Epistemology and Moral Economies of Difference:
Transforming Social Research

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ABSTRACT
Colonialism's incitement to difference threads through the historical and intellectual formation of academic institutions. How are today's standards for scholarship compromised by methodologies and methods that are entwined with colonial productions of difference? My analysis begins with a brief consideration of colonialism's social and intellectual projects, most particularly, I attend to some of their systematic productions of belonging and erasure. I then demonstrate how the power of coloniality extends through the hegemonic practices that define social science scholarship to (re)produce systematic erasures that continue to normalize particular forms of belonging and exclusion. My analysis illustrates that even when research practices have purportedly progressive aims, they can reproduce hegemonic relations of power through the ordinary constraints of epistemic foundations. The goal of this article is to provide analyses and insights that contribute to more globally inclusive intellectual environments, to a more diverse range of epistemologies, and to more effective studies of power and privilege. I conclude by considering decolonial strategies to build inclusive global communities of scholars and to transform our epistemic foundations of research.

Social Science as a Cultural Activity

For more than 150 years, scholars have provided material and theoretical analyses of inequality on global, structural, cultural, local, and interactional levels. There is much research examining processes of marginalization and the inequalities they produce. Thanks to the many contributions of scholarship on equalities we can effectively illustrate consequences of inequalities, make recommendations for policy changes, add insights to movement organizing, and imagine forms of intervention to build equity and inclusion. In more recent decades, scholars have turned their analyses toward centers of hegemonic power and toward the systems of signification used to legitimize inequalities.

Despite this scholarship, we are witnessing increasingly bifurcated economies on local, national, and global levels. Further, political gains and social support for marginalized groups across the globe seem to be increasingly precarious as far-right groups experience a global resurgence both in politics and in extra-political organizing. Clearly, inequalities are shaped and resisted by far more than academic scholarship. And, it is also true that when our scholarship fails to reach broad audiences, it has limited effectiveness. However, it also seems both timely and reasonable to also ask if there is something about the structure of the academy that contributes to this outcome. How is the very nature of research implicated in the continuation of systems of inequality? Have we cultivated practices that effectively examine *the effects* of inequality and marginalization but are unable to empirically critique the relations of power that create them? This article is not to be read as an indictment of existing scholarship, some of which has been truly transformative. It is a call for scholars to turn a decolonial lens on the epistemic foundations of our own endeavors. As scholars concerned with equity, we must always ask how, and to what extent, our work is implicated in systemic inequalities.

With the goal of creating more inclusive intellectual environments and more diverse epistemic power, I will examine some of the systematic erasures produced by North Atlantic epistemologies. My analysis locates the heart of these erasures in the incitement to difference that has characterized colonialism and which pervades neoliberalism. Marginality is always a qualified presence (re)produced through hegemonic moral and political economies. Consequently, to fully apprehend marginality, we must examine the erasures that produce the qualified status. By examining marginality as both presence and erasure, we begin to see the production of power and domination more clearly.

In the subsequent pages, my analysis situates the development of academic institutions and current research practices within geographic and intellectual colonial projects. This establishes grounds for considering how colonial practices extend through academia and our standards for research. This is an ambitious effort with a very narrow focus. The primary concern of this article regards two points: (a) How the epistemic state of nations, created through the power of coloniality, shapes global scholarly engagements; and (b) How epistemologies of the North Atlantic, now commonly assumed to be the standard for all social research, limit researchers' capacity for analyzing relations of power and privilege. I conclude by suggesting strategies (and offering encouragement) for senior scholars to leverage our privilege in the service of decolonizing social research methods.

