

## Epistemologies of the South and the future<sup>1</sup>

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In a manner similar to the *postcolonialitalia* research project, in my work I have been dealing with the South of Europe. I come from Portugal, where the conception of Southern Europe, even though it goes back centuries, has become current in the light of the present crisis. In fact, the historical problems of internal colonialisms, between North Europe and South Europe, return in the recent policies of the European Union. As academics and intellectuals, we need to be aware of the deep histories of such debates, the long term (*longue durée*), and the types of prejudices that compromise solutions of the present predicament. Such solutions need to afford dignity for people, and particularly for those seeking social protection and well-being in a society that is becoming increasingly exclusive and discriminatory. Europe has become a fortress which, though coveted from the outside (the so-called immigrants crisis), has increasingly hollowed out itself.

There are many differences between Portugal and Italy: the times and duration of colonialism were different in each case, but they were, in a sense, both subaltern colonialisms. For example, in the light of world system theory, Portuguese colonialism was semi-peripheral. Actually, by the end of the seventeenth century, Portugal and Spain were already out of the game, as they had lost most of their hegemony to the Dutch and then to the British. As a result, certain hierarchies within European colonialisms and empires developed. By the eighteenth century, Portugal was an informal colony of England: it was an imperial centre that, in financial terms, was dominated by, or subordinated to, the hegemonic control of the British Empire. In addition, we also witnessed a rise of differences within the “Western World.” Southern Europe became a periphery, subordinated in economic, political, and cultural terms to northern Europe and the core that produced the Enlightenment. This has been my debate with some postcolonial thinkers, particularly in Latin America, but also in Europe, who think that there is just one Europe or just one Western modernity. I think that the situation shows that from the very beginning there has been an internal colonialism in Europe. This has now become very visible with the financial crisis. In one of my studies, I argue that the Portuguese and the Spanish in the seventeenth century were described by the northern Europeans in the same terms that the Portuguese and the Spaniards attributed to the indigenous and native peoples

in the New World and Africa. They were described as lazy, lascivious, ignorant, superstitious, and unclean. Such descriptions were applied to them by the monks that came from Germany or France to visit the monasteries and the people in the South.<sup>2</sup>

I consider myself a postcolonial thinker and I think that my work has some specificities in this respect, but first we need to define what is meant by colonialism. Colonialism is a system of naturalizing differences in such a way that the hierarchies that justify domination, oppression, and so on are considered the product of the inferiority of certain peoples and not the cause of their so-called inferiority. Their inferiority is 'natural', and because it is natural, they 'have' to be treated accordingly; that is, they have to be dominated. Historically, colonialism also means invasion and foreign occupation. This foreign occupation is very important because it is a negation of all conceptions of territoriality: meaning states, political organizations, and cultures that existed within the occupied territories prior to their colonial occupation. Colonial domination involves the deliberate destruction of other cultures. The destruction of knowledge (besides the genocide of indigenous people) is what I call *epistemicide*: the destruction of the knowledge and cultures of these populations, of their memories and ancestral links and their manner of relating to others and to nature. Their legal and political forms – everything – is destroyed and subordinated to the colonial occupation. Colonialism also creates a problem for us in relation to postcolonialism; that is to say, there may be some naïveté in thinking that postcolonialism refers to a postcolonial period when, in fact, postcolonialism claims that colonialism did not end with the end of historical colonialism. There are other ways through which occupation continues, not necessarily through foreign occupation, tutelage and the prohibition of a state formation. In Europe, racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, and Islamophobia are among the modalities in which we can see colonialism at work.

