

Academic Cooperation from *the Souths*: Geopolitics of the Gaze, Cognitive and Epistemic Justices¹²

Cooperación académica desde los Sures: geopolítica de la mirada, justicia cognitiva y justicia epistémica

Cooperação acadêmica a partir dos Suls: geopolítica do olhar, justiça cognitiva e justiça epistêmica

Jair Vega Casanova³⁴
Universidad del Norte
Colombia
jvega@uninorte.edu.co
ORCID: 0000-0003-0394-5483

Abstract: In this article I reflect on academic and scientific cooperation among institutions in Latin America and the Caribbean, the misnamed "Global South": *the Souths*, and in Europe and the United States, from a decolonial perspective articulated around the *geopolitics of the gaze, cognitive justice, and epistemic justice*. I approach cooperation not as a technical matter, but as a political-epistemic field traversed by power relations and structural inequalities. Drawing on Latin American thought -including contributions from feminism, Indigenous and Afrodescendant communities, and social movements- and in dialogue with African, Asian, and critical Northern traditions, I problematize three dimensions: interinstitutionality, interdisciplinarity, and intersectorality. I also reflect on the challenges of cooperation in contexts of authoritarianism, anti-rights movements, and funding constraints, emphasizing the need to strengthen South-South networks and inter-epistemic dialogues. A cooperation with a decolonial vocation requires a situated social science, committed to equity, social justice, human rights, and democratic and plural forms of governance.

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³ Sociologist, master's in political and Economic Studies, with more than 25 years of experience in the field of communication and social change. He has combined activism, work with communities, consultancies with governmental organizations, public bodies, international cooperation agencies, and academia. He is currently Professor in the Department of Social Communication, researcher at PBX (Research Group in Communication, Culture, and Social Change), co-coordinator of the Jui Shikazguaxa Collaboratory on Communication for Social Change, and editor of the journal Investigación & Desarrollo at Universidad del Norte, Barranquilla, Colombia. His publications can be consulted on ResearchGate and Academia.Edu.

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Keywords:

Academic cooperation; geopolitics of knowledge; cognitive justice; epistemic justice; epistemologies of the South

Resumen: En este artículo abordo una reflexión sobre la cooperación académica y científica entre instituciones de América Latina y el Caribe, el mal llamado “Sur Global”: *los Sures*, Europa y Estados Unidos desde una perspectiva decolonial articulada en torno a la *geopolítica de la mirada*, la *justicia cognitiva* y la *justicia epistémica*. La cooperación la asumo no como un asunto técnico, sino como campo político-epistémico atravesado por relaciones de poder y desigualdades estructurales. A partir del pensamiento latinoamericano - incluyendo aportes del feminismo, comunidades indígenas, afrodescendientes y movimientos sociales- y en diálogo con tradiciones africanas, asiáticas y críticas del Norte, problematizo tres dimensiones: interinstitucionalidad, interdisciplinariedad e intersectorialidad. Así mismo, incluyo una reflexión sobre los desafíos de la cooperación en contextos de autoritarismo, movimientos antiderechos y restricciones de financiación, enfatizando la necesidad de fortalecer redes Sur-Sur y diálogos interepistémicos. Una cooperación con vocación decolonial requiere una ciencia social situada, comprometida con la equidad, la justicia social, los derechos humanos y formas de gobernanza democráticas y plurales.

