

From Epistemic Translations to Decolonial Encounters: Towards an Ethics of Reciprocity in the Academia

Amanda González Izquierdo

Abstract:

Academic research on subaltern communities often functions on the basis of extractive knowledge: The researcher, an agent, seeks out knowledge from the bodies of his research and brings that knowledge back to the academy. Through this extraction and its subsequent interpretation, Western scholars appropriate non-Western epistemologies and control how they are (re)presented. It is the extraction, coupled with the act of moving the knowledge from a minoritized place to a colonial one, that marks the violence and the epistemic injustice of coloniality. Engaging with theories from scholars including Walter D. Mignolo and Boaventura de Sousa Santos, this paper explores the movement (translation) of knowledge, the linguistic translation of non-Western works into Western languages, and linguistic translation as itself a form of movement of knowledge. The aforementioned are examples of what I term epistemic translations, which I maintain are inherently unjust. I then examine the ethics of Mariana Mora's collaborative research process with Zapatista communities to offer an example of an endeavor that, instead of an epistemic translation, was a just, decolonial epistemic encounter. In so doing, I consider how epistemic translations can be decolonized by contemplating the ways in which academic researchers can establish reciprocity so that non-Western peoples are not the objects from which to extract knowledge, but subjects with agency in a two-way process of sharing and creating knowledge. I argue that it is only through praxes of co-laboring and reciprocity that a postcolonial epistemic justice in research and academia can be obtained.

Keywords: epistemic justice, decoloniality, translation, research