hierarchies and rational thinking devoid of emotion. This kind of thinking displaces other knowledge systems and ways of engaging with the world that emphasise communality, a complex understanding of the world and how people and things interrelate, and thinking that is mediated by one’s location and positionality. Moreover, it precludes the possibility of historical conversations by postulating an in situ view of the world. In this sense, the above-mentioned knowledge systems can be viewed as mechanical and instrumental, on the one hand, and humanistic, on the other.

The Euro-North American tendency to universalise its knowledge is intricately linked to coloniality which is, in turn, linked to colonialism premised on subjection and subjugation of those thought of as the empire’s Other.
This idea of the Other follows from the arguments made above – the hierarchisation of knowledge and thus of people. Grosfoguel (2008) argues that racism is the idea that some people are less human than others, and as such, also have inferior knowledge and thus inferior intelligence compared to ‘real humans’. Furthermore, the idea of the Other is a direct consequence of the modernity/coloniality dialectic. The Other is one conquered by the Self, and thus becomes colonised by the Self. In the quest for conquest, the Other is vanquished and made in the inverse image of the Self, in order to fortify the Self. Therefore, the other side of modernity is coloniality. Maldonado-Torres (2008) reflects on the modern subjectivity as a consciousness born out of the radical unevenness between the European and the native. He argues that modernity is thus born in the moment when Western civilisation takes the place of God and defines its mission as an expansionist one, rendering every Other a slave by means of ‘naturalising war’. This state of war that characterises relations between Europe and the native is ‘the radical suspension or displacement of ethical and political relationships in favour of the propagation of a particular death ethic that renders massacre and different forms of genocide as natural’ (Maldonado-Torres 2008, xi). The conquest and the colony are quotidian exercises in which ‘imperial God and imperial man become immediate proofs of the existence of each other’ (2008, xi).

In the same way that abyssal thinking (Santos 2007) presupposes that recognition can only be possible between coloniser and colonised, the modernity/coloniality complex highlights their interdependence – as subject and object. The European expansionist impulse, birthed since 1492, paved the way for a dynamic constitution of different aspects of life in the empire and its Other. Following from this, Mignolo (2011) argues that to understand the local, one must simultaneously understand Europe’s relation with its Other. And according to Dussell (2014, 12), the development theory which promises modernity is, in fact, a fallacy as it envisions each country and each nation as an entity in itself, with unhindered ability to ‘develop’. On the contrary, decolonial perspectives argue against the growth path envisioned by development theory. According to decolonial epistemic perspectives, empire and its colony are implicated in the reproduction of each other. The universalising tendency of Western knowledge systems is wilfully blind to this dialectic. Dussel (2014) asserts that while some scholars criticise modern rationality as an instrument of terror, he criticises it for concealing its own irrational myth
about its universality, its ‘zero sum’ and ‘god-eye view’ of the world. That is, an all-knowing point of view that is independent of time and place and devoid of human interference, and is thus universal and wilfully ignorant of the pain it perpetuates by negating the ways of being and knowing of its Other.

Further and related assertions of the decolonial epistemic perspective are that Western science functions by, firstly, separating units of the world into boxes, whereas we are all constituted in dialectical relations – this puts paid to the notion that some people are yet to progress towards modernity. The fact is that we are all in modernity, but are experiencing different aspects of it. The possibility of experiencing modernity positively rests on the possibility of the Other experiencing it negatively. These are the two inextricably related sides of modernity. Secondly, difference is organised into hierarchy; and thirdly, these orientations are naturalised. Finally, Western science intervenes in the production of inequalities in that the creation of the Other justifies their exploitation and differential treatment. In this way, we see a link between racism and capitalism, and how racism powerfully enables capitalism. Because Western science is blind to the dialectic of modernity殖民化，它自动地认同进化论中固有的二元对立——进步与原始，科学与民俗，我们与他们，这里与那里，等等。

**MODERNITY/COLONIALITY AND SOCIAL EVOLUTION**

The above characteristics imply a hierarchy of being, which can be summed up by historically fraught questions such as *Do you have a God? Do you have a soul? Do you have knowledge?* (Grosfoguel 2013). This logic, characteristic of the modern world view, not only informed and resulted in inequalities and violent encounters between the peoples of the world, but also sought to justify them. These questions, which are informed by the modernity paradigm that espouses a developmentalist view of the world, imply a need for some nations to be always catching up with Western ideals of modernity.

