

## Beyond the Two Cultures Paradigm: The Humanities in the CODESRIA Project

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**T**he critiques of dominant approaches to research in both the social sciences and humanities on knowledge and objectivity seek to demonstrate that modern science paradigms and ‘regimes of truth’ are situated within a particular cultural, social system that needs to be challenged and “decolonized”. The research carried out in the Global North brings with it a particular set of values and conceptualizations of time, space, subjectivity, gender relations, knowledge production, storing (archives) and knowledge sharing.

This ‘ethnocentric’ research is encoded in imperial and colonial discourses that influence the gaze of the researcher (Mudimbe 1988). The research carried out through ‘imperial eyes’ (Said 1978; Pratt 1992) is not just to be challenged through historical re-evaluation. As the colonial imprint in our societies is not a finished business, we have to argue for new epistemologies. These new epistemologies cannot arise from the traditional disciplines of the social sciences and humanities, as this division reinstalls a specific approach opted out by Euro-centric scholarship.

As several scholars have underlined, an abyssal division haunts contemporary academy: the idea of a complex, modern, civilized world of autonomous citizens is contrasted with its antithesis, an unsophisticated, traditional (pre-scientific, pre-logical, irrational), underdeveloped Africa steeped in backward customs, traditions and cultures (Fanon 1961; Nyamnjoh 2015). But western understanding of the world is only a fragment of the knowledge about the world (Santos 2014). Indeed,

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Eurocentric models to explain reality have used coercive violence and control over people and resources as its privileged mode of influence, to force into silence, self-repudiation or ridiculous defensiveness, African modes of self-reproduction and ideas of the good life and dignity (Meneses 2011). African endogenous epistemologies (as in other contexts of the Global South<sup>2</sup>) despite being popular in everyday life, thrive in settings away from the prescriptive gaze of the epistemic stance of modern science. Thus, in academic environments, the predominant approach often ignores or misrepresents other epistemologies as superstition, local cosmovisions, traditions, etc.

For example, science and technological advances by corporations and governments, particularly with regard to the environment, have failed to recognize ‘local’ / ‘indigenous’ knowledge systems, and, even worse, that these ‘local’ systems are an integral part of ancient knowledge systems. In many contexts of the Global South opposition between the Eurocentric conception of ‘land’, subject to property rights, and distinct conceptions of ‘collective spaces or territories’, belonging to a people, both the living and their ancestors, is a good example. The definition of the identity of peoples in the Global South and of their collective rights is quite often bound to a notion of ‘territoriality’, associated with responsibilities in relation to a territory, which is defined as a collective of spaces, human groups (including both the living and their ancestors), rivers, forests, animals and plants. Differences between world views become explicit and turn into sites of struggle when the integrity of these collectives is threatened by alternative notions of relationships to territory and knowledges – such as those that are based on the right to property – or when the distinction between respect for knowledge and culture and the imperative of development is employed used to justify the exploitation of ‘natural resources’ by outside forces.

This nature-culture divide is at the core of modern science (Latour 1993). While the distinction was installed within the realm of the scientific method, in practice modern practices have never maintained such an unambiguous distinction. Instead, what has taken place is a proliferation of hybrids between nature and culture, so that non-modern practices have never been displaced. The divide between the subject and the object is another central characteristic of modernity which by means of purification creates two entirely distinct (for modern science) ontological zones: that of human beings on the one hand; and that of nonhumans on the other.

The presumed epistemological and praxiological unity of science and the opposition of the ‘two cultures’ – of the sciences and of the humanities – , as a structuring feature of the field of knowledge, has been exposed as a rather unstable plurality of scientific and epistemic cultures and of configurations

of knowledges (Wallerstein et al 1996; Stengers 2003; Knorr-Cetina 2007).<sup>3</sup> The multiple episodes of the so-called 'science wars' represent, indeed an attempt at reasserting this divide and re-establishing and policing the boundaries of different domains of knowledge and their hierarchy (Santos 2003).