Coloniality and Difference

Culturally meaningful forms of "difference" enunciate relationships of power by establishing a purportedly oppositional category to difference—an imaginary "sameness" or homogeneity. This incitement to difference enacts discursive, symbolic, and material violence that simultaneously creates and depends upon systematic erasures to achieve particular forms of belonging and exclusion. Through an incitement to difference, empires of the North Atlantic have sought to establish themselves as economically, politically, and culturally superior to other regions, communities, and peoples. Colonial geopolitics have been and continue to be forms of intellectual as well as physical occupation. The drive to establish European thought as the standard for all scientific truth depended upon the destruction and disqualification of other epistemes (Walsh, 2007). Today, it is impossible to think of modernity, anywhere, without invoking something of the North Atlantic. Modernity, science, capitalism, and Eurocentrism have become thoroughly imbricated (Quijano, 2000).

The dehumanization that colonizers inflicted upon people around the globe was constituted through ontologies that rendered colonized peoples (and consequently their nations) as fundamentally deficient and developmentally primitive. Racial and gendered projects were central to the fiction of "self-evident" differences used to establish boundaries between the colonizer and colonized. These boundaries were made to define and delimit social, economic, and political possibilities (McClintock, Mufti, & Shohat, 1997). Paid labor became the privilege of White men as colonized people were forced into racial classifications constituted in part as an enslaved, or poorly paid, labor force: "It is not difficult to find, to this very day, this attitude spread out among the white property owners of any place in the world" (Quijano, 2000, p. 539).

The construction of racialized gender binaries was crucial to the nation formation under colonialization (Schiwy, 2007). Colonizers forced Indigenous women into labor as servants, concubines, and/or prostitutes and demanded their forced sterilization. Through the oppression of colonized women, White women, particularly those in the colonies, achieved an elevated standard of Europeanness, which benefited both White women and White men. Indigenous men—purportedly the opposite of colonizing men—were constituted as either lacking adequate masculinity (i.e., feminized) or as dangerous (i.e., hypermasculine) (McClintock et al., 1997; Shohat, 1991, 2006). Sexual violence toward "women of color" and charges of sexual predation against "men of color" served as repressive mechanisms of domination.

Colonial forms of domination (including structures of labor, race, capital, culture, patriarchy, and knowledge production) have continued long after the end of colonial administrations. This deep cultural imbrication survives colonialism itself and is one of many reasons why Quijano (2000) argues that it is important to speak of the *coloniality of power* rather than simply colonialism. Coloniality is itself a model of power—a codification of knowledge, hierarchies, and discursive structures—that renders identities, cultures, institutions, and nations as fundamentally and permanently lacking. It is maintained through bureaucratic systems (e.g., governments, economies, criminal justice systems, educational institutions, and media) as well as through cultural expression, common sense, the self-image of peoples, and the aspirations of self. It permeates nearly every aspect of our modern

experience (Maldonado-Torres, 2007). The devastation of colonialism goes well beyond any historical era or event, normalizing relations of power, and the forms of knowledge they produce. Coloniality legitimized a Eurocentric perspective of knowledge and knowledge production (Quijano, 2000; Walsh, 2007). Intellectual dependencies were cultivated, indeed required, along with economic ones.

Coloniality and the Academy

The university has played, and continues to play, an important part in colonial expansion and nation building. Universities have functioned not only to extend empires but also to articulate the power of coloniality by contributing to the "civilizing" mission of the occupation. Indeed, the model of the European university contributed to the eradication of educational institutions around the globe. For example, Europeans destroyed the Aztecs' and Incas' educational institutions, displaced their language, their own forms of knowledge, and ways of knowing (Mignolo, 2003, p. 104). This form of intellectual violence has been integral to colonialism; colonizers have secured their sustained domination by systematically destroying Indigenous knowledge, language, and institutions. In the United States, academic institutions were shaped both by colonialism and the slave trade. Colonialism was predicated on genocidal campaigns against Indigenous nations; those who survived saw their children abducted and forced into "re-education" programs at settler schools. The high point of the African slave trade marked, not coincidentally, the period in which higher education in the colonies expanded most rapidly (Wilder, 2013 cited in Carp, 2018, pp. 2–3). For example, Yale funded its graduate courses as well as its first scholarship with rents from its slave plantation (Carp, 2018). These developmental processes have deep and far-reaching consequences for academic structures, organizations, and knowledge production. Consider that one consequence of the colonial university is that the history of colonized nations cannot be written on their own since the discipline of history, as we know it today, is a European invention (Chakrabarty, 2000).[1] The neoliberal model of empire expansion includes the export of entire university systems from wealth countries in the North Atlantic to poorer nations around the globe. These are only a few examples to illustrate the coarsest forms of the extension of empire through academia. Around the globe, empire is also evident in the North Atlantic epistemologies that constitute the social sciences.