Colonial domination, oppression, and the relations between the colonizer and the colonized became key to my understanding of the various forms of domination, because forms of domination never act as pure forms but rather in a constellation of oppressions. That is why my thinking has increasingly turned to epistemological issues – that is, an engagement with the ways of knowing from the perspectives of those who have systematically suffered the injustices, dominations and oppressions caused by colonialism, capitalism, and patriarchy. This is the definition I give of 'epistemologies of the South': a crucial epistemological transformation is required in order to reinvent social emancipation on a global scale. These evoke plural forms of emancipation not simply based on a Western understanding of the world.<sup>3</sup>

The global South is not a geographical concept, even though the great majority of its populations live in countries of the Southern hemisphere. The South is rather a metaphor for the human suffering caused by capitalism and colonialism on the global level, as well as for the resistance to overcoming or minimising such suffering. It is, therefore, an anti-capitalist,

anti-colonialist, anti-patriarchal, and anti-imperialist South. It is a South that also exists in the geographic North (Europe and North America), in the form of excluded, silenced and marginalised populations, such as undocumented immigrants, the unemployed, ethnic or religious minorities, and victims of sexism, homophobia, racism and islamophobia. I believe the concept of 'epistemologies of the South' provides a new base for understanding the transformations occurring in our societies. But why do we need these epistemologies in our daily lives? We live in global societies (global North and global South) that are becoming increasingly more unjust and discriminatory. Nature, turned by the epistemologies of the North into an infinitely available resource, has no inner logic but that of being exploited to its exhaustion. For the first time in human history, capitalism is on the verge of touching the limits of nature. On the other hand, the bellicose, securitarian ideology that is taking hold of both domestic and international politics is going to make it more difficult for activists to cross borders and to organise transnationally. The criminalisation of social protest is under way. In Latin America these days, increasing numbers of indigenous leaders are arrested as terrorists. Their crime? Blocking roads to stop multinational corporations from entering and destroying their ancestral territories.

We are witnessing the conflation of two time frames. On the one hand, there is a pressing sense of urgency. A series of phenomena (climate change, for instance) seems to demand that absolute priority be given to immediate or short-term action because the long term may not even exist if the trends expressed in those phenomena are allowed to evolve without control. On the other hand, there is a sense that our time calls for deep and profound civilisational changes. The phenomena mentioned above are symptoms of deep-seated structures and agencies that cannot be confronted by short-run interventionism, insofar as the latter is as much a part of the civilisation paradigm as the state of affairs it fights against. This double and paradoxical uncertainty poses new epistemological, theoretical, and political challenges. It requires a new and different time frame. It requires time while we are simultaneously crushed between two time frames blocking social transformation.

Recently, this blockage has become all the more evident in the financial crisis confronting some southern European countries (Greece, Portugal, Spain, Italy). My students at Birkbeck College – coming from many different countries – told me last year that their countries (Brazil, Argentina, Tanzania, for example) had already dealt with similar problems and had solved them. So, why couldn't Europe learn from them? The problem is that after five centuries of 'teaching' the world, the global North seems to have lost the capacity to learn from the experiences of the world. In other words, it looks as if colonialism has disabled the global North from learning in non-colonial terms, that is, in terms that allow for the existence of histories other than the 'universal' history of the West.

This condition is reflected in all the intellectual work produced in the global North, Western, Eurocentric critical theory included.<sup>4</sup> A sense of exhaustion haunts the Occidental,

Eurocentric critical tradition. It manifests itself in a peculiar and diffuse uneasiness expressed in multiple ways: irrelevance, inadequacy, impotence, stagnation, paralysis. Such uneasiness is all the more disquieting because we are living in a world in which there is so much to be criticised, in a world, moreover, in which an ever-growing number of people live in critical conditions that call for urgent alternatives. If there is so much to criticise, why has it become so difficult to build convincing, widely shared, powerful, critical theories, which may give rise to effective and profound transformative practices?