Palabras clave:

Cooperación académica; geopolítica del conocimiento; justicia cognitiva; justicia epistémica; epistemologías del Sur

Resumo: Neste artigo, reflito sobre a cooperação acadêmica e científica entre instituições da América Latina e do Caribe, o mal chamado “Sul Global”: *os Sules*, a Europa e os Estados Unidos, a partir de uma perspectiva decolonial articulada em torno da *geopolítica do olhar*, da *justiça cognitiva* e da *justiça epistêmica*. Encaramos a cooperação não como uma questão técnica, mas como um campo político-epistêmico atravessado por relações de poder e desigualdades estruturais. A partir do pensamento latino-americano -incluindo contribuições do feminismo, das comunidades indígenas, afrodescendentes e dos movimentos sociais- e em diálogo com tradições africanas, asiáticas e críticas do Norte, problematizamos três dimensões: interinstitucionalidade, interdisciplinaridade e intersectorialidade. Da mesma forma, incluo uma reflexão sobre os desafios da cooperação em contextos de autoritarismo, movimentos antiretais e restrições de financiamento, enfatizando a necessidade de fortalecer

redes Sul-Sul e diálogos intepistêmicos. Uma cooperação com vocação decolonial requer uma ciência social situada, comprometida com a equidade, a justiça social, os direitos humanos e formas de governança democráticas e plurais.

Palavras-chave:

Cooperação acadêmica; geopolítica do conhecimento; justiça cognitiva; justiça epistêmica; epistemologias do Sul

1. Point of Departure

Academic and scientific cooperation is often conceived as a set of technical mechanisms -academic agreements, mobility programs, joint funding initiatives. However, this view is insufficient for understanding the scientific field in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), which is shaped by historical and structural inequalities (Beigel, 2014; Vessuri, 2004). An approach grounded in the *geopolitics of the gaze* helps problematize the conditions under which knowledge is produced and to recognize that every scientific practice is situated and politically implicated (Haraway, 1988; Mignolo, 2003).

This perspective draws on the Latin American critical tradition that, from Mariátegui and Martí to Fals Borda (1987), Freire (1970), and Dussel (1996), called for forms of thought rooted in the realities of the region; These contributions were later expanded by the modernity/coloniality group (Castro-Gómez & Grosfoguel, 2007; Lander, 2000; Quijano, 2000) and by the epistemologies of the South (Santos, 2019). In parallel, the concepts of cognitive justice (Visvanathan, 2009) and epistemic justice (Fricker, 2007; Medina, 2013) draw attention to the hierarchies that organize both knowledge traditions and the subjects authorized to produce knowledge.

Drawing on these frameworks, this article contributes to a reflection on cooperation as a field of epistemic dispute in which agendas, hierarchies of knowledges, and forms of validation are constantly negotiated and contested, incorporating contributions from feminism, Indigenous peoples, Afrodescendant communities, and women's organizations, whose forms of knowledge have historically been subalternized (Cabnal, 2010; Espinosa Miñoso et al., 2014; Rivera Cusicanqui, 2010; Walsh, 2013).

Rather than presenting an entirely original argument, I bring together different contributions made in recent years, as a rapporteur, with the sole purpose of contributing to ongoing reflections and transformations in the field of academic cooperation.

2. Geopolitics of the Gaze and Knowledge Production from the Souths

All epistemic production is situated and traversed by relations of power (Mignolo, 2003; Quijano, 2000; Rivera Cusicanqui, 2010): the alleged universality of knowledge conceals the privileged location from which it is produced: Western Europe and the United States. Haraway (1988) called this as *situated knowledges*. Quijano (2000) argues that modernity cannot be understood apart from its colonial dimension, which established racialized and territorialized epistemic hierarchies; Castro-Gómez (2005) describes this **logic** as the hybris of the zero point; while Mignolo (2003) develops the concepts of the geo- and body-politics of knowledge. Thinking from Latin America therefore implies decentering North-centric epistemologies and opening space for a pluriversity of knowledges (Pedro-Carañana et al., 2024).

Lander (2000) demonstrates how sectors of Latin American social sciences, by naturalizing Eurocentric matrices, contribute to rendering Southern knowledges invisible, echoing Fals Borda's (1987) critique of intellectual colonialism. In response Santos (2019) proposes the epistemologies of the South and an ecology of knowledges as alternatives against epistemicide.