The assertion of the discontinuities of science and its 'others' requires a permanent policing of borders and a persistent epistemological vigilance, in order to contain and repel the always allegedly imminent assaults of the so-called irrationality. This boundary work, however, had to face a number of obstacles, namely the difficulty of dividing scientific knowledge and the objects of science from those that 'belonged' to other domains of culture or to the vaguely defined territory of 'opinion'. The latter always had an ambiguous status in the history of the sciences, being regarded either as the 'other' of science that had to be denounced, demystified and defeated in the name of rigour and reason, or as the 'natural' ally of science, the obligatory point of passage for a transformation of the world according to the principles of reason and Enlightenment.

In short, the differentiation and specialisation of the sciences are the outcome of historical changes associated with two processes: 1) the drawing of boundaries between science and technology, a ploy used to claim the intrinsic neutrality of science and to locate the consequences of scientific research, be they desirable or undesirable, good or bad, constructive or destructive, on its applications; 2) the demarcation of science from other modes of relating to the world, taken to be non-scientific (or local, irrational, etc.), including the arts, humanities, religion, and, as Durkheim stated, allowing collective life to rest upon 'well-founded illusions', known as common sense.

The separation between the social sciences, and the humanities – originally elaborated in a Eurocentric context – sought to impose itself globally as the norm, at the core of the Eurocentric civilizational project. By doing so, this reason, the metonymic reason (Santos), states its own centrality as the only form of rationality and therefore does not exert itself to discover other kinds of rationality or, if it does, it only does so to turn them into raw material. This exercise became possible because modern science lies

upon an arrogant reason, a kind of reason that feels no need to exert itself because it imagines itself as unconditionally free and therefore free from the need to prove its own freedom.

To challenge the arrogance of this reason, one needs a distinct approach, beyond the two cultures. These new epistemologies ought to be developed working with 'subjects' in their diversity, producing knowledge with and not about 'homogeneous societies', reproducing mechanically dichotomies such as nature vs society. This epistemic turn allows to promote different viewpoints and to claim the right to dignity, to 'think from our heads' (Cabral, 1976), claiming sovereignty and cognitive justice (Santos 2003).

Such an approach includes a dual aim: 1) to explain that what does not exist is, in fact, actively produced as non-existent; 2) to understand the biases associated with this worldview to be exposed and other (re)configurations of knowledges, based on the mutual recognition of their partiality and incompleteness (Santos 2014). Their adequateness in different situations, experiences and struggles has to be evaluated pragmatically, and it is not possible to determine the 'intrinsic' superiority of any one strategy over another. As several African philosophers have pointed out, what humans know they know it according to given circumstances, within which the knowing process takes place and actualizes itself (Masolo 2003). Thus, knowledge emerges as a common product of the dialogue between the scholar, the cultural practitioners or experts, and the social actors of everyday life (Ramose 2003). These academics have highlighted the central significance of the conception of knowledge as a construction, as the interaction, through socially organised practices, of human actors, materials, instruments, ways of doing things, skills, in order to create something that did not exist before, with new attributes, not reducible to the sum of the heterogeneous elements mobilized for its creation; finally, they scrutinised the conditions and limits of the autonomy of scientific activities, displaying their connections to the social and cultural context where they are carried out. In short, knowledge cannot be reduced to a model, that is, a reduced and simplified scheme of a complex reality.

Although internally diverse, modern science provided the knowledge under-

lying the long cycle of colonialism and global capitalism. These historical processes profoundly devalued and marginalized the knowledge and wisdom that had been in existence in the Global South. Therefore, rather than a mere historical criticism of the 'African situation', to overcome the peripherization and subalternity of endogenous epistemologies, requires to carry out a critical review of hegemonic concepts defined by modern rationality, such as history, culture and knowledge. Seeking to analyze the goal of these concepts includes: an historical reevaluation – to rethink all past and future prospects in the light of other perspectives, beyond the rationality associated with the global North; an ontological analysis, which requires the renegotiation of the definitions of self and of the senses; and finally, an epistemic challenge, putting into question the exclusive and imperial understanding of knowledge, challenging the epistemic privilege of the global North (Santos & Meneses 2010).

