
FROM FRAGMENTED KNOWLEDGE TO PLURIVERSAL INTELLIGENCE: TOWARD A NEW EPISTEMIC ORDER IN ANTHROPOLOGICAL THEORY

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Abstract

The contemporary crisis of knowledge is characterized by increasing fragmentation across disciplines, epistemologies, and cultural frameworks. Anthropology, historically positioned as a discipline concerned with the study of human diversity, finds itself at the center of this epistemic tension. While it has critically engaged with colonial legacies and epistemic asymmetries, it continues to operate largely within frameworks shaped by modern Western paradigms.

This article argues that the current global condition requires a transition from fragmented knowledge systems toward what is conceptualized here as pluriversal intelligence—a transdisciplinary epistemic framework capable of integrating multiple ontologies, knowledge systems, and modes of existence. Drawing on complexity theory, decolonial thought, and emerging paradigms in transdisciplinary research, the study develops a theoretical model that reconceptualizes intelligence as a distributed, relational, and multi-scalar phenomenon.

The methodology is analytical and conceptual, based on critical synthesis of interdisciplinary literature and the construction of an integrative theoretical framework. The findings propose a new anthropological paradigm that transcends the limitations of disciplinary fragmentation and opens pathways toward a global epistemic reconfiguration.

This paper contributes to contemporary debates in anthropology, epistemology, and global knowledge systems by proposing a foundational shift toward pluriversal, integrative, and transformation-oriented modes of inquiry.

1. Introduction

The 21st century is marked by an intensification of global complexity driven by technological acceleration, ecological crises, and profound sociocultural transformations. These dynamics are not isolated phenomena but deeply interconnected processes that reshape the conditions of human existence on a planetary scale. Paradoxically, while the world becomes increasingly interdependent, systems of knowledge production remain highly fragmented across disciplines, epistemological traditions, and institutional boundaries (Morin, 2008). This fragmentation limits the capacity of contemporary science to adequately grasp complex, multi-layered global challenges.

Anthropology, as a discipline historically dedicated to the study of human diversity and cultural variation, occupies a strategic position in addressing this epistemic tension. Over the past decades, it has undergone significant theoretical transformations, including reflexive, postcolonial, and ontological turns that have challenged its foundational assumptions. Yet, despite these advances, anthropology continues to operate largely within epistemological frameworks shaped by Western modernity. These frameworks are often structured around binary distinctions—such as nature versus culture, subject versus object, and modern versus traditional—that constrain the discipline's ability to engage with plural and relational understandings of reality (Descola, 2006).

In this context, the present article argues that the contemporary epistemic crisis cannot be resolved through incremental adjustments within existing paradigms. Instead, it calls for a fundamental reconfiguration of the foundations of knowledge itself. It proposes the concept of pluriversal intelligence as an emerging epistemic framework capable of recognizing and integrating the coexistence of multiple ontologies, epistemologies, and modes of existence (Escobar, 2018). By moving beyond both universalist and relativist limitations, pluriversal intelligence offers a pathway toward a more inclusive, relational, and complexity-sensitive anthropology.

This article aims to contribute to this ongoing transformation by outlining the theoretical foundations of pluriversal intelligence and exploring its implications for the future of anthropological inquiry in an increasingly complex and interconnected world.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Legacy of Epistemic Fragmentation

The fragmentation of knowledge constitutes one of the defining characteristics of modern scientific development. While disciplinary specialization has enabled significant advances in depth and precision, it has simultaneously generated epistemic silos that constrain the possibility of holistic and integrative understanding (Morin, 2008; Klein, 2019). This tension between specialization and integration represents a structural limitation within contemporary knowledge systems.

In anthropology, this fragmentation is particularly evident in the division of the discipline into distinct subfields—such as cultural, biological, and linguistic anthropology—which often operates with divergent theoretical frameworks and methodological approaches. Despite addressing inherently interconnected aspects of human existence, these subfields frequently evolve in relative isolation, thereby limiting the discipline's capacity to engage comprehensively with complex, multi-dimensional phenomena.

2.2 Anthropology and the Colonial Epistemic Structure

Anthropology has historically been deeply entangled with colonial power structures, functioning not only as a tool for understanding cultural difference but also, at times, as an instrument for classification, control, and governance of colonized populations (Asad, 1979). This historical entanglement has had enduring implications for the epistemological foundations of the discipline.

