

Academic Freedom, a Right Reimagined Outside of the Colonial Cognizance

Throughout my life, I have been told that university is the most fundamental epicenter of any type of knowledge. A site where you can manifest and explore, without the feeling of being judged, the deepest and most beloved topics that you are both personally and academically interested in. Even if those are considered for you essential to the construction and further development of your own identity. This was, at least, my experience when I understood that in college, I was going to be able to investigate gender dynamics related to my own identity.

Nevertheless, as a university student at a Latin American institution, I have realized that those privileged attributes, where the idea of a welcoming universalism has been stated for everybody and any kind of knowledge, could be contradicted by some academic idealisms that persist along with the idea of reproducing the European and, in contemporary times, American cognizance over others; violating, therefore, the possibility for including and addressing regional epistemes correctly. Indeed, that epistemological dilemma has been increasing due to its constant consideration as undoubtedly correct to explain and be applied as Schneider and & Hayes (2020, 12) claim: “in most of the phenomena that humans experience, in a globalized world, has been faced with.”

Thus, in this essay, I will argue that academic freedom, at least in Latin America, is threatened while the natural right to conceive all possible types of knowledge, -as valuable as others-, to achieve a more precise sense of truth continues to be mainly designated to Europe and North America. Nevertheless, I suggest that an appropriate solution to that matter would be an integrative thought in which Western and other forms of knowledge(s) production can be linked to the pursuit of real academic freedom. Due to the fact that for me, as a member of academia but a future Latin American researcher as well, it seems quite important to be consciously equipped with specific scientific-technical methods that I can effectively implement towards the hardships of my land. Yet, as I mentioned earlier, it has not been totally conceivable because of the European and North American colonial heritages that have remained as superior and fixed cognizance inside high-education schools.

In order to achieve my purpose, I have organized my text into three sections. Firstly, I aspire to critical evidence why the university, -by analyzing the Latin American scientific

operation-, is the place *par excellence* where the European and North American glaze has been imposed as the alleged cure for all epistemological needs; specifically, I will analyze what may be understood as the origin of this dilemma, and how, according to some hot debates, it has shown some timid, but still valuable advances towards its overthrow. To illustrate this, I will take into consideration a gender case that, from my own experience, could be vital for the scrutiny that I am dealing with. Lastly, I plan to reflect on the idea of why negative assumptions pointed out before within a Gender Studies sample, but inside of other fields too, might be prevented, -as I proposed above-, not by the abolition of the knowledge that has been established from the colonization spheres: Europe and the USA, but through the worthy and equal inclusion of another valid way(s) for making academic life in Latin America less dependent on certain dominant systems of cognition. In a word, a reinterpretation of the Latin American scientific operation. Moreover, by the end of this essay, I would like to reaffirm that one of the ways needed to reimagine and, thereafter, preserve proper academic freedom at universities such as mine can be summarized through a multidisciplinary approach of epistemes, where old and new generations of scholars could be part of, making, eventually, much more visible their intellectual contributions coming from what has been considered, in terms of Raúl Prebisch (2006): “The Epistemological Periphery.”

The Dilemma

To begin with, I would like to remark on how the role assigned to universities in Latin America becomes central when the idea of modernity turns out to be a fundamental feature for countries to succeed (Cardoso 1966-1967, 4-5). In consequence, the internal organization, -the structure of the place-, and its productive outcome, -the type of knowledge that has been worthy to the market-, have had to be largely adapted towards certain directions. Some scholars have already noted the unidirectional relationship that has been created when inspecting the nature and linked functions of a university inside any Latin American culture. Castro-Gómez (2007, 79-92), based on Lyotard’s 1989 analysis of some philosophical debates, asserts that “there are at least two metanarratives that conventionally have surrounded the purpose of high-learning institutions;” which, subsequently analyzed by me in debate with the Colombian author, may provide several reasons to evidence why that structure and consequent scientific operation have been questioning the importance of academic freedom over time.

Initially, the philosopher argues that universities have acquired a huge educational significance for the people. Due to the fact that “every nation has had the right to enjoy the

advantages coming from the European and American science and technology; this to progress and make better the material standards for everyone's lives" (Castro-Gómez 2007, 80-81). Thus, universities have been, even nowadays, the institutions requested to supply the knowledge needed to foster the scientific-technical knowledge of any country in Latin America. In other words, the notion of progress that has been sold by the Old World and the United States, as far as I am concerned, has strongly depended on the abilities acquired from an institution for offering a well-prepared number of subjects oriented to the proposal of, -what are supposed to be-, profitable ideas. In effect, it seems as if schools should be obliged to train, *perforce*, a particular gamma of characters such as engineers, administrators, officers and so forth to be connected to the alleged material progress of the land picture by the global north; this thereby leaving out the real picture of academic freedom for students (interested in local subjects) to select their own degrees, or, as Mignolo (1999) points out: "blocking them to think locally."