Social sciences were designed by people with power and privilege to examine "others": those who are poor, disenfranchised, or "foreign." This is evident in the focus of many of our research projects today. For example, when academic disciplines and funding agencies focus on the study of Black Africans but not on wealthy, White colonizers, they enact real and symbolic violence that protects the wealthy, White colonizer (Warnier, 2014). Scholars are making important efforts to turn their analytic lenses toward privilege and power. However, I want to argue that we must also do more than refocus the specific questions of our research agendas. As scholars we must question the capacity of existing research methods and methodologies to adequately apprehend the full extent of social life.

Can research methodologies/methods designed to study "others" provide adequate tools for examining relations of power, domination, and privilege? For more than 50 years, scholars

have argued that the ground from which we conduct research is often set against our efforts (Flyvbjerg, 2001; Gordon, 1997; Harding, 1991; Latour & Woolgar, 1986; Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011; Pascale, 2011; Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002; Winch, 1958). Nations and their intellectual traditions have been shaped by intellectual, cultural, and material occupation. The consequences affect what we research, how we research, what we teach, and how we teach.

The coloniality of power endures today through material, symbolic, and discursive forms of violence that often threaten the very existence of people who have been racialized, while simultaneously advancing systems of White supremacy. At the same time, the power of coloniality produces an inclination to national amnesia on matters of genocide and slavery, as well as violence against women, sexual minorities, and people with nonconforming gender expression. In short, coloniality produces an inclination to national amnesia *regarding its own acts of terrorism* waged in support of its own formation. For example, the power of coloniality extends through U.S. society and is integrated into our educational systems that continue to exclude and/or marginalize the experiences and knowledges of Native American, African American, Latina/o, and Asian American students and teachers. These exclusions reiterate the colonial question of their basic status in the world (Richardson, 2012, p. 539). This is just one example of how coloniality extends through our universities, and it is an example that progressive teachers and scholars have sought to combat through critical theory and critical pedagogy. Yet many Indigenous scholars view these liberatory projects as the most recent in a long line of political endeavors that fail to consider the uniqueness of Indigenous people (Grande, 2000, p. 467). Intellectual traditions that are imbricated with coloniality might be progressive but cannot be liberatory. Social researchers must deliberately examine, and make visible, our own repressive strategies and practices—the part we play in collusion with corporate interests and the projects of the modern state. Academia must come to terms with coloniality.

Epistemologies of the North Atlantic

This section takes up the epistemic force of history by considering how the coloniality of power has structured North Atlantic ontology and epistemology through specific erasures. Hegemonic research methods—in research design, data collection, and grant proposals and publications— systematically rely upon and (re)produce systematic erasures. The absences produced by research methods are thoroughly naturalized and are consequently among the most profound form of silencing practices enacted by scholarship. Absences, and the erasures that create them, are secured through moral and political economies that include concerns for rights and obligations, access to and distribution of resources, and systems of social and government accountability. This section examines two specific forms of erasure: those related to the certification of knowledge producers and those related to the production of authoritative knowledge.

Most fundamentally, erasures are processes through which belonging (and exclusions) are produced and therefore are always relational. Erasures can be organized in ways that are densely concentrated (across exclusive environments) or appear more sporadically, yet are rhizomatically connected. They are maintained, in part, through the active production and

routinization of ignorance—an active misapprehension regarding the nature of the world and how it exists. Epistemologies of ignorance are anchored to two foundations: socially acceptable but faulty systems of logic *and* instruments of science that are unable to fully apprehend social complexities (Alcoff, 2007; Pascale, 2011; Prasad, 2005; Sullivan & Tuana, 2007; Swan, 2010). Epistemologies of ignorance provide discursive resources for producing distanced and authoritative knowledge based on *non-relational* ways of knowing the world (Swan, 2010). Importantly, epistemologies of ignorance tend to provide scientific legitimacy to cultural beliefs held by dominant groups in society.