Alternatives are not lacking in the world. What is indeed missing is an alternative thinking of alternatives. Whenever I say that there are very interesting things occurring in Mozambique or Bangladesh, or in Ecuador or Bolivia, the answer is usually that we are from developed countries, so we do not have the same problems and have no need for their kinds of solutions. That has led me to two conclusions that are also premises for the epistemologies of the South. First, the understanding of the world is much broader than the Western understanding of the world. This means that the progressive transformation of the world may also occur in ways not foreseen by Western thinking, including critical Western thinking (and that includes Marxism). Second, the diversity of the world is infinite. It is a diversity that encompasses very distinct modes of being, thinking and feeling; ways of conceiving of time and the relations among human beings and between humans and non-humans, ways of facing the past and the future and of collectively organising life, the production of goods and services, as well as leisure. This immensity of alternatives of life, conviviality and interaction with the world is largely wasted because the theories and concepts developed in the global North and employed in the entire academic world do not identify such alternatives. When they do, they do not valorise them as being valid contributions towards constructing a better society. The epistemologies of the South do not address the idea of what we consider relevant knowledge *per se*, because they are concerned with things, ways of knowing, that very often do not count as knowledge. They are viewed as superstitions, opinions, subjectivities, common sense. They are not rigorous, they are not monumental and therefore they are discounted. As a consequence, the epistemologies of the South have to occupy the term 'epistemology' in order to re-signify it.

The basic idea behind the epistemologies of the South is that all of our theoretical thinking in the global North has been based on the idea of an abyssal line. A line that is so important that it has remained invisible. It makes an invisible distinction sustaining all the distinctions we make between legal and illegal, and between scientific, theological and philosophical knowledges. This invisible distinction operates between metropolitan societies and colonial societies. For the last five centuries this abyssal line has been there and it has been so strong that the world has been divided into this side of the line and the other side of the line. All of our theories have been based and developed on the experiences from this side of the line. Our universalisms have been based on the realities of this side of the line; the other side of the line has remained invisible. This exclusion and silencing of the other side of the line

is such that what happens there does not compromise the universality of our ideas, because they do not count as reality, because the people that live there do not count as humans in the modern understanding of humanity. The Western-centric conception of humanity is not possible without a concept of sub-humanity (a set of human groups that are not fully human, be they slaves, women, indigenous peoples, migrant workers, Muslims). That is why I maintain that humanity is a task. These ideas of sub-humanity go together with those of humanity in such a way that the two belong to each other in our capitalistic colonial patriarchy.

Let me provide an example. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in the northern part of Italy and also in Germany, labor law was created, based on the idea that working time must be limited otherwise it would kill you. These regulations began by including children, later women, and still later men. Labor law at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century is the beginning of the social welfare and protection law. At the same time, in the colonies, labor law was penal or criminal law; forced labor was in many instances slave labor, highly regulated by the same authorities that were producing the new labor law on this side of the line. The two realities do not match because they do not belong to the same world, even though they actually do. The other side of the line is a line of invisibility and, in fact, also a line of absence. The real turning point for us to develop, in the epistemologies of the South, is what I call the sociology of absences, which is strange in itself, because the idea of a sociology of something that does not exist is quite odd. The point is that whatever does not exist in our society is often actively produced as non-existent and we have to look into that reality. Looking at this reality you can see that the sociology of absences allows us to expand the relevant experiences of the world. We expand the present because our present has been narrowed down to whatever exists on this side of the line and therefore we need to go beyond that. But once you discover whatever is on the other side of the line, you also discover that it is produced by people in their struggles against capitalism, colonialism, and patriarchy. There is no place or legitimacy for vanguards today, we have to listen to the voice of the movements, of the people. Not to 'give' them voice, but to 'share' voice with them. Deep listening is in fact a key concept in the epistemologies of the South – sharing, helping or, as commandant Marcos of the Zapatistas used to say, we have to move behind the movements and particularly help those that move most slowly, those about to give up the struggle. That is where we have to be, not in the front lines of any self-declared vanguard. That is why I consider myself not a vanguard intellectual but rather a rearguard intellectual.

Once you discover this, you discover an amplified conception of the present, because in the present, once you start doing the sociology of absences, you come to the conclusion – unacceptable today in our curriculums, in our canons of social studies in Europe or in the United States – that the understanding of the world by far exceeds the Western understanding of the world. Indeed, the transformation of the world may come from perspectives that are available in the script of the canon of critical Eurocentric theory. There may be other ways of transforming the world based on these other understandings of the world.

