

2016

Decolonizing Queer Epistemologies: Section Introduction

Kulpa, Robert

<http://hdl.handle.net/10026.1/13061>

Routledge

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Roberto Kulpa and Joseli Maria Silva

Decolonizing queer epistemologies

Since the 1960s and the publication of original works by Kuhn (1996), Feyerabend (1993), Foucault (2002), the Western European and Anglophone intellectual hemispheres have been going through a continuous change from positivist to more critical epistemologies (Carr 1987). In the following decades these parts of the world also lived through social and cultural rebellious mobilisations that are now often called ‘new social movements’ - feminism, black liberation, lesbian and gay liberation, black feminism, and others. These movements made the issue of ‘location’ one of their primary object of critique. For the contemporary social initiatives and academic social sciences and humanities, particularly important are feminist debates about ‘standpoint theory’ in the 1980s (Harding 1991; 2004; Hekman 2004) and about ‘situated knowledge’ in the 1990s (Visweswaran 1994; Haraway 1997), along with, and developing since the 1970s, post-colonial studies (Fanon 2008; Nandy 1983; Said 1994; Spivak 1995). Among other things, they all share interest in ‘self-reflexivity’, ‘situated knowledge’, ‘politics of location’, and ‘critical epistemologies’, an interest from which stems also this section of the *Companion to Geographies of Sex and Sexualities*. Although these ‘alerting processes’ are already decades long, we believe that the contemporary production and circulation of (scientific) knowledge, also within gender & sexuality studies, and geographies, is still affected by the ‘coloniality of power’ (Quijano 2000; 2007) related to the (metaphorical *and* physical) place of knowledge enunciation.

As the editors and authors come from a range of geographical contexts, academic traditions, and are differently placed in relation to the academic privilege, we draw on these rich, diverse positionalities to revisit epistemological practices through geopolitical lenses directed at ‘geographies’, ‘genders’, and ‘sexualities’. Inspiration is found in the work indicating Eurocentrism of contemporary ‘social sciences’ (Bhambra 2007; Bortoluci & Jansen 2013; Connell 2007; Go 2013; Oommen 1991; Steinmetz 2013), and other disciplines (Lal 2005; Martinez 2003; Wane et al. 2011; Comaroff & Comaroff 2012; Hudson & Williams 2004; Baber 2002). In particular, we follow geographers, who criticised the Anglophone journals for reproducing ‘the Anglophone’ as ‘*the canon*’, thus perpetuating inequality of knowledge (Aalbers 2004; Aalbers & Rossi 2006; Garcia-Ramon 2003; Garcia Ramon et al. 2006; Fall & Rosière 2008; Kitchin 2005; Kitchin & Fuller

Kulpa R and Silva JM, *The Routledge Research Companion to Geographies of Sex and Sexualities*, Routledge, 2016 2003), those who claimed that Anglophone geography gets self-centred and thus impoverished (Rodríguez-Pose 2006; Vaiou 2004; Whitehand 2005), and those geographers, who investigated the academic neoliberalism as a form of profit-making from the knowledge ownership (Berg 2012; Best 2009; Minca 2000; Paasi 2005).

The current organisation of scientific production is prone to an increasing number of encounters between researchers from around the world, due to the expansion of communication networks, air transport, and (supra)national incentives for the internationalisation of intellectual labour (but mostly 'quantifiable knowledge outputs'). Consequently, the everyday life of academics is not only intersected by cultural, social or economic dynamics, but is made accountable to them, especially in terms of the neoliberal economy (think that 'a track record of successful grant applications' requirements in the job ads) (Bailey & Freedman 2011; Collini 2012; Farred 2003; Raunig 2013). We urgently need debates about the flux and exchanges between academics, to understand the risks but also possibilities of rebellion these exchanges and encounters offer to academic communities around the globe. For it is important to not only identify the 'Anglophone hegemony' in the scientific world, but - like in the project of 'decoloniality' (Bhabra 2014; Mignolo 2011) and 'critical pedagogy' (Freire 2000; Giroux 2011) - to also look for alternatives and resistance practices to these hegemonies. As the section editors, we are convinced that each of the chapters here offers such a two-step approach, and will become important reference points to working in broader 'critical gender & sexuality studies'.