The modern scientific paradigm is fundamentally a Western paradigm of knowledge (Mudimbe 1988; Appiah 1992) to justify a certain way of experience the world, a certain vision of history, reason and civilization. So, although many intellectuals in the continent continue to insist on epistemic paradigm that subsist behind the 'two cultures', knowledge production is an inseparable creation of subjective activity and external activity, moving through history (Masolo 2003). The twenty-first century requires a more sophisticated understanding of our world, entailing dialogues and conviviality between various epistemologies. A critical element of this challenge is the very disciplinary nature/organization of modern knowledge. Academic disciplines embody the very division of knowledge into two cultures, a structure that seeks to manage and make comprehensible and orderly this field of knowledge, while controlling, endorsing and justifying inequalities between knowledges and generating other forms of oppression that perpetuate the abyssal and hierarchical division between science and other knowledges (Fanon 1961; Dussel 1995; Santos 2003). To ensure that our modes of engagement do not re-enact the very epistemic violence (Spivak 1988) that we are working to undermine, it is necessary to acknowledge the difference that makes a difference (Geertz 1973); to unmask the power structures that still characterize our

engagement with other knowledges/epistemologies while working actively towards transforming those structures and thereby the terms of the conversation. Otherwise, we run the risk of practicing 'strategies of condescension' (Bourdieu 2004). Thus, there is urgent need to recognize the power and privileges present in the loci of enunciation; the need for incessant self-reflexivity by those of us engaging with other knowledges; to be constantly on guard against being involved in the reproduction of new hierarchies; to avoid falling into the draw of representing, explaining or speaking on behalf of the subaltern.

Today, working against epistemicide is imperative in order to recover and valorize the epistemological diversity of the world (Santos 2014). Such recovery and valorization requires the transformation of the world's epistemological diversity – beyond the two cultures<sup>4</sup> – into an empowering instrument against hegemonic globalization, developing silenced and invisibilized forms of cosmopolitanism. It would promote a wide conversation of humankind, celebrating conviviality, solidarity, and life against the logic of market-ridden greed and individualism and the destruction of life to which world populations large and small are condemned by the dominant forces of globalization.

These epistemologies allow for the present to encompass distinct promises of future, beyond the linearity of modern project. In short, the Global south calls for a distinct library, beyond the colonial library that negates the possibility of a plural rationality and history (Mudimbe 1988).

### Challenges in Training New / Younger Scholars

Since our world is still heavily contaminated by the colonial-capitalist project, our goal is to recover knowledges and social practices that were forgotten, silenced and erased in their condition of (renamed) dominated, inferior, local knowledge in the international constellation of knowledges and powers. It is the struggle for these other epistemologies that embodies the epistemologies of the South (Santos 2014). The incredible diversity of the world obviously produces powerful and fertile knowledge, whose plurality is infinite. The contemporary 'learned ignorance' consists of knowing that the epistemological diversity of the world is potentially infinite and each knowledge

only knows about itself to a limited extend. So, the university and research in the Global South should not be hostage of the metonymic reason. Rather, it should be places where learned ignorance calls for unlearning and for relearning with others.

In short we need to recall – as have Frantz Fanon, Aimé Césaire, Rabindranath Tagore, among others – that when one privileges one form of knowledge, in fact privileges a system of power. The future of education in today's world requires fostering a dialogue among different worldviews with the aim of integrating knowledge systems originating in diverse realities, and to establish a dialogue in diversity (pluriversality instead of universality). In this debate, the voices from the global South need to be heard in international debates on education. A politics of cultural diversity and mutual intelligibility calls for a complex procedure of reciprocal and horizontal translation rather than for general theory (Santos 2014).