Capturing this reality, however, is not in itself sufficient. You have to make a second move that I call a sociology of emergences. What is an emergence? It is the necessary that manifests itself as possible. Political work is the task of working on this possibility to make the necessary and concrete. So we amplify symbolically what is there as an alternative, as a different way of understanding and transforming society. The sociology of emergences is absolutely necessary these days to fight exhaustion, which is also political paralysis. But in order to do that, we need to give credit to other kinds of knowledge, those knowledges that carry such new possibilities. The scientific knowledge that brought us here will not be able to get us out of here, we need other knowledges, we need other conceptions of time, we need other conceptions of productivity, we need other conceptions of spatial scale. I have focused on the ecology of knowledges, on the need to bring together different kinds of knowledges. Scientific knowledge with popular vernacular knowledge and other non-scientific ways of knowing, artistic knowledge, performative knowledge... To say this does not mean that we are against science. Science is important, even when it is not born in struggle. It can be used in the struggles and I could give you lots of examples of the use of scientific knowledge in the concrete work of the social movements, but the problem is that science is just one kind of knowledge – a very important kind of knowledge – but it has to work together with other knowledges. If I want to go to the moon, I need scientific knowledge. If I want to preserve the biodiversity of the Amazonia region, I need indigenous knowledges. For different purposes I need different kinds of knowledge.

In order to bring together different knowledges without compromising their specificity, we need intercultural translation. Intercultural translation consists in searching for isomorphic concerns and underlying assumptions among cultures, identifying differences and similarities, and developing, whenever appropriate, new hybrid forms of cultural understanding and intercommunication that may be useful in favouring interactions and strengthening alliances among social movements fighting, in different cultural contexts, against capitalism, colonialism, and sexism, and for social justice, human dignity, or human decency. Intercultural translation questions both the reified dichotomies among alternative knowledges (e.g., indigenous knowledge *versus* scientific knowledge) and the unequal abstract status of different knowledges (e.g., indigenous knowledge as a valid claim of identity *versus* scientific knowledge as the only valid claim of truth). In sum, the work of translation enables us to cope with diversity and conflict in the absence of a general theory and a commando politics.

An example will illustrate what is at stake. The Ghanaian philosopher Kwasi Wiredu claims that in the culture and language of the Akan, the ethnic group to which he belongs, it is not possible to translate the Cartesian precept *cogito ergo sum* (1990, 1996).<sup>5</sup> This is because there are no words to express this idea. 'Thinking', in Akan, means 'measuring something', which does not make sense if coupled with the idea of being. Moreover, the 'being' of *sum* is also very difficult to explain because the closest equivalent is something like 'I am there'.

According to Wiredu, the locative ‘there’ “would be suicidal from the point of view of both the epistemology and the metaphysics of the *cogito*.” In other words, language enables certain ideas to be explained and not others. This does not mean, however, that the relationship between African and Western philosophy has to end there. As Wiredu has tried to show, it is possible to develop autonomous arguments on the basis of African philosophy, not only concerning the reason why it cannot express *cogito ergo sum*, but also concerning the many alternative ideas it can express which Western philosophy cannot.

All knowledges are incomplete and we will never reach complete knowledge; on the contrary, engaging in intercultural translation means becoming more and more aware of the incompleteness of knowledge. I like to say that our ideal should be Nicholas of Cusa, a philosopher and theologian, born in Germany in 1401. Between 1438 and 1440, he wrote the work entitled *De Docta Ignorantia* (Cusa 1985).<sup>6</sup> Confronted with the infinitude of God (whom he called the ‘Absolute Maximum’), the author engages in a reflection around the idea of knowledge in not knowing. The important thing is not to know, he argues; the important thing is to know that you do not know. “Indeed,” says Nicholas of Cusa, “no greater knowledge can endow any man, even the most studious, than to discover himself supremely learned in his ignorance, which is proper to him, and he will be the more learned, the more ignorant he knows himself to be” (1985, 6). What is new about Nicholas of Cusa is that he uses the excuse of God’s infinitude to propose a general epistemological procedure that is valid for the knowledge of finite things – the knowledge of the world. Since it is finite, our thought cannot think the infinite – there is no ratio between the finite and the infinite – but it is limited even in its thinking of finitude, in its thinking of the world. All we know is subject to this limitation, hence, to know is, above all, to know this limitation. Hence, knowledge involves the acknowledgment of not knowing. The designation ‘learned ignorance’ may sound contradictory, for the learned person is, by definition, not ignorant. The contradiction is, however, only apparent, since learnedly not-knowing requires a laborious knowing process on the limitations of what we know. In Nicholas of Cusa there are two kinds of ignorance: ignorant ignorance, which is not even aware that it does not know, and learned ignorance, which knows what it is that it does not know.

