

Resisting Intellectual Imperialism and Epistemic Violence: Towards Autonomous Knowledge Production

This conference warmly invites thinkers and activists to contribute work that advances our understanding of intellectual imperialism, academic dependency, epistemic violence, and that suggests interventions paving the way to epistemic justice and autonomous knowledge production.

Scholars researching intellectual imperialism and academic dependency have critiqued the structural inequalities of global academia and knowledge production (S. F. Alatas 2003; S. H. Alatas 2000; Guillermo 2023; Patel 2021). They argue that the metrification of academia and the imposition of university and journal rankings orient all knowledge production towards the Global North, predominantly the US, where most highly ranked universities, journals, and conferences are based (Guillermo 2023). In the race for university rankings and faculty productivity metrics, scholars from the Global North, especially White scholars, hold hegemonic influence in shaping research directions, evaluating scholarly works, setting “best practices” and training the next generations of academics. I.e., scholars who hold globally disproportionate amounts of privilege, and who are benefiting from rather than being violated by global power structures and the (after)effects of imperialism, (settler)colonialism and slavery, are judging and gatekeeping the knowledge production of the Global Majority, often with vastly insufficient knowledge about Global Southern contexts and

concerns. Thus, the elites of the Global North assessing and evaluating what *globally* counts as “good scholarship” and what not, what is *globally* relevant and what not, what deserves to be published or presented and what not. These global academic power relations have an uncanny resemblance to colonial power relations. Critics have for a very long time pointed out Eurocentric, white-centric and ideological biases pervading the social sciences and humanities (Rizal 1890; Du Bois 1947 [in Itzigsohn and Brown 2020]; Quijano 2000; Mignolo 2002, Alatas 2003, Grosfoguel 2013). This testifies to the problematic effects of these gatekeeping functions of Global North-based scholars and institutions. This epistemic violence is a formidable, tragic injustice of our time. It is extremely insidious that a group of elite scholars distorts global knowledge production and at the same time excludes the Global Majority from it, and we urgently call on scholars from all continents to put a stop to it.

These academic power relations render knowledge production itself racialized and colonized. Our very notions of “knowledge production” in academia are elitist in the sense that only knowledge production by academics—who often are white, upper class, and hold other privileges—is seen as valid. Laypeople, workers, farmers, the subaltern, racialized and indigenous people are producing, holding and transmitting accurate and valuable knowledges, but these knowledges are not seen as legitimate, they are instead perceived as mere “raw” data for academics to freely use, interpret, theorize upon and publish in single-authored publications (Tillman 2024). The methods used to “process” this data often carry racist and white supremacist biases (Zuberi 2000, 2001; Zuberi and Bonilla-Silva 2008), leading to biased theories.

Even scholars from the Global North writing about decolonization and the struggles of communities situated in the Global South may commit epistemic violence. One problem that scholars with privilege writing about subaltern subjects face is the danger of extracting and appropriating subaltern knowledge. Epistemic extractivism occurs when knowledge produced by communities in struggle from the Global South are appropriated, depoliticized and decontextualized without receiving any benefits from the scholar writing about them (Rivera Cusicanqui 2012, Grosfoguel 2016). Well-intended scholars can still reproduce epistemic sexist and racist practices by not acknowledging the origins

of theories of liberation by women and communities from the Global South (Grosfoguel 2013 and 2018). There has been a rich tradition of women from the Global South interrogating white feminist scholarship for excluding or appropriating the experiences of women from the Global South (Mohanty 1988, Curiel 2017, Espinosa Miñoso 2018 and 2022). Activists and scholars from the Global South have called to interrogate the political economy of intellectual production in the Global North as well as the networks of dependencies in the exchanges and collaborations between scholars from both regions. Furthermore, there is a demand to center the voices of the scholars and activists immersed in social struggles in the Global South without appropriating or depoliticizing their practices and knowledge.

In light of these issues, scholars have called for the need to dismantle the power structures and hierarchies of global academia (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2021; Schöpf 2021) and to foster Autonomous Academic Communication Communities (Guillermo 2023) in the Global South and among discriminated groups in the Global North that will engage in truly autonomous knowledge production. Such communities may facilitate truly autonomous knowledge production, enabling them to theorize based on their own historical, social, and cultural contexts, and to conduct agenda setting and problem formulation informed by local, in-group concerns, without influences and pressures coming from global academic elites distorting their research (S. H. Alatas 1979, 2002).

[View References](#) (PDF).