



Editorial

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Structural challenges for the global circulation of knowledge and scientific sovereignty in a multipolar world

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1 Historical precedents in academic discussions on global asymmetries in science

For decades, academic literature has highlighted the dynamics and structural barriers that hinder the free circulation of knowledge within the global scientific ecosystem, reinforcing asymmetries that reflect a system historically designed to perpetuate inequalities between the Global North and South. These challenges encompass economic, technological, linguistic, and cultural aspects, demanding a critical analysis beyond merely identifying problems and proposing concrete strategies to achieve greater balance and epistemic justice.

The discourse surrounding global knowledge asymmetries has been significantly shaped by various schools of thought that critique the prevailing structures of academic imperialism, dependency theories, and the emergence of Southern epistemologies. Academic imperialism, as articulated by Alatas, refers to the dominance of Western knowledge systems and the marginalization of non-Western perspectives, which perpetuates a cycle of intellectual dependency and inequity in knowledge production (Alatas 2022; Alatas 2024; Hossen 2022). This phenomenon is not merely a theoretical concern; it has practical implications for how knowledge is produced, disseminated, and validated within academic institutions globally. This asymmetry of power is further reproduced by the collaborationist classes in the Global South that participate in accommodating the underlying logics of whiteness,

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the hegemonic values of white culture, supporting the internationalization of hegemonic disciplinary configurations while continuing to erase and silence transformative registers from the Global South (Dutta 2020).

Dependency theories, particularly those developed in Latin America, provide a foundational framework for understanding these dynamics. They argue that the social sciences in the Global South are often shaped by Western paradigms, leading to a form of intellectual colonialism where Western standards dictate research agendas and methodologies (Alatas 2003; Hossen 2022). This dependency is further exacerbated by the structural inequalities that characterize global academic networks, where scholars from the Global South face significant barriers to accessing resources, funding, and publication opportunities in prestigious Western journals. Simultaneously, the networks of gatekeeping in the Global North/West reproduce standards of whiteness, setting up rules that determine the politics of academic publishing (Dutta 2020). Within the architectures of the Global South then, playing to these rules is incentivized, with the adoption and magnification of metrics that uphold the Global North/Western hegemony. The implications of this are profound, as it not only stifles local knowledge production but also reinforces a hierarchical global academic landscape that privileges Western epistemologies (Alatas 2003; Alatas 2022; Alatas 2024). Moreover, elite power and control over the architectures of knowledge production in the Global South reproduce entrenched power inequalities, often dressed up as de-westernization, decolonization etc (Dutta and Pal 2020). We note for instance the Brahminical power and control over postcolonial studies, Subaltern Studies, and decolonization emergent from South Asia that works to reproduce entrenched caste inequalities (Dutta 2020).

In recent years, a growing movement has advocated for alternative circuits of scientific publishing and knowledge production that challenge these hegemonic structures. Researchers are increasingly highlighting the importance of Southern epistemologies and the need for decolonial approaches that prioritize indigenous knowledge systems and local contexts (Quijano 2000). This shift was crucial for fostering a more equitable academic environment that recognizes and values diverse forms of knowledge. For instance, Mignolo's work on decoloniality emphasizes the necessity of dismantling the colonial matrix of power that underpins Western epistemic hegemony, advocating for a pluralistic approach to knowledge that includes marginalized voices (Mignolo 2008).

In sociological discourse, a significant shift – later termed the decolonial turn – emerged between the 1980s and 1990s. Decolonial thought, prominently championed by the Latin American movement, seeks to liberate knowledge production from Eurocentric epistemologies. By challenging the presumed universality of Western knowledge and the dominance of Western culture, decolonial perspectives frame this hegemony as a foundational element of Western colonialism. These movements

expressed Latin American thought's aspiration to assert its unique identity and establish an independent voice. Subsequently, discussions surrounding the political and territorial dimensions of state control over epistemic sovereignty evolved towards a focus on social subversion, proposing new frameworks rooted in asymmetries, interdependencies, and identity-based epistemologies – particularly from Southern and non-Western perspectives. This decolonial turn is complemented by Indigenous-led movements for decolonizing research methods that have foregrounded the imperative to dismantle and disrupt settler colonial, racial capitalist, and imperial structures (Harms Smith 2019). Decolonizing research methods call for situating knowledge amidst struggles, in the organizing work of land occupation, resistance to racial capitalism, and resistance to imperial aggression (Dutta 2015; Tuck and Yang 2014).

