

INTRODUCTION

India and Latin America: An Epistemic Site for a Cross-Cultural Dialogue

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Globalization, for a long time, has been used as a term involving multiple meanings. The word describes the increasing interdependence of the world's economic system, i.e., accumulation of wealth at a world scale that facilitates the cross-national flows of goods, investment, production, and technology. These processes have brought about an accelerated flow of capital and people and enabled the growth of communicative interaction. Therefore, concepts such as the global village emerged to explain a more common notion of an interdependent world in terms of economies, trade, and cultural, social, and political life.

However, scholars have also pointed out that these developments of a changed world order should not be considered a new phenomenon, as they had already started with the voyage that Christopher Columbus undertook in 1492 to the New World. Even before that, people used to travel to faraway places, trading and exchanging products, spreading their culture and knowledge. The famous Silk Route and other routes across China, Central Asia, and the Mediterranean are well-known. Continuous advances in metallurgy, transportation, or increased agricultural production meant more goods and products could be transported. Thus, through the Ages of Exploration, Revolution, and Information, the world continued to become increasingly interconnected and interdependent, and that is how the worldwide web of globalization was spun.

Nevertheless, as a decolonial subject located in the global South, my concern revolves around the central point of the globalization debate. I want to argue that the present stage of development of capitalism should not be taken as a new stage; instead, it is a consolidation and continuation of the past stages of capitalism. As James Petra states, "Counterpoised to the concept of globalization is the notion of imperialism, which attempts to contextualize the flows, locating it in a setting of unequal power, between conflicting states, classes, and markets" (Petras 3).

Therefore, what interests us is to examine what preceded the emergence of the Global South. We know that the political project of colonization (and today, the neoliberal economic model) produced inequalities and absences that led to the creation of people who supposedly did not have histories, power structures, or knowledge. Nevertheless, the colonized peoples challenged

these assumptions and contested the claims of political and cultural universality of the geopolitical imaginary emanating from processes of globalization. In fact, this violent homogenization process not only made the geohistorical areas affected by colonization skeptical about the one-dimensional “Northern” logic but also alerted them to question the right of Eurocentric local histories to design such global projects, effectively amounting to “an epistemic solipsism of subsuming the ‘other under the same’” (Dussel 45).

Colonized subjects embarked upon a long-drawn struggle to bring about economic and political changes. These struggles did not take a teleological course of action; instead, they served to lay bare extreme violence of all kinds, be it colonial violence against the people or communities or epistemic and ontological violence. Consequently, the forces that were engaged in combating multiple forms of oppression unleashed by the colonial powers and are continuing their struggle even today are reconceptualized as the Global South. Central to all their endeavor is the concept of decolonization. Mere political independence is not sufficient; we must go beyond independence. Decolonization is a broad historical process of transition. It does not mean merely freedom from colonization, but it goes beyond acknowledging the silenced knowledges and offering varied alternatives to modern thinking emanating from the West. It recognizes the world’s epistemological diversity. After all, as Achille Mbembe underlines, “There is only one world. It is composed of a totality of a thousand parts. Of everyone, of all worlds” (Mbembe and Dubois 180). Epistemic diversity of the South is not a limited concept; it certainly signals diverse experiences in the world.

In today’s global scenarios, epistemic discourses at all levels are passing through a complex and disjointed phase, placing demands to recognize alternative approaches produced by the plural “others” as part of a new agenda. Thus, the need to articulate and suggest new epistemological options emerging from locations outside the universality of European rationality has become a necessary task and an ongoing practice. In this process, the South has been responding to the Global North by recovering and asserting its epistemological diversity. Local actors from the South are rethinking the terms of their response to stimulate transversal conversations that aim for intellectual and cultural symmetry within a critical conception of knowledge production under the logic of the global. Therefore, it is necessary to establish dialogues between the people and communities to share their experiences, look for alternatives, and evaluate knowledges born out of the struggles, thereby avoiding imposition by any other force. It essentially recognizes that there is no singular objective experience in the world.

