How do epistemic inequalities inform methodological reflexivity in the social sciences ?

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Decolonizing Evaluation :
From Theory to Practice

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Introduction outline

1. Epistemic injustice: a feminist framework on knowledge inequalities

2. Language and symbolic power : *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (Spivak, 1988)

3. Decolonizing methodologies : from Smith (1999) to Connell (2018)

4. Experimenting: participatory and participatory-action research : two key issues

1. *Epistemic Injustice* (Fricker, 2007): a feminist framework on knowledge-based inequalities

<u>A. Defining testimonial and hermeneutical injustice with Miranda Fricker (2007)</u>

- Epistemic injustice (Fricker, 2007): social inequalities related to knowledge and knowing that result in differentiated or unfair treatment.

- *testimonial injustice*: « an injustice in which someone is wronged in their capacity as a giver of knowledge » (Fricker, 2007, p.18)

- *hermeneutical (or interpretive) injustice:* « an injustice in which someone is wronged in their capacity as a subject of social understanding » (Fricker, 2007, p.18)

- ***testimonial injustice*** occurs when someone is unfairly discredited or not believed because of prejudice - such as racism, sexism, ableism, etc.

- ***Hermeneutical injustice*** happens when someone cannot properly make sense of their own experience—or cannot communicate it to others—because the collective resources for interpreting that experience (like language, concepts, or public narratives) are lacking.

- References : see Jose Medina (2012), Kristie Dotson (2011), Nora Berenstain (2016), Michael Doan (2018)

1. *Epistemic Injustice* (Fricker, 2007): a feminist framework on knowledge-based inequalities

B. « Objects no dot speak » : the notion of epistemic objectification in Fricker's work

- **Epistemic objectification** : « the distinction between someone's being treated as an <u>informant</u> and their being treated as a <u>source of information</u> » (Fricker, 2007, p. 145).

- Objectification/treating someone as a source of information is not inherently problematic, so as long as this is temporary and people are not fully denied epistemic agency (Fricker, 2007)

- **Epistemic agency**: the ability to question, contribute to, legitimize, and transform knowledge based on their experiences, perspectives, and social contexts.

2. Language and symbolic power : *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (Spivak, 1988)

B. Epistemic injustice : from Pierre Bourdieu to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak

- *Language and Symbolic Power* (Bourdieu, 1982) : Legitimacy to speak is unequally distributed across social contexts, mostly class

- *Can The Subaltern Speak ?* (Spivak, 1988) Can the voices of colonized and postcolonial subjects really challenge dominant ways of thinking, or are they always filtered, translated, or even erased by systems that speak *for* them?

- A question that **needs repetition** rather than clear-cut answers (Vidal, 2020) > staying ethically alert, ongoing methodological work and experimentation

3. Decolonizing methodologies

« From the vantage point of the colonized, a position from which I write, and choose to privilege, the term « research » is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism » .

Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, Research and Indigenous People (1999)

3. Decolonizing methodologies : from Smith (1999) to Connell (2018)

A. From Smith (1999) to Connell (2018)

Indigenous methodologies « tend to approach cultural protocols, values and behaviours as an integral part of methodology. They are « factors » to be built in to research explicitly, to be thought about reflexively, to be declared openly as part of the research design, to be discussed as part of the final results of a study and to be disseminated back to the people in culturally appropriate ways and in a language that can be understood » (Smith, 1999, p.15)

Decolonizing Sociology (Connell, 2018): critiques mainstream sociology for being predominantly centered on Western knowledge and social systems.

> Decolonizing sociology involves reflecting on the history and politics behind what counts as knowledge and making room for many different voices and ways of thinking.

3. Decolonizing methodologies

B. Framing *Scientific Extractivism*

- *Scientific Extractivism* refers to research practices that **unilaterally benefit academic careers** while dispossessing individuals and communities of their life stories and knowledge

- over-researched communities are "mined fields " (Godrie, 2024)

- life histories and lived experiences *transformed into data :* what does research with « living, breathing, thinking people » (Smith, 1999, p.9) involve?

4.Experimenting: participatory and participatory-action research : two key challenges

- Kurt Lewin initiated **action-research** in the 1940s

- The term *"participatory action research"* first emerged in the 1970s during a conference in Tanzania and is attributed to Colombian sociologist Orlando Fals-Borda

- Closely linked to Paolo Freire's critical pedagogy theory

- Participatory research practices as "*a diverse set of more or less critical approaches to the co-production of knowledge, driven by political, epistemological, methodological, and ethical concerns*" (Godrie, 2022)

4.Experimenting: participatory and participatory-action research : two key challenges

A. **Integrating knowledge** – key issues?

- Boaventura de Sousa Santos - *Epistemologies of the South: Justice Against Epistemicide* (2014).

- Knowledge **hybridity**: academic knowledge may be informed by other types of knowledge and vice versa : forms of knowledge tend to overlap

- Knowledge **formalization**: how can we foster dialogue between forms of knowledge that are expressed through very different formats or structures?

4. Experimenting: participatory and participatory-action research : two key challenges

B. **Participation** – key issues?

- material: compensation, time availability

- symbolic: power imbalances and dynamics of domination within research collectives

• Céline Gélineau et al. 2012 : degrees of participation

• **appropriation of the research process**: training participants in scientific practice (raising questions of feasibility, available resources, and social and cultural capital).

• degree of **political consciousness** or **critical positioning** – that is, the extent to which the project's initiators or coordinators are willing to interrogate the relationships between knowledge production and power structures, both in the broader social world and in the dynamics between academic researchers and lay participants.