To examine the production of erasures, ignorance, and the forms of belonging they produce is to locate oneself within myriad tensions. Consequently, we constantly examine the adequacy of our vocabulary and soundness of our presumptions (Rappert, 2014, p. 42). Yet even deeply critical self-reflection is not enough to shift the coloniality of power. In addition, we need, at a minimum, an epistemological reconstruction that involves both ecology of knowledges (Santos, 2008) and a sociology of the trace (Gomez-Barris & Gray, 2010). An ecology of knowledges would necessarily engage critical knowledges and practices from outside of the North Atlantic. Critiques of science must undergo a spatial turn as increasing numbers of analyses examine how geographical location shapes the degree to which knowledge is recognized as credible and authoritative (Pereira, 2014). This is not an argument to discard epistemologies of the North Atlantic; it is part of a continued call to decenter them and to expand epistemic possibilities. We need what Santos (2008) has called alternative thinking about alternatives. In addition, we need a sociology of the trace—a means of analysis that attenuates the distance between presence and absence and pursues the operation of power/knowledge both in the everyday and in our scholarship (Gomez-Barris & Gray, 2010).

Ecology of Knowledges

An ecology of knowledges requires that we examine, refine, and enhance epistemic possibilities. As discussed, epistemologies of the North Atlantic have been universalized by destroying Indigenous knowledge, forcibly rendering North Atlantic epistemologies as the only valid standard, and reducing knowledge produced outside of the North Atlantic to narrow and particularistic frames. An ecology of knowledges would cultivate the emergence of critical understandings and practices that do not fit the North Atlantic framework. It would decenter or provincialize North Atlantic epistemologies, ontologies, and knowledges by rendering them particularistic rather than universal (Chakrabarty, 2000). In short, an ecology of knowledges would establish an epistemic equilibrium to displace the epistemic domination of the North Atlantic.

The epistemic domination of the North Atlantic is currently maintained through the dominance of English as the lingua franca of academia and through the U.S. control of ranked and indexed journals, which are vital to academic careers in terms of funding, reappointment, and tenure. The continued effects of coloniality are profound and far-reaching. Consider that the very processes that have accelerated the expansion of global scholarship in the twenty-first century have "simultaneously consign[ed] global knowledge *production* to the more narrow realms of English-speaking scholars" (Pascale, 2017, p. 219). While it might be argued that this condition facilitates transnational knowledge,

we must understand that such facilitation is conditioned upon forms of linguistic and intellectual hegemony. The overvaluation of English is itself produced through a series of erasures through which hegemony is created and maintained.

Since languages are not equivalent, the forced dominance of English enacts a kind of dispossession that not only breaks intellectual continuities but prevents some things from being said by silencing narratives. At stake is the very capacity to conduct scholarship in which one thinks critically, generates ideas, and solves problems using concepts that do not translate into English. Not only do scholars around the globe need to write in English, their academic survival may depend on their ability to cite literatures from the North Atlantic. However, English-speaking scholars within the North Atlantic are under no pressure to write in other languages or cite sources in other languages. This lack of symmetry is one more example of erasure—an asymmetrical ignorance through which the dominance of the North Atlantic is sustained.

In thinking about intellectual hegemony, it is important to distinguish between a social location and an epistemic location. In part, the success of the coloniality of power is achieved by producing subjects who, while *socially* located in the oppressed side of the colonial difference, think like those in the dominant positions—that is to say they take up dominant epistemic frames (Grosfoguel, 2007, p. 213). Given the decimation of Indigenous knowledges and the demands to write in English for English-speaking audiences, scholars around the globe are often coerced into promulgating the universality of North Atlantic epistemic frames.