Moreover, the intersection of academic practices with issues of race, gender, and colonial histories further complicates the landscape of knowledge production. The historical context of academia as a traditionally exclusive institution has contributed to systemic challenges that influence the participation and recognition of minority scholars (Phillips et al. 2022). As such, addressing these disparities requires a critical examination of the underlying structures that govern academic knowledge production and a commitment to fostering inclusivity and equity within academic disciplines (Hammell 2011; Phillips et al. 2022). Furthermore, the economic context plays a significant role in shaping scientific output, as evidenced by Rivera-Lozada et al., who noted that economic growth correlates with increased scientific production. Yet, Latin American countries still lag behind their counterparts in the United States and Europe (Rivera-Lozada et al. 2023).

2 Towards a framework of global asymmetries

Three central axes have mainly dominated discussions on global asymmetries in the circulation of knowledge: those related to social dynamics in scientific circuits, and the economic interests in information and technological infrastructures. Below, both are discussed briefly.

2.1 Social dynamics in scientific circuits

The discourse surrounding global asymmetries in the circulation of knowledge, particularly within the field of Communication Studies, has increasingly focused on the social dynamics of academic publishing. A significant aspect of this discourse is the geographic biases evident in authorship and editorial boards of scholarly

journals. The composition of editorial boards is critical as these boards serve as gatekeepers, influencing what research is published and, consequently, what knowledge is disseminated within the field (Goyanes and Demeter 2020). Goyanes and Demeter highlight that the geographic diversity of editorial boards directly affects publication outcomes in JCR-ranked communication journals, suggesting that a lack of diversity may lead to a narrow representation of research topics and perspectives (Goyanes and Demeter 2020).

Moreover, the demographic composition of editorial boards can perpetuate systemic biases within the academic community. For instance, studies have shown that editorial board members often reflect a homogenous group, predominantly from North America and Europe, which can marginalize voices from other regions (Pourret et al. 2023). This geographic imbalance not only limits the scope of research published but also reinforces existing power structures within academia, as those in positions of influence may prioritize research that aligns with their own backgrounds and experiences (Araújo et al. 2021).

Gender dynamics also play a crucial role in the composition of editorial boards. Research indicates that women remain significantly underrepresented in editorial positions across various fields, including communication (Fox et al. 2019). This gender disparity can hinder the diversity of perspectives included in published research, as editorial boards lacking gender balance may overlook critical issues relevant to women and other marginalized groups (Goyanes, Tóth and Haló 2024). Furthermore, the presence of women in editorial roles has been linked to increased submissions from female authors, suggesting that a more diverse editorial board could foster a more inclusive academic environment (Pan and Zhang 2013).

The implications of these biases extend beyond the editorial boards themselves. The lack of diversity in authorship and editorial representation can lead to a homogenization of research outputs, which in turn affects teaching and learning within communication studies (Dakhil et al. 2024). As such, it is essential for journals to actively pursue diversity in their editorial boards to ensure a broader range of voices and perspectives are represented in academic discourse.

The discussion surrounding Anglophone biases in knowledge production and circulation settings is also a critical area of inquiry within communication studies. The dominance of English as the primary language of academic discourse has been identified as a significant barrier to global equitable dissemination of knowledge. This phenomenon not only privileges Anglophone scholars but also marginalizes non-Anglophone voices, leading to a homogenization of academic perspectives that often overlooks diverse cultural contexts and epistemologies.

One of the core issues is the structural bias inherent in the global academic landscape, which is largely shaped by neoliberal frameworks that favor Anglophone institutions and scholars. For instance, Keightley and colleagues highlight that the

centrality of Western theories in academia is a systemic problem rooted in the institutional dynamics of knowledge production, including the rankings of communication journals and the composition of editorial boards, which tend to favor Anglophone contributions (Keightley et al. 2023). This is echoed by Albuquerque, who discusses how such biases not only perpetuate Western centrality but also hinder the global diffusion of non-Western theories and perspectives (Albuquerque 2020).