Similarly, Castro-Gómez (2007) acknowledges what Lyotard (1999, 69) mentions regarding the progress of human morality inside and outside of the university walls. Owing to the fact that the sense of progress is not only about scientific-technical advances but about the moral progression of the entire humanity as well. Therefore, the role of the university would not be limited to training professionals such as engineers, builders, administrators, and officers, as I already noted, it also needs to train humanists. Hence, in this metanarrative, the university becomes an entity whose role is to form the nation's spiritual leaders, promoting, as much as possible, the empiric consolidation of morality. Nevertheless, this has also been tough because it takes into consideration just the sense of morality that has been agreed on by the West (the USA and Europe), imposing, thus, only one possible way to implement and impose moral behaviors inside societies that are not a necessary part of this cultural mindset.

Consequently, these metanarratives led Castro-Gómez (2007) and me as well to, first, criticize the remarkable hierarchies that came from the European and American influence into diverse societies that to my way of thinking cannot be delimited to certain canons; indeed, many of those have aggressively defined procedures and particular functions for each of the fields of knowledge. To illustrate this, a bunch of disciplines has materialized the idea that reality must be divided into fragments, and that the certainty of knowledge is reached to the extent that societies will concentrate on the analysis of one of those parts, ignoring its connections with all the others; a characteristic that I find, otherwise, paramount for a well-fundamental educational release. Further, subjects have built their origins and staged the birth of their founding fathers, in a way that has made

impossible the chance to incorporate regional intellectuals. In a word, it appears that in Latin America we got used to reproducing other genealogies rather than ours: Marx, Weber, and Durkheim as fathers of sociology; "the Greeks" as fathers of philosophy, and so on. I will dwell on this later.

Likewise, I have witnessed how professors of each area are rarely able to move from one department to another, much less, as Shahjahan (2016, 85-86) manifests, from one faculty to another because they are like prisoners of a probably fractured university structure made to fulfill any American or European requirement.

In practice, one of the most recent advances, as Castro-Gómez (2007) ventured, but from a more precise discipline analysis was the Argentinian Maria Lugones. A work that from my own experience as an investigator of Gender and Sexuality Studies matches very well with the present deliberation. To the extent that it might be good enough to visualize how this idea of multidisciplinary should be taken seriously because once it could be implemented, we as Latin American academia might challenge the colonial dilemmas and their respective matters that I have identified above towards the American and European cognizance.

“Coloniality and Gender,” a Case for Reflection

At first, the reason for choosing this text must be primarily to emphasize and revive the urgent debate that Lugones (2008, 75-99), but me as well, deems necessary to restrict “a sense of a putative gender universe inside of Latin American academia.” Indeed, the arguments propounded by the feminist effectively understand and possibly trace genealogically some of the current disputes that have taken place around Gender Studies and its corresponding intersections. Likewise, Lugones' work could be extremely instrumental in establishing a theoretical indifference that may coexist with the Western-imposed constructions and assumed representations of gender. Such is the case, for example, of non-gendered egalitarianism in some Amerindian tribes (78); some of which I have had the pleasure to investigate and see how in many cases when Gender Studies are useful for helping to rethink traditional gender roles by giving the opportunity to interpret them without outdated cages, it still assigns more recognition to the unmistakable American and European scientific approaches.

At this stage, I believe it is important to further emphasize that Lugones' overall study manages to arrive at what she calls the *Modern-Colonial Gender System*. This proposal with the aim of generating a historical extension towards a kind of hollowness that has created a great destructive scope in all areas of existence, both feminine and

masculine, of the oppressed. In fact, some of the impacts coming from that system imposition might be seen when it comes to academically addressing gender without considering certain specifics of the group we are working with. For instance, last year, I had the chance to work with an indigenous transgender community of women called *traviesas*. At the time, I used to think that, theoretically speaking, they wanted to make their gender transition to a certain model of women like the one established in the main cities. However, that was a big mistake because rather than replicate some features of Western women, they wished to learn some of the key customs that women inside of their culture have traditionally conducted such as dancing and knitting. Undoubtedly, that might have been something I could have prevented if by that time I had been taught about gender from a non-European or non-American perspective because at my university this was scarcely contemplated.