It is from this point of view that we can understand Santos’s (2007) argument about an abyssal line informed by abyssal thinking, characterised by binary logics of ‘us’ versus ‘them’, where one cannot recognise the Other. The distance between the two is thought to be deep and infinite. More than that, in theory, the distance needs to be closed at whatever cost and, ostensibly, for the benefit of the people who are seen to be lagging behind. Grosfoguel (2008, 4) sums up the West’s attitude in this regard thus: ‘Develop or I will kill you’;
‘Transform or I will kill you’; ‘Democratise or I will kill you.’ From this point of view, knowledge becomes less a matter of surviving and thriving on one’s own terms and in one’s own context than a primary site for international relations of domination and conquest. For this reason, Maldonado-Torres (2008) characterises modernity as a paradigm of war.

Characterising knowledge systems and people in a hierarchical manner is problematic on a number of fronts. Firstly, the universalising principle does not take into account contextual factors. This tendency precludes the possibility of envisioning pluriversal knowledge systems representative of a pluriversal world with a plurality of experiences and values. By espousing an omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent god-eye-view knowledge system, the possibility of dialogic thinking is closed off. This essentially deprived Africans and other marginalised people of the world of legitimacy and recognition in the global cultural order dominated by Eurocentric presumptions. The former were thought of as ‘body’ – a thing without knowledge and the consciousness to assume an equal place in the world order, or understand and frame their plight in terms of that which questions their position in the political economy of the world.

The purported value-free nature of Western science does not necessarily mean absence of biases. As argued above, the biases are seen in the perpetuation of a particular world view and relationship. This is the crux of the matter, and can be transposed to all aspects of life – what Quijano (2000, cited in Grosfoguel 2008, 6), calls the ‘colonial power matrix’ that involves the economy, education, health and wellbeing, religion, social organisation, the legal system, politics and all other aspects of life. Grosfoguel (2008, 4) calls this a Western-centric, Euro-North American-centric, capitalist, sexist, patriarchal, Christocentric, liberal dispensation. Anything outside of this matrix of power is denigrated as inferior and deficient. At the core of relations of domination is a deep-seated doubt about the very humanity of the Other, expressed in the question: are you really human? This gives rise to radical alterity, the reification of difference, with strategic outcomes that will be alluded to when the example of so-called African sexuality and HIV/AIDS is considered later in this chapter. In this vein, I argue for thinking by metonymy – that is to say, how HIV/AIDS was understood encapsulates and points to bigger issues, such as cultural racism and racial capitalism.
Quijano (2007, 542) discounts the notion that Europeans are the exclusive bearers, creators and protagonists of modernity. How then do we account for this long-standing fallacy? In response, Grosfoguel (2008), for instance, would argue that knowledge systems from other parts of the world were subjected to epistemicide in a quest to have the West prevail over other nations. In essence, what is being argued here is that what has come to be known as Western science also has its roots in other parts of the world. While acknowledging and foregrounding this important insight, I start from the premise that has taken root which purports a unique Western science, whose motivations and use were coupled with the sinister project of Western expansionism and its concomitant characteristics. Following Thomas Kuhn (1962), it can be argued that Western science is functioning from within a particular paradigm. Kuhn argues that all scientific inquiries occur within paradigms that dictate the parameters of inquiry and interpretation. As a result, scientific inquiries are designed to explore the applicability of the accepted paradigms to an expanding range of data. They do so in order to affirm the validity of the paradigm, rather than to challenge it.

