Conflicting reactions to chi'ixnakax utxiwa

A reflection on the practices and discourses of decolonization

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I have read the article by Cusicanqui, who is a feminist sociologist, historian, and subaltern theorist who draws upon anarchist theory in combination with indigenous Quecha and Aarymara cosmologisms in her analytical work. Because Cusicanqui focused on Bolivia, the article provided me with an opportunity to view African Global Southern sociolinguistics through the experiences of a different site in the Global South and to compare, philosophically, sociolinguistic practices in two sites of the Global South, Bolivia and Africa.

In a series of articles (see Severo & Makoni, 2014; Makoni & Severo, 2015, 2017), Severo and I compared Brazil and an African nation, Angola, and were able to illustrate, at least to our satisfaction, that, even though both Brazil and Angola shared Portuguese colonial experiences, their current political linguistic dispensations were radically different, underscoring the importance of not viewing the Global South as a homogeneous entity. The diversities within the Global South, for example, in Africa, also are likely to have an impact on knowledge production and circulation. For example, at international conferences, one is more likely to meet scholars from South Africa than from other African countries because it is easier to secure funding and visas for travel by South African scholars than it is for African scholars in other regions of Africa. Scholarship on Africa is, therefore, strongly skewed toward South Africa. The Global North also should be construed as a hierarchized space.

This is not to deny the analytical value of the Global North/Global South distinction but, rather, to draw attention to the importance of diversity within each entity (Mignolo & Walsh 2018). Methodologically, it may, therefore, be inadequate to simply state that we are dealing with either the Global North or the Global South. It is more appropriate to emphasize the sociological, economic, and historical configurations of the sites in which the analysis is situated.

Our social location has a bearing on our knowledge production and the research we conduct and the answers we are amenable to accept. I perceive myself

as a Black male intellectual migrant who is working on the sociolinguistics of African languages, at a major, yet rural, university in the Global North, while retaining relatively strong personal and professional connections with institutions in the Global South. It is conceivable that, had I been a non-nomadic scholar, I would not have developed a substantial interest in how knowledge is produced in diverse contexts and interpreted or how ideas circulate, and, more importantly, I would not have sought to address issues related to conceptually mediating philosophies between the Global North and Global South. The fact that I am working in a major institution in the Global North while engaging in a sociolinguistics of African languages, a research area of marginal interest in the institution and department with which I am affiliated, has created both positive and negative aspects in how I engage with scholarship generally.

From a positive perspective, the marginality within the major rural institution with which I am affiliated has rendered it feasible to develop "border thinking". In this regard, I am critical of the Eurocentric thinking that may permeate some aspects of the sociolinguistics of African languages while, at the same time, wary of the Third World fundamentalisms that are typically couched as African perspectives or Afrocentric orientations to scholarship and are characteristic of some decolonial approaches to contemporary African scholarship.

My personal history as a scholar from the South, which has a colonized and racialized history, adds an additional intellectual wrinkle to my positionalities, which manifest themselves in an interest in *colonial linguistics, raciolinguistics, Black linguistics*, and other areas of sociolinguistics that seek to address issues of discrimination – that said, it may be possible that I may not be as subjected to comparable forms of discrimination as are African Black female sociolinguists whose work is rarely acknowledged in African sociolinguistics, either in the Global North or Global South.

Distinctions can be made between centre and periphery institutions in the Global North, and there are different hierarchies of power even within centre institutions because not everyone within these institutions wields the same amount of power or even wants to. Being on the periphery has its advantages, however, as it has led me to envisage scholarly opportunities that I might not have readily been aware of if I were not confronted with challenges of demonstrating my own relevance due to my being on the periphery of a powerful institution. Over the years, I have been aware that, in rural universities, at least in the United States, African languages do not "sell", while, at the same time, study abroad programs are the "in" thing in U.S. academia. Thus, the tying of courses in the sociolinguists of African languages to study-abroad programs has proved to be productive. The success of the programs, however, has, unfortunately, been a

product of the exocitization of Africa by either White Americans or Americans of Black descent.