In response, contemporary scholarship has undertaken a critical re-evaluation of these legacies, emphasizing the need to decolonize knowledge production and to challenge the dominance of Western epistemological frameworks. This includes recognizing the legitimacy and epistemic value of indigenous knowledge systems and alternative modes of knowing (Smith, 2021; Mignolo, 2011).

However, despite these efforts, the transformation remains incomplete, as many analytical frameworks continue to be implicitly shaped by the very epistemologies they seek to critique.

2.3 The Emergence of the Pluriversal Turn

Recent theoretical developments in anthropology and related fields indicate the emergence of what

may be described as a pluriversal turn—a shift away from universalist epistemologies toward frameworks that acknowledge the coexistence of multiple, equally valid worlds and ontologies (Escobar, 2018). This perspective fundamentally challenges the assumption of a single, objective reality underlying human experience.

Within anthropology, this shift is closely associated with the concept of ontological pluralism, which posits that different cultures do not merely interpret the same world differently, but may in fact inhabit distinct ontological realities (Viveiros de Castro, 2016; Descola, 2006).

Moreover, this pluriversal orientation theoretical finds support in complexity theory, which emphasizes relationality, emergence, and non-linearity as defining characteristics of complex systems (Mitchell, 2009). Together, these perspectives open new pathways for rethinking the foundations of anthropological inquiry beyond the constraints of epistemic fragmentation and universalist assumptions.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a theoretical and analytical research design, aimed at constructing a new epistemic framework rather than testing predefined hypotheses. The research is situated within a transdisciplinary paradigm, integrating perspectives from anthropology, complexity science, and decolonial theory.

Unlike empirical studies based on primary data collection, this approach is grounded in conceptual synthesis and theoretical reconstruction. Its primary objective is to generate a coherent and innovative framework capable of addressing the epistemic limitations identified in contemporary anthropological discourse.

3.2 Epistemological Positioning

The epistemological foundation of this research is rooted in a post-positivist and pluriversal orientation. It rejects the assumption of a single, universal framework for knowledge production and instead recognizes the coexistence of multiple epistemologies and ontologies.

This positioning draws on decolonial perspectives that advocate for the diversification of knowledge systems and the recognition of marginalized epistemic traditions. It also aligns with complexity theory, which emphasizes relationality, emergence, and the non-linearity of

knowledge processes.

As such, knowledge is approached not as a fixed and objective entity, but as a dynamic, context-dependent, and relational construct.

3.3 Analytical Approach

The study employs a critical and integrative analytical approach based on three complementary processes:

1. Critical Literature Synthesis

Key works in anthropology, epistemology, and complexity theory are systematically analyzed to identify underlying assumptions, conceptual gaps, and emerging theoretical trends.

2. Conceptual Abstraction

Core concepts are extracted and reconfigured to develop higher-level theoretical constructs, particularly the notion of pluriversal intelligence.

3. Framework Construction

These conceptual elements are integrated into a coherent epistemic model that transcends disciplinary boundaries and addresses the limitations of existing paradigms.

3.4 Transdisciplinary Integration

A central feature of this methodology is its transdisciplinary orientation, which goes beyond interdisciplinary collaboration by seeking the integration of diverse knowledge systems into a unified analytical framework.

This includes:

- Scientific knowledge systems
- Indigenous and local epistemologies
- Philosophical and spiritual traditions

The integration is not hierarchical but relational, emphasizing complementarity rather than reduction.

3.5 Validity and Theoretical Rigor

In the absence of empirical validation, the rigor of this study is ensured through:

- Conceptual coherence: internal consistency of the proposed framework
- Theoretical grounding: alignment with established scholarly literature
- Analytical depth: capacity to address complex and multi-level phenomena

The validity of the framework is therefore evaluated based on its explanatory power, integrative capacity, and potential applicability across diverse contexts.

4. Results

4.1 Intelligence as a Distributed Phenomenon

Our analysis conceptualizes intelligence not as

an isolated cognitive property of individual agents, but as a distributed and emergent phenomenon embedded within networks of interaction (Hutchins, 1995). This perspective aligns with contemporary developments in cognitive science, particularly theories of distributed cognition and embodied cognition, which posit that cognitive processes emerge through the interaction of individuals, artifacts, and social structures.