**THE PRIMACY OF WESTERN SCIENCE: HISTORY AND CONTEXT**

The point made above – that all knowledge systems represent a way of seeing, perceiving and thus engaging with the world – behoves underscoring. Furthermore, all knowledge systems represent a political view. In the case of Western science, this view can be summed up in the statement *I think, therefore I am*, thereby privileging the thinking subject involved with himself to the exclusion of others. This assertion simultaneously calls for a suspension of any other way of perceiving and engaging with the world and advocates for the domination of a particular way of seeing and engaging with it. History is replete with examples of warfare waged on the knowledge front. Indeed, the idea of coloniality that encapsulates being, knowledge and power speaks to this in a fundamental way. The maxim *I conquer, therefore I am* – the precursor of *I think, therefore I am* – is accompanied by epistemicides associated with actual genocides. Sylvia Wynter (1991) attributes this genocidal impulse of the West to the belief that the world was given to whites – the Imperial man – by God to conquer – *propter nos* (for our sake). This belief, based on the understanding that God resides in and favours places of the world where there
is enlightenment, was the driving force of the founding fathers of Europe. This view is captured by the observation that places unoccupied by Europeans are in a state of nature, where life is barbaric, nasty and short. Therefore, these places need Western civilisation. Moreover, this civilisation will be imposed by hook or by crook if need be for, according to the logic of *propter nos*, beyond the equator one can sin no more (anything and everything is allowed at the behest of God and by His will). Maldonado-Torres (2008) argues that 1492 signalled a radical change in how difference was perceived. Seduced by the possibility of wealth, European voyagers and explorers conceived of the idea of *propter nos* that gave them carte blanche to steal, plunder and pillage with impunity. He argues that whereas the guiding principle heretofore was the ‘love of God’, this radically changed to the ‘love of gold’. By questioning the humanity of the people they encountered on their so-called voyages of discovery, the European voyagers could absolve themselves of any moral obligation towards them. Grosfoguel (2008) argues strongly for linking European colonial expansion to the subsequent intellectual division of labour whereby the West became the producer of knowledge thought of as credible and the referee in deciding what was credible knowledge. He sketches a picture of bloodshed en masse in these epistemic wars that sought to hierarchise knowledge, rendering some knowledge as credible while discounting other knowledge systems. He argues that these hierarchical tendencies are the basis for the Western-centric, racist, patriarchal and sexist knowledge that enjoys epistemic privilege today. This knowledge is based on Eurocentric assumptions that give impetus to practices of Othering which not only recognise and give primacy to difference, but also put such difference in a hierarchy that speaks to the very fundamental question: are you human? These universalising binaries – human versus sub-human, exterior versus interior, progressive versus backward, universal versus local – underscore this implied question. Such universalising schemas undergird and are undergirded by power dynamics. Knowledge and power thus go together and, as such, coloniality of knowledge is equal to coloniality of power and coloniality of being.

In an insightful piece that traces the factors that might have influenced Descartes’s *cogito ergo sum*, Dussel (2014) argues that Descartes needed to conceive of a science without people, so to speak, to come to this conclusion. By conceiving of a science that divorced the body from the soul, Descartes
closed himself off from the external world opened up to us by our feelings, imagination and passions. In this way, the purportedly pure machine of science is blind to race, gender and class. These important sociological indicators would not be primary sites and pillars of analysis – they would be incidental to analysis. From this point of view, ‘the quantitative indeterminacy of any quality will only be the beginning of all illusory abstractions about the “zero point” of modern philosophical subjectivity’ (Dussel 2014, 10). This is part of a long history of the Christian world founded on the idea of the primacy of the soul above the body. The body was and could be nothing but an object of knowledge. From the Eurocentric perspective, certain races are condemned as inferior for not being rational subjects. They are objects of study, consequently bodies closer to nature. In a sense, they become dominatable and exploitable: Cartesian thinking is able to ignore and naturalise the modernity/coloniality dialectic by disregarding the union of the body and the soul. The thinking individual, who stands above their experiences and thus in a particular locus of being and enunciation, is essentially independent of both intersubjective and social relations: ‘First in that supposition, the “subject” is a category referring to the isolated individual because it constitutes itself in itself, in its discourse and its capacity of reflection. The Cartesian cogito ergo sum means exactly that’ (Quijano 2013, 26). Therefore, knowledge flowing from such a standpoint denies intersubjectivity and social totality as the sites of production of all knowledge. The ‘object’ to be studied is not independent of a given field of relations either. Furthermore, the idea that the subject is the bearer of ‘reason’, while the ‘object’ is not only external to it, but is of a different nature, is a falsehood founded on Euro-North American abyssal thinking. Cartesian thinking thus emphasises difference and not inequality. Where inequality is considered, it is thought to be of nature – only European culture is rational, and can contain subjects; the rest are irrational, they can only be objects of study (Quijano 2007, 174).