From the Caribbean, thinkers such as Wynter (2003), Césaire (1955/2006), Fanon (1961/1983), and Glissant (1996/2002) challenge the Western conception of an universal Man. Decolonial feminist scholars further show that coloniality also operates as a gender system. Lugones (2008) develops the concept of the coloniality of gender, while Espinosa Miñoso et al. (2014) and Curiel (2007) critique the limits of white feminism. Gonzalez (1988) introduces the concept of amefricanity, and Segato (2016) shows how patriarchy and coloniality intertwine in structures of violence.

Indigenous epistemologies further expand this horizon: Rivera Cusicanqui (2010) proposes the category *ch'ixi*; Cabnal (2010) articulates the notion of territory-body-land; Paredes (2008) from Aymara communitarian feminism, critiques patriarchal structures embedded in colonial modernity. These voices should not be understood merely as cultural expressions or identity-based claims, but as forms of theoretical and political knowledge production (Walsh, 2013).

Within the field of academic cooperation, North–South frequently reproduce these asymmetries: theoretical frameworks, methodologies, and research agendas have been defined from the North (Connell, 2007), while systems of indexing and academic validation segment scientific circulation and reinforce existing centers of epistemic authority (Beigel, 2014).

3. Cognitive and Epistemic Justice in Cooperation

Thinking cooperation through cognitive and epistemic justices therefore shifts the classical question of internationalization toward another: what knowledges circulate, who defines their value, from which territories are problems formulated, and under what conditions does recognition take place? Cooperation among LAC, Africa, Asia, Europe, and the United States is not merely exchange: it is a field traversed by historical relations of power and disputes over intellectual authority (Mignolo, 2010). Cognitive justice (Santos, 2019; Visvanathan, 2009) posits that different forms of knowledge have the right to coexist under conditions of reciprocity and intercultural translation, in opposition to epistemicide. Epistemic justice (Fricker, 2007; Medina, 2013) analyzes how subjects -women, racialized people, Indigenous and Afrodescendant communities- are excluded as legitimate producers of knowledge. The two converge: the former interrogates hierarchies between traditions; the latter, hierarchies among subjects. Decolonial pedagogies articulate both **dimensions** through concrete practices (Walsh, 2013).

To cooperate, therefore, is not to transfer capacities from consolidated centers toward deficient peripheries: it is to build conditions for multiple rationalities to participate in defining agendas, methods, and criteria of validity. This wager has roots in participatory action research (PAR) (Fals Borda, 1987) and popular education (Freire, 1970). LAC has produced its own critical traditions -dependency theory, critical pedagogy, philosophy of liberation, decolonial thought, communitarian feminisms, political ecology, Afro-Caribbean thought. Yet the international circulation of knowledge remains structured by the supremacy of English, the concentration of academic capital, and indexing systems that reward dominant circuits (Beigel, 2014; Invernizzi, 2022). North-South projects reproduce an international division of intellectual labor: the North formulates theory; the South provides field and data (Connell, 2007). A just cooperation acknowledges that territory is a locus of enunciation, and that problems are defined by concrete historical tensions -inequality, coloniality, extractivism, racism, political violence, ecological crisis, and disputes over democracy (Quijano, 2000; Segato, 2016). For whom is knowledge produced, and which historical project does it serve? Vessuri (2004) shows that the problem is not whether to cooperate with Europe or the United States, but to do so from conditions of autonomy, symmetry, and recognition of the South's theoretical capacities. This implies diversifying languages of publication, recognizing regional journals, promoting equitable authorships, and revising who appears as first author, which institutions administer the funds, and which knowledges are rendered invisible. A decolonial cooperation moves from assistance to co-production, from

subordinated exchange to plural epistemic communities (Haraway, 1988; Pedro-Carañana et al., 2024; Vega-Casanova et al., 2023).