Coloniality and the Decolonial project

The control of language covers the different forms of colonisation of epistemological beings (Fanon 2008), for language is where the knowledge is inscribed (Mignolo 2003a). Consequently, a mastery of English as a *lingua franca* is a tool for gatekeeping and maintaining an unequal geopolitics of knowledge within Academia (Bajerski 2011; Gutiérrez & López-Nieva 2001; Lander 2000; 2005; Short et al. 2001). An alternative can be inspired by the idea of 'decoloniality' (e.g. Grosfoguel 2007; Mignolo 1993; 2000; Lugones 2007; Tlostanova & Mignolo 2012; Quijano 2000; 2007). The argument is that although colonialism is already a history, coloniality as complex structures of interlocking economic and social axes continue to perpetuate the contemporary world. It operates on three dimensions of power (Eurocentric systems of economic and other production), knowledge (naturalisation of the European thought as 'the science') and being (e.g. Eurocentric gendered and racialised hierarchies). Coloniality represents

the dark and inseparable side of 'Modernity' (Mignolo 2003b; Walsh 2012): while Europe experienced what it calls 'Modernity', the conquered world has been subdued to its opposite, the coloniality. In comparison with postcolonial thinkers, decolonial authors suggest the process to begin already with the 'discovery of Americas' in the 15th century, when bonds were formed between formal rationality, the aspiration to dominate the world and the emergence of a world market. These are the links that are the basis for the notion of linear progress, the superiority of white European men over nature, and capitalism as a unique framework to guide and control thought and life. Coloniality is omnipresent and sustains the mechanisms that hinder the possibilities of creating new knowledge-relationships, based on the ideas of the multiplicity and pluri-locality of knowledge(s).

The alternative path begins with the awareness of the effects and affects of the coloniality of being and knowing, hopefully leading to the promotion of social organisations that stand against the persisting inequalities of the modern world (Mignolo 2000; 2009). Decolonial knowledge must go beyond the simple inclusion of those on the 'academic peripheries' (metaphoric and symbolic, material and geographical). In order to avoid accepting the conditions of inferiority of our knowledge, to avoid accepting the rules of the game that has been imposed on the 'non-Western world' through colonialism and coloniality, the project of decolonial knowledge demands a dedicated space for those hitherto excluded voices to be enunciated (Tlostanova & Mignolo 2012), polyphony of voices, and rebuilding of epistemological foundations of contemporary research and teaching practices.

Towards Queer Epistemologies / Epistemologies of Queer

The power shift of epistemic enunciation to produce non-hegemonic relationships between researchers working on genders, sexualities, and geographies, who, although they are spread globally actually co-exist on equal terms in the imagined world of academia, is necessary and will only be achieved through/in our everyday practices. We concur with Castro-Gómez (2007) and Walsh (2007), that these encounters will hopefully result in the true intercultural dialogue between scholars from around world, from the places of privilege and periphery, and will result in structures and practices that are truly inter-epistemic. Gender, sexuality, and queer studies have from their inception offered critical perspectives on inequality, power, and systems of hegemony and subjugation in the 'modern world'. However, dare we play devil's advocate role and say, that feminist and queer epistemologies we represent across many disciplines, have yet

Kulpa R and Silva JM, *The Routledge Research Companion to Geographies of Sex and Sexualities*, Routledge, 2016 to face their coloniality legacy, mostly on their (Northern) American- and Eurocentrism, and Anglophone squint? Proliferation of 'post-colonial queer studies' and works attaining to geographies 'beyond the West' is not enough, if we are to take the decolonial project seriously.