This falsehood is sustained by violence and by ideologies that supposedly reflect a reality. By denying intersubjectivity, the Other is made absent in the conversations that take place following the logic of cogito ergo sum, except as an object of Eurocentric knowledge. As such, ‘the radical absence of the other not only postulates an atomistic image of social existence in general, but also denies the idea of a social totality, which led to adopting a reductionist vision of reality’ (Quijano 2007, 173). Descartes’s posture and considerations were
geared towards upholding relations of domination between empire and its Other. This is in view of the argument that knowledge is not so much a relation between an individual and something, but rather a relation between people for the purpose of something. Acknowledging the union of the body and the soul would have meant putting a quantifiable price on slavery (Dussel 2014).

The knowledge that flows from the premise of ergo et sum is thus used to hide relations of domination by hiding the union of the soul and the body. From this point of view, such knowledge can only be instrumentalist. It cannot respond to the fundamentals of inequality. Knowledge informed by the prescripts of cogito ergo sum is thus about privileging a certain understanding of the world that is silent on the relationship between the individual and society, and between empire and its Other. It is thus not far-fetched to argue that Euro-North American knowledge is decadent in that it seems unable to respond to the challenges that it spawns. Tied to capitalism, Western science purports to have similar values of mastery and survival of the fittest. As such, it has wrought much unnecessary pain and cannot seem to be able to correct itself, as evidenced by increasing inequalities, exclusion of the majority of humanity, degradation of the planet and climate change. This assertion provides a response to the question of whether coloniality is abstract or concrete. The coupling of difference and hierarchy results in the same outcome of violence. Therefore, coloniality or modernity not only produces identities and categories, but also the experiences of people. Modernity thus ignores its own decadence by always producing the same narrative – a reductionist view of the world produced by supposedly pure observation that isolates variables in a mechanical model of that world. It is caught in its original objectives of effecting an unequal world order and expanding its global domination. It is from this point of view that I argue that Euro-North American knowledge cannot go far in resolving the many challenges that beset the world.

**THE NATURE OF SCIENCE**

Western science has bypassed any real scrutiny and criticism by shrouding itself in mystery. Instead, critique has largely centred on what have been called ‘epistemologies of equilibrium’ (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2015), which advance a modernist critique of modernity, and thus do not fundamentally challenge its precepts but rather serve the perverse role of obfuscation. Western science is supported by ‘institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery, doctrines, even
colonial bureaucracies and colonial styles’ (Said, cited in Smith 1999, 2) that bolster its clout. It erected an abyssal line between itself and other knowledge systems, casting itself as a superior kind of knowledge, while castigating these other systems. The abyssal line denotes both vertical and horizontal hierarchies. Vertically, other knowledge systems are relegated to an inferior position. Horizontally, the line defines its purported characteristics and, by so doing, marks its inclusionary and exclusionary criteria. Western science fashions itself as universal, objective, logocentric, apolitical and impartial, effectively casting itself as having a god-eye view of the world, outside and above world power dynamics and other worldly concerns, except to add to knowledge in aid of human civilisation and progress.

By implication, other knowledge systems are thought of as local, intuitive, subjective and partial, and thus fraught with human frailties such as emotions, politics and the attendant short-sightedness. An example is the notion of a ‘scientific West’ and an ‘intuitive East’, with antithetical pairs of attributes, namely scientific versus intuitive, theoretical versus practical, causal versus correlative thinking, adversarial versus ieric or geometric versus algebraic. Furthermore, Western science has remained valid across historical periods, geographic locales, social strata, gender identifications, and economic and technological differentials. However, Sander Gilman (1985) asserts that science works differently in the real world. Paula Treichler (1991) argues that when cultural differences among human communities are taken into account, they tend to be enlisted in the service of this reality, but their status remains utilitarian. Western science has assumed the role of both player and arbiter, in that it prescribes a particular view of the world. Also, it imposes its view of what constitutes credible and worthy knowledge. It is a master signifier – the alpha and the omega of knowledge systems. As such, the methodologies associated with Western science emphasise distance of the observer, purporting to be concerned with pure observation without interpretation, thereby concealing their human qualities and interests. In a continuing vein, it assumes a static and mute object of study (atoms that have no subjectivity of their own), which thus unproblematically fits within knowledge parameters informed by Eurocentric imaginations.