It comes as no surprise that, almost six centuries later, the dialectics of finitude/infinity characterizing the present time is very different from Nicholas of Cusa’s. The infinity we face is not transcendental, resulting, rather, from the inexhaustible diversity of human experience and the limits to know it. In our time, learned ignorance will entail a laborious work of reflection and interpretation of those limits, of the possibilities they open and the exigencies they create for us. Moreover, the diversity of human experience includes the diversity of ways of knowing human experience. Our infinity has thus a contradictory epistemological dimension: an infinite plurality of finite ways of knowing human experience in the world. The finitude of each way of knowing is thus twofold: it is made up of the limits of what it knows about human experience in the world; and the limits (albeit much larger) of what it knows about the world’s

other ways of knowing, hence about the knowledge of the world supplied by other ways of knowing. The knowledge that does not know is the knowledge that fails to know the other ways of knowing which share with it the infinite task of accounting for the experiences of the world. It is not an adequate guide for us in this uncertainty, because it grounds a kind of knowledge (modern science) that does not know well enough the limits of what it allows one to know of the experience of the world, and even less well the other kinds of knowledge that share with it the epistemological diversity of the world.

A second example from a different continent. I recently chaired an ethical tribunal to protect the Amazonia, particularly a national park in Ecuador, the Yasuní ITT project, a highly disputed venture. The Yasuní ITT Project, presented for the first time in 2007 by the then Minister of Energy and Mines, Alberto Acosta,<sup>7</sup> was an alternative to the developmental-extraction capitalist model of development that is today prevalent in Latin America and Africa, and actually in most of the global South. It called for an international co-responsibility of a new type, a new relation among more and less developed countries, and it aimed at a new model of development: a post-oil model. Ecuador is a poor country in spite of – or because of – being rich in oil. Its economy depends heavily on oil exports: oil income constitutes 22 percent of the GNP and 63 percent of exports. However, under the pressure of multinationals and the Chinese and major international partners, they are going to exploit oil there.

The resulting human and environmental destruction in Amazonia will be immense. As a direct consequence of oil exploitation by Texaco and later Chevron, between 1960 and 1990 two entire Amazonian peoples disappeared: the Tetetes and the Sansahauris. As already mentioned, we organised an ethical court and you could see that an intercultural translation was going on among the people that were there. Who were they? The indigenous people, because they live there, and of course their allies, and allies from other regions of the Amazonia because they have their own concept of nature. This concept of nature is *Pachamama/Madre tierra* (Mother Earth), that is to say a living organism from which everything derives, ourselves included, our blood being part of the blood of the earth. If you extract oil, you extract the blood of the earth, thus extracting your own blood. This is a concept of nature that is absolutely foreign to the Cartesian concept of nature. Together with the indigenous peoples there were the participants of the ecological movement, most of them young people. They were very urban and had never been to Amazonia, they only knew Spanish, couldn't understand Quechua or Aymara (native languages of the indigenous people), but they shared the struggle of the indigenous peoples because the ecological understanding of the world by the urban youth and the *Pachamama* concept of the indigenous peoples had some affinities that could be spelled out through an exercise in intercultural translation. Across different cultural lines you can see some complicities and the creation of a new form of hybridity: de-colonial mestizaje – as I call it – that is to say, de-colonial mixing. Nowadays, in the Constitution of Ecuador, the article 71 states that nature has rights. And there I was as a consultant to the