Additionally, Lugones alludes, among other samples, to the fact that many Native American tribal communities were matriarchal before the colonial heritage of gender was fixed. In effect, argues Allen (1986, 84), “they favorably recognized homosexuality and the third gender, but not in the terms of subjugation and oppression imposed on them by the Eurocentric and then Americanistic cognition.” Precisely, Lugones refers to it as “gynocentric egalitarianism.” A subject that I could get in touch with after a while, just through praxis.

Moreover, I find it tempting to assert that many Native American tribes believed that the dominant force in the cosmos was female and that all tribal actions were permitted as a result of this belief. “The Old Spider-Woman, The Corn Woman, the Serpent Woman, and the Thought Woman were just some of the names of these powerful creators” (Lugones 2008, 89). In Colombia, for instance, Embera people see the role of women, called *wera*, as the providers of the future of the entire community. Yet, the inferiority of indigenous women in all the previous samples was directly intertwined with the domination and alteration of tribal life. This, therefore, was situated and hidden in the dark side of the Gender Theory I had learnt by then. Leading, thus, students such as me to idealize that inside our target communities’ gender was going to be displayed under some unique patterns because this is the way it is taught at Latin American institutions; at least mine. But I realized that it is not genuine because gender might be diversely performed inside a particular community.

I want to close this short examination by focusing on how worthwhile this theoretical approach has been to understanding social association by means of pre-conquest cosmologies and practices, which additionally, are fundamental to perceiving the depth and

extent of the provincial inconvenience of intellectual freedom. As a reaction, I was led to decide -so far- how much this inconvenience has been constitutive of the epistemology of force inside the Gender System that the Lugones' analysis invites us to reevaluate. Hence, the circumstances displayed by the Eurocentric, in this case, private enterprise toward native women, particularly, can be substantially mediocre and nearly non-existent; which makes me think straightforwardly about an epistemic separation that takes into consideration the making of a not entirely set in stone to battle against the tide of impositions. A discussion that I am going to tactically deepen in the following section, with the aid to provide fortuitous relief to all this dilemma.

In the Pursuit of an Epistemological Equality

Turning now to re-evaluate the conditions created by the European and North American cognition inside of the universities in Latin America, I could argue that the strict pursuit of those models has therefore reduced academic freedom to a painful copycat of their epistemological and organizational ways of producing knowledge. Particularly, this is visible through its restricted ability to make any kind of impossible logic outside of those dominant systems. Some of them are, even, dangerous when they are wrongly assumed by researchers such as me. Owing to the fact that certain theories or methods might not be applied to cases of study or are scarcely well taught, occasioning, consequently, more obstacles to the appropriate approach that academic freedom is supposed to provide.

Consequently, I consider it vital to fix that dependent logic and its related threats by considering the important convergence that might be done by the diverse elements and forms of building awareness; including, as I have illustrated in the second part of this text, the knowledge that modernity had declared as doxic concerning Gender Studies, besides other multiple examples inside of the academe. Specifically, I propose that a university should think and function complexly. To reference Castro-Gómez (2007), I am imagining a school where students can co-author their study plans. Hopefully, not at the same level within the fixed structures of a particular syllabus that imitates American and European models, but in a network of curricula that also includes subjects vital for our regions and their huge paramount intercultural component. As a result, students could thus navigate between different master's and even undergraduate programs, connected in a network, not only within a single university but between several campuses where educational leeway may achieve its maximum but concrete splendor.

Furthermore, I think of a structure where teachers, probably from different backgrounds and professions, can belong to several departments at the same time; thereby

facilitating the exercise of multidisciplinary as a crucial component in which different cultural forms of knowledge can coexist without being subjected to the single hegemony of the episteme of Western science operation. In a way epistemes coming from cosmological and spiritual traditions, for instance, can establish subject bridges of dialogue with the two wished models that I have stressed before, the European and North American. In the sense that different cultural forms of wisdom can coexist, **at the same level**, in the same university space.

In essence, the transgression of those two could influence us, as scholars, to go beyond the binary pairs that marked the evolution of Western thought of modernity: nature/culture, reason/sensation, unity/diversity, civilization/barbarism, and so on. Multidisciplinary seeks to change this exclusive logic for an inclusive logic, incorporating the one that has been excluded from the modern map of episteme for having been considered “mythical,” “organic,” “superstitious” and “pre-rational” (Quijano 2007, 116). In brief, that transgression might break down some of the dependent chains that have traditionally enslaved academic freedom in Latin America, and that even nowadays prevents it from thriving.