With the decay of colonial rules and the emergence of nation-building projects, historical connections between southern nations and regions (e.g., Asia and Latin America) in the late

nineteenth and early twentieth centuries witness cross-cultural dialogues. We know that many scholars, like Araceli Tinajero, have pointed out that historically, for Latin America, the Orient was not a part of the imperial power, but, on the contrary, countries like India and China were influencing the forming of an imaginary that was syncretic, eclectic and their own. Latin American modernists consciously proposed and used broader geographical imaginaries. Thus, twentieth-century figures like M.N. Roy, Rabindranath Tagore, Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Pablo Neruda, Gabriel García Márquez, Cecília Meireles and Octavio Paz, to mention just a few, provided the possibility of intense engagement and transcultural exchanges between India and Latin America. Even cultural phenomena such as magical realism and the genre of *testimonio* bear witness to these interactions across the South.

At the Threshold of a New Age of History

Thus, the intercultural dialogue that began in the Twenty-first century between the post-colonial communities is now striving to have an ontological and epistemological foundation. Enrique Dussel, while setting up the Agenda for the Global South, has pointed out that:

Given the exhaustion of premises upon which modernity is founded, we stand at the threshold of a new age of history. This is not a postmodern situation., but instead a moment characterized by radical transformation in the very foundation of modern *ethos*. (Dussel 26)

Therefore, intercultural exchanges help establish reciprocal understanding and identify the common grounds and complementarities for evolving an alternative vision. Cultural relations and exchanges between Latin America and India advocate plural and heterogeneous knowledge. Therefore, the Global South becomes an epistemic location for producing knowledge and challenging unequal power relations. Sousa Santos has foregrounded the concept of "ecology of knowledge":

The ecologies of knowledges are collective cognitive construction led by the principles of horizontality (different knowledges recognize differences between themselves in a non-hierarchical way) and reciprocity (differently incomplete knowledges strengthen themselves by developing relation of complementing one another). (Santos, Meneses xx)

Thus, Santos and Meneses have insisted that there is a need to underscore the plural and heterogeneous knowledge and connection between them. Notably, the south-south relation is based on horizontal similarities rather than a vertical and bipolar arrangement of difference. Therefore, constructive negotiation and mutual understanding between cultural practices help to

surmount the consequences of thinking in terms of differences. In this manner, a new vision of a geopolitical and epistemological location emerges from the South, wherein the struggles and conflicts against imperial global domination and emancipatory and decolonial forces are at work.

Similarly, Ignacio López-Calvo suggests that Latin American and Indian/Asian literary relations create a plurality of identities beyond national and cultural boundaries, as well as the formations of different transnational identities based on the socio-political and economic circumstances (18); he suggests “planetary consciousness” as foundational elements for a critical model (4) or geopolitical paradigm that avoids Eurocentric assumptions (Lu, Camps 5).

In recent times, the globalization debates have looked at the “entangled histories of the South” (Klengel and Wallner 2016) more meaningfully because presently, it is not limited to research on the economic, political, or anthropological studies but has extended its scope to cultural and intellectual fields, as well. In this globalized world, undoubtedly, South-South intercultural relations become a significant part as they provide insight into the knowledge production in the South. Furthermore, these studies also throw light on negotiations, exchanges, and transfers of experiences and facilitate a better reflection and evaluation of their relations. Susanne Klengel and Alexandra Ortiz Wallner, in their important volume *SUR/SOUTH: Poetics and Politics of Thinking Latin America/India* (2016), have rightly argued that:

A significant number of the narratives and configurations which circulate within South-South relationships are also geared towards a performative expansion of epistemological boundaries, especially when emotional knowledge of spiritual and corporeal experience comes into play. This *mélange* of heterogeneous experiences, in conjunction with intellectual dialogue and transfer processes, is one of the keys to grasping the horizontal knowledge of a mutual Sur/South understanding, which explores the spaces between scholarship, aesthetic/poetic discourse and heterodox agency. (Klengel and Wallner 13)

As is evident, in the context of knowledge production, it has become imperative to acquire a deeper understanding of the dynamics of intellectual/cultural dialogue between the southern nations. The South-South interaction in most fields of human relations has served to evolve a new approach to knowledges and experiences gained there and, on that basis, form a new field of studies to inquire into the reciprocal and horizontal connections and influences. Thus far, for various reasons, these have been systematically marginalized and subsumed by the universal cultural discourses of Modernity. Therefore, drawing on concepts like ecology of knowledge, forwarded by Boaventura de Sousa Santos, and pluriverse transmodernity by Enrique Dussel, this special issue will focus on the intersection between India and Latin America as a site of intense epistemological dialogue. It

will attempt to challenge the discourses on the universality of the epistemological North and their view on Modernity.