Constitutional Assembly, and some guy from the opposition asked me: “Professor Boaventura, you are a well-known sociologist and lawyer and so on, so you know all these kinds of things about nature and about law. Please, tell me something, these Indians are crazy, aren’t they? How can we give rights to an object?!” And I answered, “Of course, according to the concept of nature that you have and I had in my training, it is nonsense. The problem is that the nature that is in the constitution is not that concept of nature, it is the concept of nature as the *Pachamama*, mother earth as the source of life, a living organism that sustains life.” In fact, the concept of the rights of nature is a legal and cultural hybrid because the concept of rights comes from the West. The indigenous peoples do not have the concept of rights in the Western sense of the word. Can you imagine our culture giving rights to God? God cannot have rights. S/he is the source of rights, so how can we say that he or she has rights? The same can be said of Pachamama. The rights of nature is a mix of the Western concept of rights with the Quechua concept of nature. This is a de-colonial form of hybridity.

In the ALICE project I am currently coordinating, we develop such ideas.<sup>8</sup> This project encompasses different examples of research activities. In one of them I work with young rappers from Lisbon.<sup>9</sup> Besides drawing attention to the type of political and cultural work that these young people have been doing so brilliantly, I want to show that the type of hip-hop they practice is an art form in which the artists have the privilege of identifying the abyssal line better than social scientists or literary critics. That is to say, there is a third kind of knowledge, as Spinoza would say. This third kind is a mix of immediate knowledge, it is intuitive, it is the kind of inside knowledge through which the abyssal line can be seen very clearly together with the kinds of abyssal absences and exclusions it creates. Moreover, the rappers with whom I work walk the abyssal line where abyssal exclusions are generated, register exclusions that are hidden in what are apparently zones of contact.

I would like to discuss briefly some points that are still work in progress. The first one is, what is a struggle? It is very important for us to deepen our knowledge on this subject, because sometimes the struggles are very different from what we think they are. For example, the struggle of the social movements and the daily struggles of the people that have to survive in hostile contexts in an exclusionary society. They are the silent struggles, as James Scott called them.<sup>10</sup> This is very clear for migrant communities in our societies when they know that open confrontation with the legal powers will mean deportation, so they cannot afford active resistance. They prefer passive resistance. Sometimes, things that do not seem to move are in fact moving, but we do not have the instruments to understand it.

The second idea is the question of authorship – who is the author of knowledge? It is very clear in individual or collaborative projects, but most of the knowledges that prevail in our societies have no authors. They are collective knowledges. There are also knowledges by ‘classic authors’, great authors that pen outstanding work recognised by Occidental society. But for the epistemologies of the South there are other classic authors. When you read

Nkrumah, Fanon, or Nyerere, you see the idea of classic authors there, but based on a collective formation of knowledge that we do not have in the West. There are still other knowledges by 'other' major authors, who have nothing to do with the great politicians just mentioned. Such authors are the wise people of Africa, Latin America (e.g. the Andes). These are the sages. In fact, philosophic sagacity is a term coined by the Kenyan philosopher, Odera Oruka. It describes the kind of philosophic activity which Momoh in Lagos, Nigeria, calls "Ancient African philosophy" (Momoh 1985)<sup>11</sup> and Kwasi Wiredu of Ghana named "Traditional African thought or philosophy" (Wiredu 1980)<sup>12</sup> – a reflective evaluation of thought by an individual African elder who is a repository of wisdom, knowledge and rigorous critical thinking. Philosophic sagacity attempts to articulate the thoughts, ideas and views of individual Africans reputed for exceptional wisdom, presenting them as authentic African philosophy. The real purpose of sage philosophy "was to help substantiate or invalidate the claim that traditional African peoples were innocent of logical and critical thinking" (Oruka 1991).<sup>13</sup> In order to establish this thesis, he conducted a number of dialogues with individuals in traditional Kenyan societies, and identified them by names. Another aim was to give a decisive blow to the position of ethnophilosophy, by presenting individualised as against collective views of traditional Africans. Amadou Hampâté Bâ, another African intellectual, said that in Africa, when an old man dies, it is a library burning. This is a different form of knowledge that we do not know and, therefore, there is a tension between written knowledge and oral knowledge, so some African intellectuals have developed the concept of orature. Unlike oral literature, orature does not need literature as its ground of legitimation.