From an anthropological lens, this approach illuminates how cultural knowledge, practices, and social norms co-constitute intelligent behavior. Intelligence, therefore, is relational both rather than intrinsic, distributed across human and non-human agents, and dynamically shaped by context. This shift challenges conventional Western-centric models that equate intelligence with individual reasoning or abstract problem-solving.

4.2 Pluriversal Intelligence

Building on decolonial and postcolonial scholarship, the study introduces pluriversal intelligence as a conceptual extension of distributed cognition. This framework recognizes the coexistence of multiple epistemologies and ontologies, emphasizing that no single form of knowledge can claim universality (Mignolo, 2011; Escobar, 2018).

Pluriversal intelligence acknowledges that diverse communities construct reality differently, embedding knowledge in local practices, cosmologies, and relational systems. It thus calls for a shift from unilinear epistemic hierarchies to epistemic pluralism, where scientific, indigenous, and local knowledge systems are recognized as equally valid and complementary.

This perspective provides a theoretical foundation for understanding how complex societal challenges—such as environmental crises, health disparities, and sociocultural conflicts—can be approached through integrative, context-sensitive, and relationally informed solutions.

4.3 Integration of Knowledge Systems

The results highlight the necessity of integrating scientific and indigenous knowledge systems to achieve holistic understanding and problem-solving capacity (Berkes, 2026). This integration is not merely additive but synergistic, producing new insights and practices unattainable within isolated epistemic frameworks.

Case studies and prior literature indicate that

combining localized ecological knowledge with formal scientific methods has led to sustainable management practices, resilience in community-based interventions, and adaptive strategies in the face of climate change (Berkes, 2026).

In a broader sense, this integration exemplifies the operationalization of pluriversal intelligence, demonstrating that cross-epistemic collaboration enhances collective cognitive capacity, strengthens systemic problem-solving, and promotes culturally grounded innovation.

4.4 Summary

Together, these findings suggest that intelligence is:

1. Distributed: Emerging from interactions between individuals, communities, and artifacts.
2. Pluriversal: Encompassing multiple, coexisting knowledge systems and ontologies.
3. Integrative: Realized through the synthesis of scientific and local/indigenous epistemologies.

This reconceptualization provides a robust framework for anthropological inquiry in the 21st century, offering pathways to decolonized, contextually informed, and systemically effective research.

5. Discussion & Implications

5.1 Reconceptualizing Knowledge and Intelligence

The results indicate that intelligence is both distributed and pluriversal, challenging conventional anthropological and epistemological assumptions. This finding supports a paradigmatic shift from universalist, Western-centric frameworks toward a relational and contextually grounded understanding of cognition and knowledge (Escobar, 2018; Hutchins, 1995).

From a theoretical perspective, pluriversal intelligence provides a meta-framework that integrates diverse epistemologies, positioning anthropologists as facilitators of dialogue between knowledge systems rather than sole arbiters of truth. In practice, this approach implies that research methodologies must move beyond strict disciplinary silos, embracing transdisciplinary, participatory, and co-creative designs.

5.2 Implications for Anthropological Methodology

Adopting a pluriversal framework has significant methodological consequences:

1. Epistemic Reflexivity: Researchers must

critically examine their own positionality, biases, and assumptions, recognizing the epistemic power embedded in traditional anthropological frameworks (Mignolo, 2011).

2. Cross-Knowledge Collaboration: Integrating indigenous and local knowledge with scientific methods becomes essential. Such collaboration enhances the explanatory and predictive capacity of anthropological research (Berkes, 2026).

3. Multi-Level Analysis: Anthropological inquiry must account for interactions across symptomatic, paradigmatic, and ontological layers of social systems, enabling deeper insights into systemic dynamics and transformations (Viveiros de Castro, 2016).

5.3 Societal and Global Relevance

Pluriversal intelligence offers tangible benefits for addressing complex global challenges, including:

- Environmental sustainability: Combining traditional ecological knowledge with climate science improves adaptive management strategies (Berkes, 2026).
- Cultural resilience: Recognition of multiple ontologies fosters social cohesion and reduces epistemic marginalization (Escobar, 2018).
- Policy and governance: Inclusive knowledge systems support evidence-informed, culturally sensitive policymaking that transcends reductive, technocratic approaches.

By operationalizing pluriversal intelligence, anthropology contributes not only to academic knowledge but also to societal transformation, aligning scholarly inquiry with urgent global imperatives.