Horizontal/Reciprocal South-South Relations and Pluriversal Dialogue

Articles included in this volume locate the India-Latin America intercultural relations in a broader spectrum of enunciations proceeding from the Global South. Thus, the questions that arise from the circulation of knowledge, ideas, and intercultural dialogues across and between the Souths, specifically between India and Latin America, address such concerns. For instance, what practices and agendas are emerging towards re-grounding a decentered epistemology in locations other than the North? In constructing transcultural dialogues, what are the realities, experiences, voices, and inequalities of the internal “others”—be they gender, caste, race, religion, language, or ethnicity? Is it true that the European Enlightenment, in the name of its civilizing mission and rationality, imposed a hegemonic model that was most irrational and violent, thus exposing its darker side? Are there multiple directionalities of ideas and influences that constitute the discourses on transmodernity? The contributions to this volume will engage with the above questions and examine the efficacy and potential of the critical enunciations for empowering the South to produce and develop another/new body of knowledge and promote wider and plural conversations at the global level.

Before briefly referring to the articles written for this number, I must acknowledge that the inspiration for venturing into this area of research came from the international conference organized by the Freie Universität, Berlin, in October 2011, entitled SUR/SOUTH. *Nuevos Pasajes a la India: América Latina/India. Literature and Culture*, and International Workshop held in April 2012 on *Cultural Flows*. Indien/Lateinamerika. I had the honor of being invited to these events. The conference and workshop were held under the guidance of Prof. Susanne Klengel, Director and Professor of Latin American Studies, with whom I had the opportunity to interact and share experiences. Her profound knowledge and enriching ideas helped me continue and further develop this study area at the University of Delhi, where I was a professor then. Our association and engagement in the South-South intercultural relations have continued since. Dr Alexandra Ortiz Wallner, project investigator and resource person at Freie Universität, was another prominent expert with whom I had long conversations and exchanges of insightful ideas. We continued these exchanges even later for several years. In order to take these studies further and explore new subjects and themes, the Department of Germanic & Romance Studies, University of Delhi, in collaboration with the India International Centre, New Delhi, organized another International Conference on *India/Latin America: Emerging Epistemological Options & Inter/Cross/Transcultural*

Dialogues in November in 2016. Dr. Enrique Dussel, eminent Mexican-Argentinian philosopher and renowned writer Arturo Arias delivered plenary lectures. Prof. Klengel and Dr. Ortiz Wallner, colleagues from Freie Universität, had also participated.

The present volume includes some of the papers presented at the 2016 Delhi conference; however, many contributions were written later by scholars who have worked in this area. Most of the articles are from literary studies, although they adopt different theoretical approaches and deal with concrete textual material that lends itself to interconnecting India with Latin America from a historical and a contemporary perspective. We have also included lectures delivered by Dr Dussel during his stay in Delhi.

In this volume, we seek to foreground areas that have yet to be explored that connect India and Latin America. We use multiple references from literature and society that shape our historical experiences and highlight diverse processes of knowledge production. The seven essays presented here show how horizontality and reciprocity constitute the mainstay of our relationship, be it in cultural, political, or social life.