Nevertheless, I have witnessed that this change is still timid because only the kind of knowledge that meets the methodological and epistemic characteristics defined from the same ontological sources, -academic presses for example-, is legitimate. Other motions, historically deployed by humanity for millennia, have been seen as anecdotal, superficial, folkloric, and, in any case, as belonging to the Western past. This is a constant dilemma for me because as a sociocultural student and researcher, I have had to tolerate, more than once, how teachers assure that some of my ways of analysis lose the point when it has had to be obligatory to adapt myself to ward off any type of theoretical or methodological bias that I could have noticed during my study.

Quijano (2007, 112) states that “this epistemic colonialism of Western science is by no means gratuitous.” Indeed, the *sin* of those epicenters of knowledge was formed precisely at the moment when Europe began its colonial expansion throughout the world, in the 16th and 17th centuries. Furthermore, this has thus accompanied the imperialist pretensions of the Americans since more contemporary times (Cardoso 1966-1967, 12-14). In Latin America, subsequently, we have internalized the thought of, as Gestell (2018) puts it forward, being a “nature that can be manipulated, shaped, disciplined, and civilized” (45).

On the other hand, that way of thinking towards the middle of the 18th century helped, initially, Europe and then North America to see themselves as the ones who possess

an apparatus of knowledge from which it has been possible to exercise judgment over others. Also, it has been agreed that both are capable of unifying reality under the superior criteria of that parameter. Even though universities in Latin America have had the potential to suppress that heritage. This is in order to guarantee true academic freedom, which should have made its points of view much more adequate to describe reality.

Accordingly, I want to make it clear that the equalization of knowledge inside the university in Latin America, as it has been proposed, does not imply a crusade against Europe or North America in the name of some type of Latin Americanistic autochthonism, ethnocentric, cultureless and populist nationalism, as someone may tend to believe. Nor is it about going against modern science and promoting a new kind of epistemic obscurantism as some intercultural institutions have importantly been made in Colombia, Bolivia, and Ecuador. Instead, I claim that it is necessary to go “beyond” the categories of analysis and modern disciplines, not because they must be denied, nor because they will have to be “surpassed” by something that could be “better.” I refer, rather, to a prohibited expansion of the field of visibility opened by modern Western science, given that it was unable to open to certain domains. It is not, then, the disjunction but the epistemic conjunction that I am proclaiming. An integrative thought in which Western science operation can be “linked” with other forms of knowledge production that can be as valuable as they are in the pursuit of authentic non-violated academic freedom.

Conclusion

In this essay, I have aimed to manifest how academic freedom, as the right that each Latin American student and researcher should bear in mind to approach a better sense of truth, has been menaced or rigidly violated while universities in Latin America continue giving more validity to the knowledge coming from Europe and North America without considering itself.

Initially, I addressed critically why the university, by analyzing the Latin American model, is a place of excellence that mainly imposes European and North American idealisms as remedies supposed to be the cure for all epistemological needs; more specifically, I have generally analyzed where and when this dilemma arose, and how it has shown mild but valuable progress considering some recent debate within some disciplines. Affirming how universities have been subjected, *ab initio*, to the rule of certain historically invariant behavior patterns.

Likewise, I made the decision to show how a case of gender analysis could be displayed as an important factor in the problem I dealt with. In the third place, I intended

to reflect on why the negative assumptions previously pointed out in studies of gender, but also in other fields, could be prevented not by eradicating prejudice of the established knowledge from the colonial realms, but through combinations that should include another valid way(s) to make scholastic principles in Latin America less dependent on two dominant systems of cognizance. It means making Gender Studies a method to rethink traditional gender roles by accepting their different interpretations and expressions.

Additionally, at the end of this essay, I wanted to reaffirm that one of the necessary means of re-imagining and, subsequently, preserving academic freedom is through equal intellectualism, where new and old generations of university Latin American students can be part, thus making it much clearer that their contributions come from the peripheries rather than from “the epicenters of knowledge”. De facto, I consider this a good strategy because it might help us as scholars and even researchers to think outside of the box we have been inside of. In other words, we will not live in a world that can be understood based on just one analytical knowledge, which sees reality in a compartmentalized and fragmented way looking at the Old World or the well-known Start of the North; but instead, as a university, we should imagine that out there is more than a complex reality that cannot be explained simply. Even if some academics do not conceive regional wisdom as sufficient to approach our matters.

However, this is not just a headache that comprises Latin America, since this might be found inside African, Asian, and Oceanian universities; therefore, ratifying how academic freedom may become a right that just the global north has the privilege to make use of. Definitely, I reimagine a Latin American Academia that rejects or at least tries to ward off the idea of continuing to train Cartesian, humanist, disciplinary professionals, incapable of really intervening on land that most of the time, for not saying all the time, works with complex logic outside of the colonial cognizance.

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