The final concept is the body. I think that the epistemologies of the South have focused on the body because the struggles are carried out by fighting bodies and the body suffers, rejoices, and dies. In the Western philosophical tradition, Merleau-Ponty is the only male philosopher to value the body as the necessary mediation of our representation of the world and of interaction with it. In fact, if you consider Kant, he wrote his most important book on the philosophy of subjectivity, but the individual subject is an epistemic subject, not the empirical, bodily subject. The motto he borrowed from Francis Bacon for the second editions of his *Critique of Pure Reason*, *de nobis ipsis silemus* (about ourselves we are silent), reflects his reticence on himself, a kind of bodyless body. In the West, only feminist epistemologies and theories have underlined the corporeality of knowledge.<sup>14</sup>

The epistemologies of the South value the warm current of reason which includes the emotions (not just the rationale) behind indignation and the will to resist; the emotions caused by unjust suffering or by victory over a concrete form of oppression. Mourning as well as rejoicing and celebrating, crying as well as laughing. Western critical thinking has become boring, too serious. Emma Goldman once said, "If I can't dance I don't want to be in your revolution," and I think she was right. Thank God I can dance!

Finally I want to propose a question for further reflection. Can you really write a dissertation based on the epistemologies of the South? Is it possible? I have discussed this with my students and I do not have an answer. The epistemologies of the South call not just for new methodologies, non-extractive methodologies, but also for new ontologies. It is problematic whether the still dominant canons of scholarship will allow for the methodological innovation and transformation called for by the epistemologies of the South. Non-extractive methodologies are based on two core ideas. On the one hand, modern science and, most particularly, modern social sciences advance knowledge by transforming alternative knowledges (vernacular, popular knowledges generated and owned by various social groups) into raw materials for the production of scientific knowledge. Alternative knowledge is converted into information and then processed and transformed into scientific knowledge. This is a form of cognitive extraction having some affinities with the material extraction of natural resources, which is currently the main form of capital accumulation in many parts of the world. On the other hand, the generation of non-extractive methodologies is a very complex and difficult process which, given the absolute hegemony of cognitive extraction, must comprise both an epistemological and a political dimension.

Let me mention two examples of methodological innovation in the aforementioned research project I am carrying out ([www.alice.ces.uc.pt](http://www.alice.ces.uc.pt)). The first one addresses the question: how do you de-monumentalise written knowledge? In the ALICE project we engage in what I call the 'Conversations of the World'. These conversations place together men and women from different parts of the world and different experiences that share the struggle for human dignity and the belief that another world is possible and necessary.<sup>15</sup> Some of the participants in the conversations are well-known intellectuals with extensive bibliographies. Why do we entertain the conversation? Because when we talk we de-monumentalise written knowledge. We hesitate, repeat ourselves, there are no footnotes. By being oralised, so to speak, written knowledge becomes de-monumentalised and allows for horizontal exchanges in which non-written parts of written knowledge emerge.

The second one is the Popular University of Social Movements (PUSM).<sup>16</sup> It was created within the World Social Forum (WSF) in 2003, with the aim of promoting shared knowledge and extending, linking and strengthening forms of resistance to neoliberal globalisation, capitalism, colonialism, sexism and other relations based on domination and oppression. The PUSM concept of co-learning seeks to bridge two divides, the one between academic knowledge and popular knowledge, and the one among different popular knowledges generated by different social groups in their struggles against different modes or intensities of domination, mainly capitalism, colonialism, and patriarchy. It is based on some of the core ideas of the epistemologies of the South: an ecology of knowledges and intercultural translation. Its starting point is the recognition of mutual ignorance and its endpoint is the shared production of knowledge. Learning results from debates between activists, leaders of

social movements, social scientists, intellectuals and artists. The dialogues established between academic knowledge and popular knowledge aims to reduce the distance between them and make academic knowledge more relevant to concrete social struggles. The PUSM operates by holding workshops, preferably lasting two days, in which discussion periods alternate with time dedicated to study and reflection, and leisure activities. The PUSM is a collective asset. Anyone may take the initiative to organise workshops, provided that they respect the two fundamental PUSM documents: the Charter of Principles and the Methodology Guidelines.<sup>17</sup> These workshops are a co-learning experience. They are also inspired by Paulo Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed, but go beyond more conventional popular education insofar as they focus on learning through exchange among different and diversely incomplete knowledges.