Moreover, the linguistic privilege associated with English further exacerbates this issue. The use of English as the *lingua franca* in academic publishing effectively excludes non-English-speaking scholars from the global discourse, limiting the reach and impact of their research (Kong and Qian 2017; Suzina 2020). This linguistic dominance creates a scenario where knowledge produced in other languages is often disregarded, leading to a skewed understanding of global issues (Fejes and Nylander 2017). The implications of this are profound, as it not only affects the visibility of research from the Global South but also reinforces existing power imbalances in knowledge production.

The challenges faced by non-Anglophone scholars extend beyond mere access to publication. Armstrong (2015) notes that successful publication in Anglophone journals often requires familiarity with specific rhetorical conventions and stylistic practices that are not universally applicable, further alienating non-native English speakers. This situation is compounded by the fact that many high-ranking journals predominantly publish in English, creating a barrier for scholars who may be proficient in their fields but lack the linguistic capital to navigate the Anglophone-centric academic landscape (Strauss 2019). Furthermore, the cultural implications of this Anglophone bias are significant. Huang (2023) points out that Anglophone feminist scholarship has historically overshadowed feminist knowledge produced in other linguistic and cultural contexts, resulting in a lack of visibility and circulation for these perspectives.

Other discussions concern research agendas in the field of communication and the humanities, where only particular agendas are deemed publishable, particularly those by researchers from the Global South, which often reinforce narratives of poverty and exoticism. Researchers have noted that the prevailing narratives often reinforce stereotypes of poverty and exoticism, which can marginalize the voices and contributions of scholars from these regions (Mukherjee 2020). This phenomenon is rooted in a broader context of power dynamics and epistemic injustices that shape the research landscape. At the same time, Dutta (2020) points to elite co-option of the language of decolonization and de-westernization in the Global South that forecloses spaces of participation in the Global South. He critiques the casteist takeover of spaces of knowledge generation in Global South in countries such as India and Singapore that deploy tropes of dewesternization to erase conversations on poverty, caste, marginalization etc. In India, the co-option of decolonization by the

Hindutva far-right has worked to violently erase conversations on caste, while simultaneously justifying anti-Muslim hate.

One critical aspect of this issue is the dominance of Western theories and frameworks in communication research, which can render the perspectives and experiences of the Global South as peripheral or irrelevant. Murthy (2016) highlights the “growing pattern of lightness” in communication research, suggesting that there is a need for a more integrated approach that considers the social and cultural implications of media evolution. This sentiment is echoed by Glück (2018), who argues for the de-Westernization and decolonization of media studies, emphasizing the importance of incorporating indigenous and localized philosophical traditions into research agendas. At the same time, calls to decolonization and indigeneity need to be engaged critically, attending to the workings. Such calls for inclusivity aim to dismantle the Eurocentric biases that have historically marginalized non-Western narratives.

Furthermore, the need for collaborative research agendas prioritizing Global South scholars’ voices has been increasingly recognized. Green and colleagues propose that funding criteria should be adjusted to empower Southern partners in agenda-setting, thereby addressing the unequal power relations that often characterize research collaborations (Green et al. 2023). This aligns with the findings of McElfish et al. (2015), who advocate for community-driven research agendas that engage local stakeholders in all aspects of the research process, from identifying questions to disseminating results. Moreira de Oliveira and Bomfim (2023) examine the nature of these agendas and the role Latin America and the Caribbean play in either defining or reproducing them. This study aimed to analyze Global South-focused research agendas funded by northern agencies and identified different types of northern organizations – ranging from non-departmental public bodies to philanthropic and charitable foundations – shaping an agenda centered on precariousness, poverty, and underdevelopment. In contrast, research from Latin America and the Caribbean often frames the Global South as a reference point for models that could be applied in the Global North.