5.4 Theoretical Advancement: Towards a Pluriversal Anthropological Model

This study proposes a Pluriversal Anthropological Model (PAM), which:

1. Positions intelligence as distributed across human, social, and material networks.
2. Recognizes the coexistence of multiple knowledge systems, validating indigenous, local, and alternative epistemologies.
3. Integrates epistemologies through relational, transdisciplinary methodologies, enabling holistic understanding of complex phenomena.

PAM offers a conceptual tool for anthropologists, policymakers, and knowledge practitioners, guiding research design, analysis, and interventions in complex, culturally diverse contexts.

5.5 Limitations and Future Directions

While the study advances theory, several limitations remain:

- Empirical validation: The framework is currently theoretical; application in fieldwork and case studies is required to test robustness.
- Operational challenges: Integrating multiple knowledge systems demands methodological innovation, ethical negotiation, and capacity building.
- Dynamic complexity: Context-specific factors may influence how pluriversal intelligence is expressed and applied.

Future research should focus on contextual operationalization, longitudinal studies, and interdisciplinary testing of the Pluriversal Anthropological Model in diverse cultural settings.

6. Conclusion & Future Scope

6.1 Summary of Key Findings

This study has examined the epistemic fragmentation inherent in contemporary anthropology and proposed pluriversal intelligence as a transformative conceptual framework. The analysis demonstrated that intelligence is distributed, emergent, and relational, and that knowledge systems are ontologically and epistemically plural, challenging the dominance of Western universalist paradigms (Escobar, 2018; Hutchins, 1995).

By integrating theoretical insights from complexity science, decolonial thought, and indigenous epistemologies, the study highlights the inadequacy of disciplinary silos and linear methodologies. The development of the Pluriversal Anthropological Model (PAM) offers a meta-framework that situates anthropologists as facilitators of knowledge dialogue, enabling transdisciplinary, participatory, and contextually grounded research.

6.2 Theoretical Implications

The findings carry significant theoretical weight for anthropology and social sciences:

1. Epistemic Decolonization: PAM provides a pathway to move beyond colonial and universalist assumptions, recognizing multiple ontologies and validating indigenous and local knowledge (Mignolo, 2011; Viveiros de Castro, 2016).
2. Distributed Cognition: Intelligence is reframed as an emerging property of relational networks, expanding theoretical understandings

of human, social, and material interdependencies (Hutchins, 1995).

3. Transdisciplinary Integration: The framework encourages methodological convergence, where anthropology, ecology, social sciences, and policy studies collaborate to address systemic challenges.

6.3 Societal and Global Relevance

Operationalizing pluriversal intelligence has tangible societal impact:

- Environmental Governance: Integrating indigenous ecological knowledge with scientific data supports sustainable, adaptive, and culturally sensitive environmental policies (Berkes, 2026).
- Cultural and Social Resilience: Recognizing multiple epistemologies fosters social cohesion, intercultural dialogue, and empowerment of marginalized communities (Escobar, 2018).
- Policy and Innovation: Evidence-informed, culturally attuned governance and development strategies can be designed through the lens of pluriversal intelligence, enhancing societal transformation.

6.4 Recommendations for Future Research

To advance this line of inquiry, the study proposes several strategic research directions:

1. Empirical Validation: Conduct field-based case studies to test PAM in diverse sociocultural and ecological contexts.
2. Methodological Innovation: Develop practical tools and protocols for integrating multiple knowledge systems in anthropological research.
3. Longitudinal Studies: Explore how pluriversal intelligence shapes systemic transformation over time in communities and institutions.
4. Interdisciplinary Testing: Collaborate across disciplines to evaluate practical applications in climate adaptation, public policy, and education.

6.5 Concluding Insights

This study demonstrates that pluriversal intelligence is both a conceptual and practical innovation. It provides a holistic lens for understanding human societies in the 21st century, allowing anthropology to bridge theory, practice, and societal transformation.

By embracing distributed, contextually grounded, and epistemically plural forms of intelligence, anthropologists can transcend disciplinary fragmentation, engage meaningfully with local and indigenous knowledge, and contribute to

solutions for complex global challenges.

Ultimately, the Pluriversal Anthropological Model not only enriches academic discourse but also positions anthropology as a transformative agent in shaping more inclusive, resilient, and adaptive societies.

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