Enrique Dussel titled his two lectures “Epistemological Decolonization of World History” and “Decolonizing the Conception of Modernity: Towards Transmodernity.” He underlined that the epistemological decolonization of world history was critical because history provides a framework for all subjects of humanity and social sciences. A historically and archaeologically acceptable reconstruction is needed to correct the Eurocentric deviation that marginalized and excluded many nations/regions (like Latin America) from world history. He emphasized that a complete account of the histories of the civilizations that produced occidental Europe will expose Hegel's vision of history not merely as a Eurocentric ideological invention but also as an inversion of facts. After exposing the distortions in European historiography, Dussel went on to define our task today. He pointed out that our role as intellectuals is to offer a new vision in which we shall have a place in history from the beginning. He explained how Modernity began to be related to the concept of coloniality. All these issues are linked to the theoretical question as much as the economic, political, philosophical, literary, theological, and mythical questions. Moving on to the second lecture, Dussel examined the concept of Modernity in detail. He began from its origin and presented a short periodization of historical moments of Modernity itself. Notably, the periodization shows that its development is not the same for all the countries. He then expounded on the critique of the modern reason and showed how the solution proposed by the postmodern thought is as much Eurocentric. As an alternative, he and his colleagues have evolved the concept of “Transmodernity.”

Taking the discussion forward is another philosopher from India, Soumyabrata Choudhury, who has delved into “Comparative Liturgy: A Study of New Congregations in Liberation Theology and Dalit Buddhism.” Choudhury has studied religion and politics in the context of two specific liturgical practices that stem from historical congregations formed during the Liberation Theology movement in certain parts of Latin America and a specific context of neo-Buddhist Ambedkarite movements in India. The pairing of the congregation with the collective sharing of a “common feeling” (as Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar called it) offers necessary material for a political analysis of two historical societies of the global south. In the case of Latin America, during the dictatorships, political resistance was organized by many, including that of the Christian religion, in the form of the subversive challenge presented by Liberation Theology. The Ambedkarite conversion from Hinduism to Buddhism in 1956, accompanied by Ambedkar’s own text, *The Buddha and his Dhamma*, created a situation where conversion both signified liberation from erstwhile religious oppression of the Hindus and the entry into a new form of communitarian thought. Choudhary thus establishes a conversation between two liturgical practices in two regions of the Global South.

Vijaya Venkataram’s article “Negotiating the testimonial impulse from fictional spaces: Meena Kandasamy’s *The Gypsy Goddess* and Horacio Castellanos Moya’s *Senselessness*” is indeed a parallel study of the *testimonio* genre as recreated in Tamil Nadu (India) and Guatemala. “Testimonial impulse” represented in the fictional works of two writers from different locations of Global South bear witness to what Santos called horizontal interactions across regions. *The Gypsy Goddess* (2014) by Meena Kandasamy and Castellanos Moya’s *Insensatez* (2004) are stories drawn from actual historical events in India and Guatemala. As both texts carry a reference to the genocidal violence against subaltern masses of people, the discussion in the article establishes a dialogue between the two regions by exploring the epistemic dimension of the questions of truth and justice. Therefore, if we place these writers in conversation, we can see the affinity in their geosocial location. Thus, when Venkataraman reads the two authors together, the context is expanded and becomes a trans-local context (Vargas).

Alan Meller’s “Two perspectives regarding post-Enlightenment violence: *In an Antique Land* by Amitav Ghosh and *By Night in Chile (Nocturno de Chile)* by Roberto Bolaño” bring into debate the issue of violence unleashed on the people of erstwhile colonies in the name of the “civilizing mission.” The so-called scientific rationality enforced by the project of the European Enlightenment was responsible for the imposition of a brutal hegemonic model. Meller revisited the relationship between Western Civilization and violence and showed how two strategies were used to expose the dark side of Enlightenment and the ways to overcome it. In *In an Antique Land*

(1992), Amitav Ghosh attempts to modify the modern/colonialist practice of anthropology with a view to subvert the traditional hegemonic axis and demolish the fixed representational practices. In its place, he suggests a more horizontal and familiar relationship with the Other. Whereas in Bolaño’s *By Night in Chile* (2003), the Enlightenment or culture (literature) serves as a façade to hide the aggression and ferocity that let loose the violence on their population. Meller also attempts to find Bolaño’s exit to that *corridor, with apparently no way out*. Once again, the two texts from the South are in conversation through the discourse on violence and rationality.