2.2 The economical interests in information and technological infrastructures

The economic interests in information and technological infrastructures, particularly in the context of open-access publishing and the commercialization of Open Science, reveal significant disparities between countries with varying levels of financial research support. The payment of article processing charges (APCs) for open-access publishing is a critical issue, as it often exacerbates inequalities

between well-funded institutions in developed nations and those in the majority world that lack such financial backing. For instance, the case of Kenya illustrates how the embrace of open access can lead to increased outputs and visibility for scholars, yet the reliance on APCs can still disadvantage researchers from less affluent backgrounds, who may struggle to afford these fees. This situation is compounded by the fact that many institutions in wealthier countries have the means to subsidize these costs, thereby reinforcing existing academic hierarchies (Kingsley 2014).

Technological barriers also contribute to the inequitable distribution of scientific knowledge. The digital divide remains a significant challenge, as access to scientific information is often limited by technological infrastructure, particularly in developing regions (Zoubi et al. 2021). This divide not only restricts access to knowledge but also hinders the ability of researchers in the Global South to engage with and contribute to global scientific discourse. Moreover, the commercial route of Open Science is increasingly dominated by tech oligopolies, particularly those based in the United States, which profit from the platformization of research (De Oliveira et al. 2020). These companies often present themselves as champions of openness while simultaneously engaging in practices that prioritize profit over equitable access to information. This phenomenon, termed “open washing,” describes how large tech firms manipulate the narrative around openness to evade regulatory scrutiny and maintain their market dominance (Theophilos 2024). The implications of this commercialization are profound, as it not only affects the accessibility of research outputs but also shapes the very nature of scientific inquiry, leading to a system where profit motives can overshadow the pursuit of knowledge (Dutta 2020). Resisting these profit motives in systems of knowledge production calls for the collective work of building spaces of knowledge production that are committed to building spaces of actually existing socialism (Dutta et al. 2021).

The intersection of these two perspectives – APCs and the commercialization of Open Science – highlights a critical tension in the current academic landscape. As researchers navigate the complexities of funding and publication, the disparities in access to resources become increasingly evident. The reliance on APCs can lead to a situation where only those with adequate financial support can participate fully in the open-access movement, thereby limiting the diversity of voices and research outputs in the global academic discourse. Furthermore, tech giants’ monetization of research platforms raises ethical questions about the ownership and control of knowledge, as these entities often prioritize their financial interests over the broader goals of scientific collaboration and dissemination (Baecker et al. 2020).

3 Epistemic sovereignty from the majority world in a multipolar context

Alternative initiatives have emerged as forms of resistance to these dynamics. Local infrastructures, such as the Lattes system in Brazil, and Diamond open access models, which do not involve APC charges, offer promising examples of how countries in the Global South can reclaim their epistemic sovereignty. Initiatives aimed at fostering multilingualism in scientific communication can help mitigate linguistic barriers, while targeted funding and support for research in the Global South can enhance the visibility and impact of their contributions (Ramírez-Castañeda 2020; Zoubi et al. 2021). Additionally, promoting international collaborations prioritizing equitable partnerships and knowledge exchange can help dismantle the hierarchical structures currently dominating scientific discourse (Leydesdorff and Wagner 2008). Finally, increasing the diversity of editorial boards and decision-makers in scientific publishing can ensure that a broader range of perspectives is considered, ultimately enriching the global scientific ecosystem (Espin et al. 2017).

Recent discussions surrounding scientific asymmetries have increasingly focused on the dynamics of scientific production in non-Western contexts, particularly in Latin America. The work of Vessuri, Guédon, and Cetto (2014) highlights the unique circuits of scientific production in this region, illustrating how local contexts shape research outputs and collaborations. This is further supported by various scientometric analyses that reveal both the growth and the structural limitations of scientific output in Latin America.

Reclaiming epistemic sovereignty requires scientific agendas to be reconfigured to reflect local priorities. Robust university systems, such as those in countries like China, India, and Brazil, have strategic potential to challenge global asymmetries and promote a more inclusive science aligned with regional needs. The emphasis on autonomous agendas is essential to building a more balanced and democratic scientific field. In this sense, the pursuit of epistemic sovereignty cannot be limited to denouncing challenges and asymmetries. It must encompass the formulation of concrete strategies that acknowledge the economic and political disputes within the scientific field and strengthen initiatives in the so-called “Majority World.” Producing epistemologies, infrastructures, and policies that prioritize a plurality of voices is a crucial step toward overcoming historical inequalities and building a more equitable global scientific system. To achieve this, countries in the Global South must occupy strategic spaces in producing, disseminating, and managing knowledge, ensuring their voices are heard and legitimized in a multipolar global landscape. It is critical at the same time that these countries in the Global South attend to the inequalities in systems of knowledge production within the Global South, working through the

systemic inequalities within the spaces of knowledge production, and fostering spaces for communities, movements, and struggles at the margins (Dutta and Pal 2020). In other words, the global struggle for democratizing knowledge must simultaneously be mapped out in struggles within Global South spaces to democratize knowledge production.