To write in languages other than English is to marginalize one's own work, yet to accept English as the lingua franca is to accept a neocolonial demand for assimilation. The process is fraught with erasures of experience, knowledge, and insight. The fact that one is socially/ geographically located on the oppressed side of power relations does not automatically mean that one is thinking from a subaltern epistemic location. To clarify, I am neither suggesting a return to an idealized pre-colonial past nor suggesting reclamation of knowledges. Rather I want to advocate for the *cultivation*, rather than the location, of new epistemic frames and trajectories. All cultures are dynamic practices and those which have been most oppressed depend upon re-inventions.

An ecology of knowledges, predicated on a decolonial approach, may mean that categories which are quite central to North Atlantic ontologies, such as class, race, ability, sexuality, and gender, do not mean what scholars think they mean or that they do not intersect in the ways previously assumed (Salem, 2014). Indeed, the very meaning of civil society in the North Atlantic is in tension with traditional structures of tribal society (Grande, 2000). To conduct truly inclusive scholarship, we must come to terms with coloniality of power as it operates in academia and how deeply our disciplines have been constituted and constrained—in foci, methods, and theory—by it.

An ecology of knowledges requires that we create institutional transformations designed to reward scholars who are working in languages other than English. Most immediately, this necessitates institutional changes within journals and conferences to include scholars—and audiences—who do not choose to work in English. More fundamentally, it means creating mechanisms to address the problems with citation indexes, grant review panels, and committees for promotion and tenure. It is not enough to decolonize curriculum; we face the

much harder task of decolonizing the institutions of academia. It is a formidable struggle but an honest one worthy of the intellectual power and relative privilege of scholars—particularly, those with tenure.

A Sociology of the Trace

While social sciences demonstrate a *conceptual* appreciation of the importance of addressing erasures and absences within disciplines, substantive *empirical* understandings of absences are much less robust, both in number and form. Scholars around the globe have met with uneven success in their efforts to adapt, create, or transform the epistemic foundations that sustain research methods. Historically, disciplines have been amenable to epistemic transformations regarding processes of interpretation but unwelcoming to proposed changes to processes of formalization (Pascale, 2011). Processes of formalization determine the legitimacy of knowledge production by delimiting the nature of evidence and the systematization of data collection. The entire academic apparatus (including journals, funding agencies, review panels, promotion, and tenure committees) is invested in maintaining the existing processes of formalization precisely because these establish the criteria of valid research. Yet, processes of formalization systematically and necessarily (re)produce erasures of people, ideas, knowledge, histories, and nations through methodological mandates, techniques, standards, and ethical training.

How do we as scholars maintain a commitment to the empirical without (re)producing systematic erasures? We know how to study the effects of inequality. How can we examine mutually constituted relations of power that (re)produce inequalities? Is it possible to examine the messiness of culture without pursuing a precision that forces premature closures? Which epistemologies might generate methods that allow us to examine social *processes* in systematic ways? Should the criteria that we use for judging the adequacy of social analyses include criteria for considering the production of erasures and the absences they produce? To decolonize research methods based on epistemologies of the North Atlantic, we must begin by recognizing and re-evaluating how the politics of knowledge production has naturalized some methods as the standards for all research. Let us take for example, the binary, dualistic knowledge, particular to Eurocentrism, that has been imposed around the globe; it would not be possible to explain the elaboration of Eurocentrism as the hegemonic perspective of knowledge otherwise (Quijano, 2000, p. 542).

The dualistic foundation of knowledge production, established by Descartes, became the basis of social science epistemologies. Indeed, many disciplines continue to naturalize scholarship by teaching research methods—techniques for data collection and analysis—without also teaching the epistemological and ontological logics that constitute the range of valid methods. Similarly, our empirical papers and books are largely silent on issues of epistemology and ontology. These are two pervasive practices through which we actively naturalize techniques of research methods by routinizing ignorance. Only when *techniques* of research methods are naturalized can they be made to serve as the standards to which all knowledge production must aspire for validation. The binaries upon which modernity depends, and on which much of academia depends, include juxtapositions such as theory/

method, local/global, local/cultural, and contemporary/historical that simply cannot hold with a decolonial approach to scholarship. In the twenty-first century, social science scholars must routinely understand the empirical as produced through networks of discursive devices that, like all discursive devices, express relations of power.