This approach has led to an intellectual division of labour in which the West’s Other is used as raw material, and as human species are processed through Western knowledge and lenses in order to vindicate the primacy
of place of this knowledge in the world and in epistemology. My contention here is not so much about the usefulness of the knowledge derived from Western science, but rather about that of any knowledge system: such a knowledge system is necessarily incomplete, perspectival and, as such, has to be put on the same analytical plane as any other knowledge systems. In the next section of the chapter I use the example of how HIV/Aids has been studied to underscore the points I have made above.

**HIV/AIDS AS AN ÜBER OTHERING SITE**

While Western science is but a particular and provincial view of the world, its epistemological primacy of place is tied to Western capital and modern thinking. In this context, this section of the chapter reflects on the matrix of hierarchies implicated in knowledge production, power and being as a form of soft oppression in the realm of sexuality. Sexuality, while a site of soft oppression, is very much at the centre of questions about one’s humanity and one’s conception of Africa, the continent that has always borne the brunt of and suffered the consequences of the Western gaze. What does each have to do with the other? In considering this question, I will speak about the relationship between these seemingly unconnected aspects of life, and show how inequalities are perpetuated and justified by this complex matrix, using the example of ‘African Aids’ as a prime and contemporary site of Othering. I will argue that the HIV/Aids epidemic has been a site that has strengthened abysmal thinking, recentring the West and its knowledge systems, while excluding and silencing others. Against a Eurocentric norm, knowledge of others as sub-human, and as raw material to be analysed through prisms that essentially question their humanity, drove and informed impulses and practices that are central to how HIV/Aids has been conceived of and approached. The advent of HIV/Aids became the site for rationalising the study of the exotic Other, a curiosity that invited the unidirectional Western gaze that ultimately makes objects of subjects.

Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff (1992) remark on the unjust conclusions that conventional scientific methods reach regarding people who are thought of as the Other of the researcher. They caution against the difference-making tendencies of such methodologies, which emphasise a speaking individual who is not based and rooted in any context. From this point of view, the speaking individual is taken at face value. Such an apprehension of the
speaking individual ignores a number of issues that relate to science. Firstly, that individual utterances, while representing a particular worldview, are also partial and perspectival. This is not least a result of the fact that the speaking individual speaks into a constraining and already prescribed mould, as directed by the questions they are asked and which reflect the researcher’s point of view and interests. Secondly, that the spoken, in an interview, is a snapshot that precludes historical conversations. Thirdly, that, taken out of context, data collected through conventional methods are open to being exoticised by a researcher who presumes distance between himself or herself and those researched. Lastly, that for research to achieve justice, data collected through conventional methods should not be read and interpreted in and of itself; it should also be restored to a world of meaningful interconnectedness. The above considerations also, and perhaps mostly, apply to surveys and other closed-ended ways of collecting data, which, by virtue of controlling for ‘extraneous variables’ and thus painting a pure rendition of ‘results’, are given higher scientific value.

Other important points are made in the Comaroffs’ *Ethnography and the Historical Imagination* (1992) that could be used to support my assertion about how the HIV/AIDS epidemic is a contemporary and prime site of Othering. In particular, they highlight the Othering tendencies of conventional research. These are manifested in the assertions made above that Western science, in particular, is premised on abyssal thinking, which purports to uphold a distance between the researcher (holder of knowledge) and the researched (objects to be subjected to the researcher’s knowledge). This distance is such that the researcher and the researched cannot recognise each other. In this vein, Comaroff and Comaroff argue that the interview encounter becomes more like an interview between strangers who lack any sort of entanglement, whereas an interview is not so much an encounter between strangers as a meeting of people who are implicated in each other. It is this posture and understanding of the world that informed the mass movement of scholars and researchers from the North to study what became known as ‘African AIDS’, ostensibly perpetuated by an ‘African sexuality’ to which the high prevalence rate of HIV/AIDS in Africa was attributed. The curiosity of these scholars and researchers was informed by the apparently exotic nature of this African sexuality which, according to them, is characterised by practices such as polygyny, dry sex, wife inheritance, promiscuity, the virgin
cleansing myth and intergenerational sexual relations. This view of Africa is informed by a belief that the continent is not only different from the USA, for instance, but that the difference is hierarchical. African sexuality is seen to be informed by ‘African culture’, which has yet to evolve from what Hobbes observed many years ago about ‘man in the state of nature’ – unbridled sexuality that is animal-like and does not show a higher consciousness (Lloyd and Sreedhar 2019).