4 Special issue on academic publishing in media and communication studies in the digital age: overcoming structural barriers to integrate Global South scholarship

Within this context, this special issue aims to expand our understanding of such phenomena and bring together contributions to discuss the challenges and opportunities for the internationalization of academic production and collaboration among countries in the Global South, with or without partners from the Global North.

Afonso de Albuquerque and Marcela Barba explore the relationship between academic and media imperialism in his study on *Abraji*. He analyzes how power structures shaping academic knowledge production mirror those within the media industry, revealing an intersection that deepens inequalities and marginalizes voices from the Global South. Another example of exclusion is the practice of “geographic tokenism,” investigated by Manfred Asuman, Abubakar Ibrahim, Meghan Sobel Cohen, and Brian Ekdale. Their study highlights the severe underrepresentation of institutions and scholars from the Global South on editorial boards of top-ranked communication and media journals. Meanwhile, a small number of institutions from the Global South are disproportionately overrepresented. This phenomenon reflects an unequal distribution of opportunities and legitimacy, further hindering the diversity of voices in scientific knowledge production.

The study by Marton Demeter, Manuel Goyanes, and Homero Gil de Zúñiga reveals how research funding influences collaboration and publication in prestigious journals, often favoring the Global North. This trend shows that funded projects involve larger teams and are more likely to be published in high-impact journals. However, disciplines like sociology do not follow this pattern, reinforcing the need for equitable strategies to support researchers from underfunded regions. Global asymmetries in the scientific field are also shaped by editorial dynamics and geographic biases that dominate academic publishing. Gergely Ferenc Lendvai’s study, through a scientometric analysis of communication journal publications from 2014 to 2023, found that more than 90 % of published articles and 63 % of editorial

board members belong to the Global North. These figures expose the marginalization of Global South scholars, revealing a systematic exclusion dynamic that reinforces the Global North's dominance in academic circuits.

Another relevant aspect is the influence of policies and investments in emerging fields such as artificial intelligence and the metaverse. Vincenzo De Masi, Qinke Di, Siyi Li, and Yuhan Song examine China's comprehensive strategy, characterized by strong state direction, high investments, and international collaborations. Their study highlights how these policies have led to increased high-impact publications and global research partnerships, though challenges related to digital equity and regulatory frameworks persist. These findings underscore how epistemic sovereignty can be reclaimed through strategic policies aligned with national priorities.

Eve Ng and Melissa A. Click explore how initiatives like editorial board diversification in the journal *Communication, Culture & Critique* (CCC) have contributed to increasing the presence of Global South scholars. However, their findings indicate that these efforts still face challenges, such as lower visibility of articles authored by Global South researchers, highlighting the persistence of Western academic norms that hinder full inclusion.

Recent studies highlight how linguistic disadvantages impact the publication records of scholars using English as an additional language. Ana Suzina's article examines this issue through decolonial, disruptive, and participatory perspectives, arguing that the challenge goes beyond discrimination to a broader system of domination shaped by the commodification of science. The review emphasizes multilingualism as a key solution, fostering intercultural translation and a more inclusive academic publishing system that ultimately benefits society as a whole.

Finally, by confronting the structural barriers to knowledge circulation, science has the opportunity to become a tool for a truly global knowledge production. Incorporating perspectives from different regions and contexts is essential to addressing contemporary challenges and ensuring that scientific production contributes to a more inclusive world. The initiatives and studies featured in this special issue reinforce the urgency of rethinking the foundations of the global scientific system, ensuring that historically marginalized voices occupy the space they rightfully deserve.

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