4. From "the Global South" to "the Souths"

Sustaining the Global South as a homogeneous bloc erases historical, cultural, and epistemic differences among regions and communities. A situated reflection from LAC therefore leads to a shift toward the notion of the Souths, in the plural, as a recognition of the heterogeneity of subalternized experiences (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2010). The Hispano-Lusitanian colonial experience is not equivalent to British colonization in Asia, nor to African postcolonial trajectories, nor to Caribbean configurations marked by the plantation, slavery, and diaspora (Glissant, 1996/2002; Wynter, 2003). LAC itself contains multiple Souths -the Andean world, the insular Caribbean, extractive Amazonian economies, metropolitan peripheries, rural women, Afrodescendant communities, Indigenous peoples- each shaping specific ways of producing knowledge (Escobar, 2014).

Moving from "the South" to "the Souths" implies abandoning the pretension of representing it as a unity and promoting situated, interregional, and translocal dialogues: epistemological solidarity is built on the recognition of difference. There are also Souths within the North (Tlostanova & Mignolo, 2012); African (Mbembe, 2017; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018) and Asian (Chakrabarty, 2000; Chen, 2010) trajectories demand analytical pluralization.

5. Challenges of Academic Interinstitutionality

From this perspective, interinstitutionality in LAC should not be understood merely as a functional articulation among organizations, but rather as a field of epistemic and political dispute mediated by historical asymmetries. Networks such as CLACSO, ALAS, and UDUALC have functioned as critical platforms (Suasnábar, 2018), coexisting with disciplinary associations and centers in a fragmented ecosystem. Relations with Northern institutions, mediated by external funding, often reproduce dependency and epistemic subordination.

Mapping these dynamics must also incorporate non-hegemonic spaces: social organizations, territorial collectives, Indigenous and Afrodescendant communities, women's organizations, and peasant networks. Experiences such as the Amawtay Wasi Intercultural University, the CRIC's UAIIN, or the Indigenous universities in Mexico (Mato, 2008) dispute the criteria of validation of legitimate knowledge.

A horizontal interinstitutionality requires addressing at least three challenges. First, it demands strengthening South–South networks with agendas defined from territorial realities, as well as reinforcing regional circuits of publication and funding. Platforms such as Latindex, SciELO, Redalyc, and AmeliCA advance in this direction despite the tension with international bibliometric systems (Vessuri et al., 2014). Second, it requires redefining cooperation with the North on the basis of reciprocity and co-determination: jointly defining problems, methodologies, and outputs, recognizing local authorships and knowledges. Third, it calls for institutionalizing practices of dialogue of knowledges through hybrid spaces -open seminars, territorial laboratories, participatory observatories- anchoring research within territorial dynamics (Fals Borda, 1987; Vega-Casanova, 2021). The Northern critique of hegemonic internationalization (Bhambra et al., 2018; Stein, 2019), pan-African networks such as CODESRIA (Hountondji, 2009; Mama, 2011), and inter-Asian articulations (Chen, 2010) offer important references of cognitive sovereignty.

6. Interdisciplinarity and Inter-associative Dialogue

Interdisciplinarity, read through the geopolitics of the gaze, should not be assumed as a mere integration of methods but as a political practice of articulating knowledges from diverse loci of enunciation. The modern disciplinary division was a historical product of the European nation-state; Morin (1994) proposed complex thinking; Leff (2004) articulated an environmental rationality; decolonial pedagogies (Walsh, 2013) and the philosophy of liberation (Dussel, 1996) demand the recognition of an other thinking from subalternity.

ALAIC, CLACSO, FLACSO, and ALAS have opened interdisciplinary spaces, although many dialogues remain segmented. It is necessary to reconfigure inter-associative spaces around transversal thematic agendas -inequality, extractivism, migrations, ecological crisis, gender-based violence, structural racism- moving from disciplinary congresses to platforms articulated by problems; to generate co-produced theoretical-methodological frameworks; to build horizontal governance with effective representation of women, Indigenous peoples, Afrodescendants, and dissident identities; and to consolidate alternative circuits of circulation that recognize collective and transdisciplinary production.