As an example of this, Treichler (1991) argues that early medical observers constructed the medical evidence they were observing to fit pre-existing assumptions about African sexuality and disease. This corroborates Gilman’s (1985) assertion that the actual may not mimic closely the ideal of science. Contrary to being objective and neutral, Gilman argues that the association of Africans with sexuality and the tendency to link African sexuality with disease have a long history in Western thought and, as such, may influence how science is carried out and the resultant conclusions. Treichler (1991, 189) asserts that a view is entrenched that ‘in dealing with Aids, we are not just dealing with sex, we are dealing with life ways and complex cultural patterns’, which further cements the view that Africans are promiscuous by nature and are culturally resistant to modifying their sexual behaviour. She postulates that, for example, Edward Green, a prominent anthropologist who plies his trade in Africa during his sojourns there from abroad, holds the view that ‘changes in behaviour which promote[s] the spread of Aids will go against social and cultural norms and values in Africa and against deeply ingrained behavioural patterns’ (Packard and Epstein 1991, 356). In this way, ‘traditions’ are reified as historically static. This type of cultural essentialism leads to exoticism, which entrenches the view that Africans are not people with problems, they are the problem. Deconstructing the specific case of ‘African Aids’, Paul Farmer (2001) points to the epistemic injustice perpetuated by the systematic conflation of structural violence with culture. He attributes this tendency to Western ideas about an exotic Other and its epistemological tools that confirm the Other’s ‘backwardness’.

Western ideas of the world compartmentalise aspects of life such that sexuality and social reproduction are thought of as ‘local’, while the economy, for instance, is thought of as ‘global’. So, while Africa is in intricate relationships with the rest of the world at the level of the economy, somehow social reproduction in Africa is divorced from these relations (Fassin 2007).
Therefore, contrary to the purported status of science as a perfect knowledge of things (Dussel 2014, 15), research on HIV/AIDS in Africa, informed by this abyssal thinking, has played into the usual tendencies of Othering and thus silencing. Mark Hunter (2010) argues that without addressing the structural reasons why women and men have more than one sexual partner, for instance, any behavioural intervention campaign is unable to provide a major breakthrough. Remarkng on a different topic altogether, Grosfoguel (2008, 1) makes a point that is general to knowledge production: ‘With few exceptions, [Western “experts”] produced studies about the subaltern rather than studies with and from a subaltern perspective; theory was still located in the North, while the subjects to be studied are located in the South.’ HIV/AIDS was a classic site where such tendencies were repeated with little, if any, reflexivity. Critical thinking would have awakened researchers to the fact, stated by Hunter (2010), for example, that the most celebrated Zulu ‘traditions’ today emerged in the colonial period.

Believing in their expert status and superior knowledge, researchers from the North conceived studies about an imagined Africa that went on to prove their preconceived ideas about the continent. Decolonial epistemic perspectives can help us understand why this was possible in the first place. In the first instance, views about Africa informed what could be said to be coloniality of knowledge, of power and being. Coloniality of knowledge can be seen in the imposition of a particular world view on the understanding of HIV/AIDS. Firstly, drawing on colonial views of Africa, the advent of HIV/AIDS resurrected notions of the Other, who is not only different, but also inferior. Secondly, the reductionist, compartmentalised view of the world led to the obscuring of root causes for the disproportionate prevalence of HIV/AIDS in Africa. The history of epidemics is thus an integral part of the history of racial segregation in South Africa (Hunter 2010). This obscuring led to the silencing of inequalities and structural violence against people who are most vulnerable. Instead, the victims of such structural violence were blamed. Malkki (1995, 17, cited in Fassin 2007, xv) asserts that this is ‘anthropological culturalism’ which, by essentialising difference, produces ‘subtly de-historicising, dehumanizing effects’. Behavioural and culturalist interpretations that have been used to explain the dramatic spread of the disease are as ineffective as they are unjust.
Commenting specifically on the injustices of Aids research in South Africa in particular, Didier Fassin (2007) goes on to say that causing suffering and ignoring the effects of that suffering are a contemporary reality. He asks a moral question: what is a just society? He responds that it is one that remembers, because ignoring the past not only harms understanding of the present, but also compromises present action. The solutions advanced from the premises of biomedical medicine, for instance, are just as reductionist as behavioural and culturalist interpretations, focusing on fighting the disease while ignoring the factors that make victims vulnerable to disease, and not offering any long-term solutions to the extent that, should there be another global epidemic, the very same sub-alternised groups that have been imagined through the Euro-North American prism will be as vulnerable as they are now to HIV/AIDS.