The binary logic of North Atlantic epistemologies necessarily seeks to reduce the vast flow of social worlds into contained and therefore knowable contexts. The first mandate of social research is to produce potential data by defining finite parameters of a static context within which we identify forms of empirical evidence. Academics around the globe are in various disciplinary stages of awakening from the delusion that social life can be parsed into small isolated parts to serve as a fixed or stable form of evidence. Yet, as social scientists, we learn to refer to local contexts. However, the appearance of a so-called local context—that which seems to be a discrete, naturally occurring, and self-evident moment—is itself an effect of power. It would be more accurate to refer to *localized* contexts. This would make the production of the so-called local visible.

However, once we acknowledge that localized moments are themselves social productions—and necessarily foreclosures—how do we conceptualize the nature of evidence? It is not enough to simply analyze what can be identified in a *localized* space. Traditional forms of scholarship that focus on the empirical in a localized context reproduce erasure and absences that are central to maintaining the very inequalities they seek to expose. Consider that while there is significance in any given localized moment, that significance cannot stand apart from the history that engendered it. Through the coloniality of power we have learned to recognize race and to understand its relative meaning and importance. To the extent that the coloniality of power has been naturalized, it is not visible in the immediate context when "race" becomes apparent. The ability to recognize race, much less to say something about its meaning, cannot be reduced to a localized context (Pascale, 2007).

Despite efforts to fix meaning in a localized context, meaning is always produced through socialities that extend well beyond any moment. Most basically, the power of coloniality secures meaningful social categories of difference—as systems of classification—through their repetition over time in *multiple* local contexts, indeed through the vast flow of social life. While there is significance in any given articulation, that significance cannot stand apart from the history of its usage. The operation of power/knowledge (Foucault, 1972, 1994) produces both presence and absence. The present and the absent must be treated as inexhaustibly conjoined (Rappert, 2014):

> In specifying what was examined, each project of empirical study simultaneously demarcates what was not. Since the analysis of anything in its totality is simply not an option, inevitably many considerations are—and are often acknowledged to be— bracketed out. (p. 42)

How do we ensure that what is bracketed out of our research is not the hegemonic reproduction of coloniality? Addressing erasures and the absences they produce requires an epistemology that provides tools and techniques to make the operation of hegemony visible in localized spaces.

In the pursuit of new epistemes, scholars can refuse Cartesian dualism and anchor methods and methodologies to critical liberatory epistemologies that help us to rethink essentialism and dualism as cornerstones of knowledge production. If we propose to examine phenomena not as they are but *as they have been produced*, our analyses will include not only considerations of the mechanisms through which phenomena have been produced but also an examination of erasures that they create and which has created them. In this way, we will come closer to understanding complex relations of power at play.

To apprehend relations of power is to consider social routes to knowledge—to use social epistemologies that can examine the systems of signification through which social life gains meaning. Social epistemologies can offer us one way of tracing the production and circulation of knowledge/power through which discourses constitute the subject positions that persons come to inhabit. They lead us to attend to the relational production of presence, absence, and the active erasures that link them. Examples of social epistemologies include studies of discourse that can address both localized expressions of meaning and broader cultural contexts from which meaning is derived (O'Brien, 2010; Osha, 2005; Pascale, 2013), as well as institutional ethnographies (Latour & Woolgar, 1986; Smith, 1990a, 1990b) that highlight the organization of knowledge and experience. Yet, these are not the only methods based on social epistemologies, there are other epistemic routes to examining erasures. Researchers must become sensitized to the epistemic and ontological foundations of methods; we must consider how the coloniality of power emerges through the design of a study and how the design inflects particular valuations that express a vision of the world. Decolonial empirical research requires coherent epistemes that look beyond localized contexts to the production, repetition, and transformation of culture. We must have epistemologies that allow us to understand how knowledge/power travels across contexts, geographies, and temporalities.