Interdisciplinarity must be articulated with the dialogue of extra-academic knowledges, recognizing women's organizations, Indigenous movements, Afrodescendant communities, and peasant organizations as producers of rigorous knowledge (Cabnal, 2010; Paredes, 2008). Without questioning inherited disciplinary privileges, interdisciplinarity risks merely reproducing academic technocracy (Bhambra et al., 2018).

7. Intersectorality and The Social Sciences

Intersectorality, should likewise not be assumed merely as a functional arrangement among academia, the state, and civil society. Rather, it constitutes a political-epistemic device for reconfiguring who produces knowledge, for whom, and to what ends. In contexts where inequalities are territorialized (Quijano, 2000; Segato, 2016), articulation among academic organizations, public bodies, social organizations, and cooperation agencies is a condition for socially pertinent knowledge.

Organizations such as Calandria, ALER, AMARC, and CIESPAL have developed participatory communication and popular education from the territories. Social organizations are not recipients but epistemic actors with interpretive capacity (Cabnal, 2010; Walsh, 2013). From this perspective, cooperation should institutionalize spaces of co-production - social observatories, territorial laboratories, public policy roundtables, PAR- where universities, social organizations, and state agencies converge (Fals Borda, 1987; Freire, 1970); it should also seek to influence public policies through intersectoral networks; and problematize the role of international bodies -the United Nations, Northern agencies, multilateral banks, foundations- that can facilitate resources but also impose external agendas. Northern notions -engaged scholarship, community-based participatory research- can operate as devices of symbolic extraction if they do not transfer real power to local actors (Stein, 2019).

8. Academic Cooperation in Authoritarian Contexts and Anti-rights Movements

In authoritarian regimes and anti-rights movements, academic cooperation acquires strategic centrality. Censorship, the persecution of researchers, attacks on universities, and the delegitimization of scientific knowledge configure vulnerable scenarios for critical production (Brown, 2019; Stanley, 2018). LAC has a dense memory: the Southern Cone dictatorships produced academic exiles and, paradoxically, drove the consolidation of networks such as CLACSO and FLACSO (Suasnábar, 2018). That memory is relevant today in the face of democratic regressions and campaigns articulated with anti-feminist, anti-rights, and anti-Indigenous discourses (Corrêa et al., 2018; Segato, 2016). South-South networks make it possible to generate mechanisms of protection, visibility, and alternative circulation; the defense of an ecology of knowledges is central where epistemic plurality is threatened (Pedro-Carañana et al., 2024; Vega-Casanova et al., 2023). Cooperation articulated with social movements that defend human rights -feminist, Indigenous (Cabnal, 2010), Afrodescendant (Curiel, 2007), and LGBTIQ+- has shown that defending rights

demands an epistemic transformation. Mbembe (2017) shows how anti-Black thought structures forms of political violence.

9. South–South Cooperation, Funding, and Power Relations

South–South cooperation challenges the historical asymmetries in knowledge production. South–South articulations enable the construction of agendas anchored in shared experiences of coloniality, inequality, and dependency, and the creation of their own platforms of publication, evaluation, and funding (CLACSO, Latindex, Redalyc, SciELO, AmeliCA). This wager connects with pan-Latin Americanist and pan-Africanist traditions, from Martí (1891/2005) to Césaire (1955/2006) and Fanon (1961/1983), extended in amefricanity (Gonzalez, 1988) and communitarian feminisms (Cabnal, 2010; Paredes, 2008). Mahler (2018) reconstructs their tricontinental genealogy; from Africa, Hountondji (2009), Mbembe (2017), and Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) propose inter-African cooperation triangulated with Latin America; Chen (2010) proposes inter-Asian articulations connected with Latin American ones.