As editors and authors of this section, we feel that as geographers, feminists, queer scholars, and all in/out-betweeners, we need not only to look for 'non-Western' examples of the world-wide diversity. Rather, and perhaps foremost, we must reconceptualise our own practices of 'doing knowledge'. We can start with reconsidering our citation policies: how many men over women do we cite?; how many white people over other 'races'?; how many Anglophone authors over those writing in other languages? We can follow by actively reconstituting our 'canons': who and what is left behind?; who is canonised as 'theorist' and who remains a mere 'informant'? As Browne (2014) does, let's think how the conditions of privilege that some producers of knowledge enjoy, may be turned into elements of struggle in constructing alternative ways to overcome the cultural, political and economic barriers that prevail in contemporary networks of academic production.

In this spirit, we hope that this introduction, together with the following chapters, will provide an opportunity to open up a dialogue over the epistemic hegemonies in geographies and 'critical gender & sexuality studies', but also possible wilful resistances in our practices of producing ('queer') knowledge. The authors in their individual pieces are exploring a range of issues that are related to the epistemic considerations of what is, and how becomes 'a knowledge' within realms of genders, sexes, sexualities, geographies, activisms, and politics. Each author in their own way identifies and names the epistemic hegemonies they struggle with, each also thinks through the possible, and already present alternatives, and pathways to make them 'partners in dialogue'.

Joseli Maria Silva & Marcio Jose Ornat's attain to the economy of knowledge production in geography and sexuality studies, for instance financial limitation of access to texts or transformations of universities into for-profit corporations (the latter also highlighted by Borghi, Bourcier, and Prieur). Subjecting knowledge to quantifiable outputs under the logic of neoliberal capitalism is also probed, and allowing business corporations under the disguise of 'academic publishing houses' to act as gatekeepers of academic credibility and thus e.g. employability.

Silva and Ornat also question the dominance of the English language, e.g. lack of reflection (esp. among journal and book editors) that English is not only a means and a vessel of communication knowledge, but also an active component constructing it (remember McLuhan's

(1964) idea that ‘the medium is the message’). Maria de Rodó Zárata ponders the usefulness of certain English concepts in other linguistic contexts, as well as the process of equivalence of English for ‘international’, emptying it of the local and national, and thus universalising English in a hegemonic erasure of its particular.

De Rodó Zárata and Jan Simon Hutta consider how geographical location and (a lack of) institutional affiliation determines who gets to be recognised as a ‘knowledge producer’, and who is subdued as ‘informant and data miner’. This translates onto a range of polarised hierarchies of value: theory/raw data, scientists/lay communities, queer scholars/queer activists, native English speakers/non-native English speakers, etc. Also Niharika Banerjea, Katherine Browne, Leela Bakshi, and Subhagata Ghosh pay attention to the overt privileging of institutionalised forms of knowledge. They show how forms of ideas that are written down and university-institution-attached, and thus easy to quantify (and supposedly to reference) - in other words, ‘academic texts’ - are recognised as ‘a (proper) knowledge’, whereas the more elusive forms of creating, living, diffusing, collecting, archiving, embodying, and imagining of knowledge remain put down as information, examples, cases, empirical data, but hardly ever the actual ‘High Knowledge’ and ‘Theory’.

Rachele Borghi, Marie Helene Bourcier, and Charlotte Prieur, as well as Banerjea, Browne, Bakshi, and Ghosh turn their critical eye on tensions between academic and activist circles, and draw our attention to the alternative modes of ‘community engagements’ and dissemination practices, envisaging cross-field practices that nurture our hope for the alternatives.

Finally, also the viciousness of collegial relations in ‘Academia’ more broadly, as well as within the feminist and queer studies, is of concern for Silva and Ornat. This is exemplified on the case of peer reviewing. Rather than being critical, reviewers could be positively engaged, entering into a dialogue *with* colleagues whose work is being reviewed. It is noted that peer reviewing turns out more often than not, to be a form of policing and gatekeeping of some imagined ‘academic standard’ (privilege?) that is performed *against* colleagues. Whether works are marked as ‘suitable’ and ‘publishable’ is determined by geographical location, linguistic and economic factors that are sites of unrecognised privilege on the part of the reviewing colleagues.

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