The site of intervention was the individual and their behaviour, and solutions were effected at that level. Other points of view were systematically silenced. For instance, research has shown that communities most affected by HIV/AIDS display more than average knowledge of how HIV is transmitted and how it could be prevented (Farmer 2001). However, this knowledge fails to translate into health-affirming practices. Audrey Pettifor et al. (2004) and Lisa Arai (2008) argue further that while the structural determinants of sexual ills are apparent, policy approaches prioritise changing motivations such as choice, rather than changing the determinants themselves. Giving a concrete example of a place characterised by premature death on a large scale, Hunter (2010) argues that places are power-laden and formed in relation to other places; he emphasises that the participants in his study attributed their heightened vulnerability to isimo – the way they understood things to be (conspiring against them). Such conversations were precluded by a unilateral understanding of HIV/AIDS as an illness perpetuated by a set of factors that are internal to the individual (their behaviour) or group (their culture).

Tuhiwai Smith (1999, 2) highlights ‘ways in which the pursuit of knowledge is deeply embedded in the multiple layers of imperial and colonial practices’. She says that for indigenous communities, research is a dirty word due its objectifying tendencies. Informed by the logic of individualism, proposed interventions to counter the spread of HIV/AIDS have favoured the market economy. These include buying expensive pharmaceutical drugs and other products, while leaving the contextual structural issues that increase vulnerability intact. The
logic of wanting to have and construct the Other is closely linked to capitalism. In the widespread disregard of death in capitalist societies and the advancing of solutions that do not question and undermine capitalism’s premises, we see glimpses of how reductionist and thus racist solutions (that blame the victim’s behaviour and culture as deviant) powerfully enable capitalism. In this vein, then, the dominant approach to understanding and responding to the HIV/AIDS epidemic has ignored the modernity/coloniality complex that perpetuates a dialectical relationship between development and underdevelopment.

By imposing a world view on mute Others, the West sought to effect indirect rule over Africa, using HIV/AIDS as a means to achieve this aim. Treichler (1991), amongst others, argues that the Aids epidemic was the site on which power relations of domination already in place were reproduced. In this sense, both Smith (1999) and Treichler (1991) argue that narratives, too, perform a function of domination and subjugation: ‘Information does not simply exist; it issues from and, in turn, sustains a way of looking and behaving towards the world’ (Treichler 1991, 124). As such, issues of power and representation loom large in the perpetuation of an unjust order. Furthermore, the question of Aids in Africa cannot be fully understood unless issues of racial exploitation, subjugation and discrimination are simultaneously considered. These factors, more than the purported different and thus regressive cultural and sexual mores of Africans, go a long way towards accounting for the disproportionate HIV/AIDS vulnerability amongst individuals, groups and nations on the continent.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have argued for the simultaneous reading of modernity and coloniality. I have reasoned that, contrary to the view that Western-derived knowledge is apolitical and acontextual, it is strategically political and can be implicated in sustaining an unequal world order. I have used the precepts of decolonial thinking to argue that the disembodied and unlocated neutrality of the ego-politics of knowledge is a Western myth that works to perpetuate its dominant position in world politics. Informed by and flowing from Cartesian thinking, Western knowledge that privileges modern conceptions of being, knowledge and power is wilfully and strategically ignorant of the dialectic of modernity/coloniality that pursues coloniality of knowledge, power and being. I have sought to show the relationship between these seemingly disparate loci of understanding.
At the core of domination is the logic that produces the Other while simultaneously defining and recentring the Self. By adopting a narrow view of the world, Western science or knowledge precludes the possibility of historical conversations about the relationship between the empire and its subaltern. As such, Western knowledge silences views from its periphery while it valorises itself as universal. HIV/AIDS, as I have shown, is a classic and contemporary site on which these power dynamics have been elaborated and entrenched in Africa.

REFERENCES