A central challenge is the tension between situated agendas and funding regimes. Investment in science and technology in LAC is limited and unstable (Vessuri, 2004), and external sources impose thematic, methodological, and evaluative frameworks not always connected to territorial priorities. The dilemma is how to participate in global circuits without reproducing epistemic subordination or disconnecting research from local realities. It is necessary to strengthen public policies that recognize research as a strategic good and to diversify sources through intersectoral alliances. Indeed, inequalities among institutions are reproduced within regional networks (Beigel, 2014). Specific attention should be paid to women researchers, LGBTIQ+ people, and Indigenous and Afrodescendant researchers (Espinosa Miñoso et al., 2014). Any policy with a vocation for cognitive and epistemic justice must incorporate affirmative measures and care arrangements (Fricker, 2007; Medina, 2013), and rethink academic timeframes, evaluation criteria, and forms of communication (Vessuri et al., 2014). The major Northern schemes -Horizon Europe, NSF, philanthropic foundations- may impose agendas that erode Southern autonomy (Bhambra et al., 2018; Stein, 2019).

In this context, academic associations are not neutral spaces: they reproduce hierarchies linked to academic capital, institutional affiliation, language, gender, race, and geopolitical location. The coloniality of power is reconfigured at regional and institutional scales, generating centers and peripheries within these associations themselves. Women -

particularly Black, Indigenous, lesbian, and trans women- face structural barriers, see their production rendered invisible, and are cited less frequently (Curiel, 2007; Gonzalez, 1988). Communitarian pedagogies (Cabnal, 2010; Paredes, 2008) call for transforming everyday practices, spaces of care, and evaluation regimes. Transforming the associations requires democratizing structures, diversifying leaderships, including non-hegemonic trajectories, and opening spaces for situated epistemologies (Walsh, 2013), in line with Mignolo's (2010) epistemic disobedience. Beyond this, it is a matter of ensuring that academic associations - especially in the social sciences- do not reproduce the practices of clientelism, subordination, exclusion, and even corruption that they precisely criticize in the contexts in which they operate.

10. By Way of Synthesis

Academic cooperation, read through the *geopolitics of the gaze*, is a political-epistemic field where meanings, legitimacies, and forms of power in the global production of knowledge are disputed. To cooperate is not only to collaborate: it is to intervene in the definition of which knowledges are valid, who produces them, and from where they are enunciated. The interinstitutional, interdisciplinary, and intersectoral dimensions are traversed by the coloniality of power, the geopolitics of knowledge, and epistemicide; feminist and decolonial critiques, Afro-Caribbean thought, and popular pedagogies show how these structures intertwine with patriarchy and racism. The reading is enriched by contributions from the North (Bhambra et al., 2018; Fricker, 2007; Mahler, 2018; Medina, 2013; Stein, 2019), from Africa (Hountondji, 2009; Mbembe, 2017; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018), and from Asia (Chakrabarty, 2000; Chen, 2010; Spivak, 1988; Visvanathan, 2009). In contexts of democratic crisis, cooperation gains centrality in defending plurality and producing critical knowledge. South-South cooperation, in the plural, and reflection on power relations within the field are fundamental for greater epistemic autonomy. The substantive incorporation of the knowledges of women, Indigenous peoples, Afrodescendant communities, and popular organizations is a condition -not a complement- of a decolonial cooperation. To think from the Souths is a political wager for a social science capable of engaging the historical struggles of peoples for democracy, equity, and dignity.

It is worth noting that progress has been made in recent years in the following areas: 1) academic conferences involving representatives from social organizations and social movements (4th ALAIC Andean Regional Seminar, 2025); 2) meetings of social organizations involving academia and the government (National Conference on Community,

Indigenous, and Afro-Mexican Media); 3) meetings between cooperation organizations, donors, academia, and social organizations (SBCC Summits—though still facing many challenges in achieving greater inclusion), 4) meetings involving diverse actors to address territorial issues, community media and expressions, local culture, etc. in different countries and leveraging digital platforms, 5) publications that highlight specific actors within fields of knowledge production (the “Women in Communication” series by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung).

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