Similarly, Vibha Maurya’s article “Travel Memoires of Indian Freedom Fighters to Post revolutionary Mexico: An Epitome of Transversal Dialogue between Two Spaces of the Global South” focuses on the revolutionary ideas of freedom and human dignity that were carried by the two persons of the Indian independence movement to Mexico in the 1920s. Pandurang Khankhoje and M.N.Roy reached Mexico almost accidentally but contributed to the lives of the people of Mexico singularly. While Khankhoje, as an agricultural scientist, carried out vastly useful work on high-yielding production of maize that amounted to giving bread to every poor Mexican household, Roy worked with progressive people of Mexican society and succeeded in forming the Communist Party of Mexico, the first one outside Russia. In this manner, their engagement with Mexican people’s lives and struggles strengthened existing knowledge and proposed new ways of knowing and being. Maurya’s analysis of these memoirs highlights the transversal dialogue between two spaces of the global South (India and Mexico). It discusses the transfer and sharing of knowledges between the two nations in the process of their formation.

“Dressing Asian to Look European: Chilean Writers Facing World Literature” by Pablo Faúndez Morán rereads and analyzes amusing and, to some extent, curious incidents of the Chilean literary scene in the twentieth century. References are to the book of poems *Fragments*, published in 1921 by Karez-I-Roshan, an Afghan poet, and the accusation against Pablo Neruda of plagiarizing a poem by Tagore in 1934. Both events describe an unusual situation: twice and in different ways, a Chilean poet was transfigured into an Asian poet. Morán has argued that these events may be examined as to how the literary or cultural interactions between Asia/India and Chile happened and how some kind of European mediation hampered these exchanges because Chilean writers may have dressed in the clothes of Asian poets but eventually found that they did not fit since, deep down, their bodies were the same size as Europeans.

Nilesh Sharan, a young researcher at the University of Baja California, has also contributed an article that contains an autobiographical perspective. In “How Can I Listen to the Voices Emerging from the Comunidad de Solentiname? (Researcher’s locus in approaching the other “Other”) Sharan wants to deal with his perception and interpretation of the testimonios and artistic

works of the revolutionary Christian community in *Comunidad de Solentiname* in Nicaragua. He poses such questions as “How can a person, born and brought up in India, listen to and interact with the voices from Solentiname, Nicaragua and produce “scientific” knowledge about the same, whereas the very framework, i.e. terms, words, categories, concepts, methodologies, etc. of the production of *that* knowledge have been set forth on the processes of colonization/otherization/ domination of the non-western/white populations, including those of India (the researcher’s position) and Nicaragua (position of the research object)?” It is an interesting, but ambivalent, premise because in it the “subject” as well as the “object” of the study are located on the exteriority (the two “Others” relatively different but not distinct) of the modern-colonial scientific paradigm, whose fundamental scientific and institutional research framework must shape the process of research. Undoubtedly, it creates tension in theoretical discussion and the selection of concrete research material. He chooses a methodological-theoretical practice of “non-negligence” and Buddhist soteriological origins to negotiate horizontal interaction and transcultural understanding to surmount the difference. Thus, he seeks to engage in a conversation with the Comunidad de Solentiname through a pluriversal translation.

Thus, all seven essays in this volume exemplify the epistemic diversity that exists in the Global South. The authors’ reflections underscore the need for an alternative ontological and epistemological paradigm that will give prominence to our resistance against any Eurocentric Northern imposition. As Santos and Meneses have pointed out, “it is a call upon the ecologies of knowledges to make it possible for humanity to be (re)cognized and to retrieve life and subaltern, silenced knowledges that inhabit the South” (Sousa and Meneses xxxvii).

I will end with an important quote from Paulin Hountondji, who says, “The margin be no longer the margin but part and parcel of a multifaceted whole, a center of decision among other decision-making centers, an autonomous center of knowledge production among others” (Sousa and Meneses xxxvii).

Is it also true that the European Enlightenment, in the name of civilizing mission and rationality, imposed a hegemonic model that was most irrational and violent, thus exposing its darker side?

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