Gramsci (1995, p. 282) argued that every process of inquiry needs to be congruent with its own particular purpose. There is no definitive place from which to locate the necessary and sufficient conditions for establishing empirical knowledge once and for all. We do not need a single framework to replace another, but rather a deep understanding of the philosophical and political foundations of research that enable us to recognize the potential and possibilities of additional frameworks. We must come to understand methods and methodologies as being managed accounts in and of themselves. They are each one way among many to understand the social world. As we seriously consider methods and methodologies as managed accounts, it will become clearer how some accounts work *against* particular insights and forms of understanding. In a sense, to treat research methodologies and methods as managed accounts is to make them accountable, not only to issues of validity but also to issues of hegemony.

Researchers must be able to systematically transform social life into forms of data by identifying, collecting, and describing—indeed by constituting—phenomena as valid evidence (Pascale, 2017). There is no easy way to dispense with universals since without them there would be no social science with which to pursue issues of social justice. Discourses of the North Atlantic are both indispensable and inadequate. How do we maintain what is useful and

also render it particular and partial rather than universal? Is it possible to talk about evidence from a radically different epistemic ground that accounts for culture as both temporal and geographical processes that exist as a varied whole? Is it possible to allow scholarly foundations to be radically different from each other and still be in conversation with each other as scholars? How intellectually inclusive are we willing to be with regard to methodological logics?

Conclusion

Given the pervasiveness of coloniality in academia, this proposal for addressing erasures through an ecology of knowledges and a sociology of the trace is as modest and incomplete as it is ambitious and idealistic. However, if we intend to transform the social world, we must consider how to transform our academic world—in particular, our own processes of knowledge production and dissemination. Whose tools are we using? For which audiences are we writing? Despite vast numbers of scholars concerned with issues of equity, there is a tendency within the social sciences to accept both the structure of academic processes and the standards for social research—this is how we advance in academic careers, how we survive to write another day.

I have argued that as scholars, we must come to terms with the ways that our research methods produce both knowledge and ignorance, presence and absence. This project will be problematic for scholars who are confident in the established mechanisms of knowledge production—perhaps most especially problematic for those who rely on traditional methods to evaluate scholarship for peer reviews, funding sources, promotion, and tenure reviews. Indeed, for some researchers, this project will never seem viable. For some scholars the coloniality of power in the academy will either not be recognizable or will be believed to be too deeply entrenched to be changed. Yet for others, this project will be too important to dismiss as unrealistic. Those who feel the weight of marginality as it is reproduced in academia may not have the privilege of turning away from the enormity of the task, even if they lack the privilege to take up the challenge.

We have much to learn from various forms of organizing to mount a collective challenge to the coloniality of power in academia. This project requires a collaboration between scholars who are privileged enough to pioneer this work without losing their appointments and those who are less secure within, and perhaps less enchanted by, academic traditions and hierarchies. It requires that all incitements to change, whether challenges to linguistic and citation practices or to the epistemic foundations of scholarship, be undertaken in ways that are both systematic and transparent—much like any translation project for unknown audiences. The stakes are not the same for each of us, yet no one is in a neutral relationship to scholarship. It is an opportunity for scholars to leverage our privilege to take up a challenge that is meaningful, important, and long overdue.

There are intellectual ruptures and disjunctures around the globe from which useful critiques are emerging. I write from a privileged position within the North Atlantic, knowing there is value to disassembling systems from the inside as well as from the outside. Scholars within the North Atlantic must, in some measure, share the cognitive labor involved in shifting and/or re-inventing research paradigms. I write with the hope that this article makes a worthwhile contribution toward those efforts.

NOTE

1. Even the concept of linear time, so central to history, is an imposition of the North Atlantic and did not exist among Indigenous peoples of the Americas, Hawaii, or Hindus (Chakrabarty, 2000). People do not exist in historical time that is independent of culture.

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