The extent to which non-extractive methodologies will be accepted in the future as the only legitimate way of advancing mutually enriching knowledge is, of course, an open question.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> This is the revised version of the transcription of an oral presentation. The traces of orality will be visible.

<sup>2</sup> Santos, Boaventura de Sousa. 2006. "Between Prospero and Caliban: Colonialism, Post-colonialism, and Inter-Identity." *Review* XXIX (2): 143-166.

<sup>3</sup> See more in Santos, Boaventura de Sousa. 2014. *Epistemologies of the South. Justice against Epistemicide*. Boulder/Londres: Paradigm Publishers.

<sup>4</sup> On the difficulties of constructing a new critical theory, see Santos, Boaventura de Sousa. 1995. *Toward a New Common Sense: Law, Science and Politics in the Paradigmatic Transition*. New York: Routledge; and Santos, Boaventura de Sousa. 1998. "Why Is It So Difficult to Construct a Critical Theory?" *Zona Abierta* 82-83: 219-229. Most recently in *Epistemologies of the South*, 19-46.

<sup>5</sup> Wiredu, Kwasi. 1990. "Are there Cultural Universals?" *Quest* 4 (2): 5-19; Wiredu, Kwasi. 1996. *Cultural Universals and Particulars: an African Perspective*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

<sup>6</sup> Cusa, N. 1985. *On Learned Ignorance (De Docta Ignorantia)*, translated by Jasper Hopkins. Minneapolis: Arthur J. Banning Press. <http://jasper-hopkins.info/DI-I-12-2000.pdf>. Accessed June 14, 2016.

<sup>7</sup> Acosta later became the President of the Constitutional Assembly that promulgated the Constitution of 2008.

<sup>8</sup> "ALICE—Strange Mirrors, Unsuspected Lessons: Leading Europe to a new way of sharing world experiences," funded by the European Research Council. This project aims to develop a new theoretical paradigm for contemporary Europe based on two key ideas: the understanding of the world by far exceeds the European understanding of the world; the much needed social, political, and institutional reform in Europe may benefit from innovations taking place in regions and countries that European colonialism viewed as mere recipients of the civilizing mission. Learn more at <http://alice.ces.uc.pt/en/index.php/about/?lang=en#sthash.lfs5wOx4.dpuf>.

<sup>9</sup> See more at <http://alice.ces.uc.pt/news/?p=2573>.

<sup>10</sup> Scott, James C. 1984. *Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

<sup>11</sup> Momoh, Campbell S. 1985. "African Philosophy... Does It Exist?" *Diogenes: International Council of Philosophy and Humanities Studies* 130: 73-104.

<sup>12</sup> Wiredu, Kwasi. 1980. *Philosophy and an African Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>13</sup> Oruka, Odera. 1991. "Sagacity in African Philosophy." In *Readings in African Philosophy*, edited by Sophie B. Oluwole Lagos: Mass-tech Publishers.

<sup>14</sup> Butler, Judith. 1993. *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex."* New York: Routledge; Grosz, Elizabeth. 1994. *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

<sup>15</sup> See more at <http://alice.ces.uc.pt/en/index.php/globallearning/conversations-of-the-world/?lang=en#sthash.ZZa1cdKk.dpuf>.

<sup>16</sup> Santos, Boaventura de Sousa. 2006. *The Rise of the Global Left. The World Social Forum and Beyond*, 148-159. London: Zed Books.

<sup>17</sup> See more at <http://alice.ces.uc.pt/en/index.php/upms/?lang=en#sthash.Tevy3PuY.dpuf> and [www.universidadepopular.org/site/pages/en/about-upms.php](http://www.universidadepopular.org/site/pages/en/about-upms.php).

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