In addition to this, and because one can carry out research from either a Southern perspective in the Global North or from a Northern perspective in the Global South, we need to distinguish between geographical location and epistemological orientation (Blommaert, Collins & Slembrouck, 2005). For example, African philosopher Hountondji (1996), in what he calls "extraversion", outlines theoretical approaches in which the main aim is to elicit data to confirm or disconfirm pre-packaged theoretical positions, typically from the Global North. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) has frequently employed the notion of extraversion in the Global South when the main objective has been to illustrate the nature of power dynamics within the local contexts more so than contributing towards a reframing of CDA. If Northern epistemologies can be used in the Global South, the opposite does occur as well. For example, Southern epistemological orientations may be evident in research into the interactional dynamics of refugees, migrants, and other vulnerable communities in the Global North.

But scholarship from the Global South needs to develop alternative perspectives that widen the intellectual repertoires of scholarship. A powerful example is the concept of *Vivir Bien* (*Buen Vivir*), which, loosely translated, means "plentiful life", "sweet life", "harmonious life", "sublime life", "inclusive life", or "know how to live". *Vivir Bien* has been used as alternative to development framework. The concept has been integrated into the Bolivian and Ecuadoarian constitutions. *Vivir Bien* envisages a continual life for decolonization. The Spanish conquest initiated, 500 years ago, a new cycle that did not end with independence; the cycle continues under post-colonialism and is consolidated by new forms and structures of domination. The major criticism against *Vivir Bien* is that it has been co-opted and so vaguely construed by the state that it has now been mobilized to serve "neo-liberal" and capitalists interests and not the Bolivian and Ecuadoarian indigenous peoples.

A concept that Cusicanqui describes that has relevance to African sociolinguistics is how logic is handled in Western scholarship. Aymara philosophy is based on a trivalent logic as opposed to a binary one in Western logic; it is based on the "inclusion" of a third concept: A is not B, and B is not A, but there are times when A and B are the same thing. In binary logic, one excludes the other. This trivalent logic can be extended to complex decolonial contexts and is analogous to Woolard's (1999) *bivalency* in African sociolinguistics. For example, the same speech form may be defined as belonging to different languages simultaneously – in binary logic, the same speech form cannot belong to different categories or languages because one excludes the other. When you have inclusion, you have enormous possibilities for intercultural action, I believe.

The indigenous cosmologies that I have outlined above deal with issues of language and life on land and, unfortunately, exclude indigenous seascape epistemologies. Indigenous seascape cosmologies can be defined as modes and ways of knowing through a multiplicity of senses that include, but are not restricted to, visual, spiritual, intellectual, and embodied literacies. Indigenous seascape cosmologies should include an awareness of the complex and intricate nexus between the sea and land. Cosmologies about the land are important because colonial exploration, colonization, and forced migration produce diverse pluriversal knowledges, contact zones, and languages, including creole and pidgin languages.

I would like to conclude this forum piece by engaging with Cusicanqui's point on the importance of activism in scholarship. From an applied linguistic perspective, one could say that research into minority languages, language planning, and, to some extent, some regimes of teaching are forms of activism in which we seek to change the state of social affairs, ideally for the better, even if the goals are not explicitly stated. The goal of scholarship should be to bring about change and to avoid the curse of the *gatopardismo* in which everything changes but remains the same. However, the rise of applied linguistics, with its capitalist orientations, has led to precisely that. Applied linguistics, like other forms of scholarship in both the Global North and the Global South, has been accompanied by an accentuation of power differences between Blacks and Whites, Caucasians and minorities, males and females, those who receive a paycheck for employment and those who rely on public benefits, and those who are part of the tenure system and those who are on contractual appointments.

The increase in the precarity of one's employment status has a bearing on the nature and type of sociolinguistic research that one is willing to risk conducting. If one's employment status is precarious, one is not likely to want to invest much time and energy into long, drawn-out research projects, but may prefer, instead, short-term projects or to reanalyse secondary data. We all are worse off if the sociolinguists and applied linguists find themselves in more precarious situations. Funding agencies are instrumental in shaping scholarship, as research agencies decide what is worth investigating and what is not.

I treat this Forum piece as a contribution to a decolonial scholarship. It is decolonial for two reasons. First I have tried to illustrate how my thinking is decolonial, in so far as it takes colonialism, "empire, and racism", as important empirical and discursive objects of study. In other words, the Forum piece is decolonial because in it I have sought to explore alternative ways of thinking about the world, and alternative forms of praxis (Bhambra et al., 2018: 2). Decoloniality is still however, a very contentious strategy because the term means different things to different people. Furthermore, as a strategy to initiate change it has generated substantial resistance to it.

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