The majority of universities and research institutions, far from being 'liberating forces' that celebrate 'achievement' over 'ascription', play a key role in the reproduction of the distribution of cultural capital and thus in the reproduction of the knowledge-power nexus (Wallerstein et. Al, 1996; Bourdieu). Given the resilience of colonial education in Africa, ordinary men and women and the endogenous alternatives on which they draw, do not receive the recognition and representation they deserve (Nyamnjoh 2015). Intercultural translation and conviviality in knowledge production would entail not only collaboration across disciplines in the conventional sense (across the two cultures and between them and the so-called hard sciences), but more significantly, the dialogue and translation between distinct epistemologies, informed by the goal to promote cognitive justice, popular universities and experiences of reality (Santos & Meneses 2010).

Our educational system does not, quite often, differentiate social sciences from humanities. We have lost the capacity to teach how to think; rather, the emphasis is placed upon the need to follow models and approaches that have been used 'elsewhere' apparently with success. In short, many of our universities have sold their soul to the market (Diouf & Mamdani 1994; Cruze Silva 2010). To bring in other epistemologies opens the possibility to

challenge the linearity of time, the immediacy of economic liberal project. The time of the market, especially under the current capitalist conditions, is a time that is very fragmented and the time of consumption is really a time of the instant. So we wanted to recapture that category of the near future and see to what extent it could be remobilized in the attempt at critiquing the present, and reopening up a space not only for imagination, but also for the politics of possibility (Mbembe 2015).

The social scientists have a problem with objectivity and neutrality. By developing strong forms of objectivity, linked to the idea of the positioned or situated subject, the African researcher can overcome his/her ventriloquist's fake reproduction of Eurocentric categories. This is a project of slow time, of listening, or producing knowledge learning from different epistemic perspectives.

Another challenge is to question the unity of science. On the one side the humanists, who were supposed to teach young men and young women how to think critically as opposed to skills enhancement and training, and those on the other side of the argument, that prefer analytic models, aimed supposedly to interpret the broader world, reflected in STEM.<sup>5</sup> The contemporary predatory capitalist state seeks to produce automata who are not going to question things. That is, that can't think critically, that are compliant with the predominant power structures that rule the world. We need to avoid universities and research institutions that are focused on getting jobs for people, in a context where societies are increasingly plutocratic. By allowing the market to select who will become a scholar is a hypocritical stance.

Thus our sciences (both cultures) have to address the actual historical processes of colonialism, enslavement, capitalist exploitation and dispossession that are involved in the making of Eurocentrism as a political civilization project. These challenges will allow demystifying the precedence of the Global North in the construction of conceptual categories, thus ending the epistemic privilege of modern science and modern societies.

The epistemologies of the south, as project that seeks to surpass the centrality of the Global north and to produce a new topology of cognitive spaces and cartographies as to aims towards a pluriverse made of (inter)connected epistemologies.

This is a claim for taking epistemology as topological space that increases the interaction between the imagination and the imaginary. The imagination is an expected extrapolation of possibilities. An imaginary is a horizon of the yet to come, the still to be imagined. This approach enables us to locate the Eurocentric scientific project within a wider political project, and learn from one another, to address the problems we currently face, reinvigorated our imagination by opening up infinite possibilities of cognitive justice.

## Notes

1. Considering culture as a phenomenon associated with repertoires of meaning or signification shared by members of a society, and also with differentiation and hierarchy within national societies, local contexts and transnational spaces.
2. Here, the South is used as historical, geographic and political term. The South is constructed cartographically as the opposite of the North. The North is evoked as the centre, the South is deemed a periphery. More dualistically, the North is hegemony and the South hopefully, resistance. As Visvanathan (2012) alerts, the epistemological challenge is to escape such frozen geographies.
3. The question of the internal plurality of science was raised, in the Global North, mostly, by feminist epistemologies, by the social and cultural studies of science and by the currents in the history and philosophy of science influenced by the latter.
4. Endogenous epistemologies thus include the discourses that have evolved out of the so called 'two cultures' disciplinary model (many of which have arisen as responses to the oppressive nature of Eurocentric academic disciplines), in dialogue with other endogenous epistemologies.
5. STEM refers to the academic disciplines of science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

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