

EPISTEMOLOGICAL MANIFEST: FOR A COUNTER-HEGEMONIC WRITING MANIFESTO EPISTEMOLÓGICO: POR UMA ESCRITA CONTRA-HEGEMÔNICA BEATRIZ SIMÕES, CRISTINA DE ARAUJO

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Abstract

The scenario of the production of scientific knowledge and research in the social sciences of yesterday and today was/is shaped by hegemonic values such as universality, impartiality and neutrality. In the opposite direction, also in the past and today, we find, among so many resistant voices, those belonging to feminist epistemologists, who have sought to denounce traditional academic work and propose, in its place, a theoretical contribution of a revolutionary nature, that raises criticism and the researcher's political and ethical position. To contribute and stimulate criticism of the hegemonic thinking that circulates in the field of architecture and urbanism, the purpose of this paper is to elaborate an analytical approach to one of the influences of counter-hegemonic research: feminist epistemology. The goal is also to collaborate in the review of some of the existing analytical categories and to rethink delimitations of methods, procedures and the role of the researcher, with a view to the possibility of a more democratic way of thinking. Therefore, the proposed methodological path was the elaboration of a survey of bibliographical references which sought to address the themes of the “decolonial turn” and feminist epistemologies. As a result, we present a manifest that propagates another project of production of scientific knowledge, constituting itself as a methodological-political-ethical project, which has methodological tools that enable the construction of situated, partial, responsible knowledge and, therefore, compromised both politically and ethically.

Keywords: Feminist Epistemologies, Production of Scientific Knowledge, Methodological-political-ethical Project, Feminist Writing

1 Introduction: Where do We Start from

Nowadays, the hegemonic values that stand out in the (de)formation of Brazilian cities have been imposed by capitalism, colonialism, patriarchy (Santos, 2018), and slavery. Faced with this complex panorama of social relations, which “continue to operate and manifest themselves in their three canonical forms: exploitation, domination and oppression” (Kergoat, 2010, p. 95), the most varied clashes arise as resistance. In this way, we are interested in contributing to the debate of discussions that seek to refute hegemonic thinking in the disciplinary field of architecture and urbanism, in which the logic determined by dominant groups has influenced the standardization and reproduction of “interests, concerns, predilections, neuroses, prejudices, social institutions, and social categories” (Oyěwùmí, 2002, p. 1).

This is, according to sociologist Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí (2002, p. 1), one of the principles of modernity, which implements the “Euro/American cultural hegemony” that contaminates the various spheres of society, exerting a greater influence “in the production of knowledge about the human behavior, history, societies and cultures” (Oyěwùmí, 2002, p. 1). Given this context, it appears on the horizon that we intend to address in this writing, what conventionally is called counter-hegemonic architectures. They are seen as a set of contesting positions, which aim to question the naturalized and reproduced ideas, values, and beliefs and launch themselves into proposing new possible ways of producing current architecture and urbanism.

Given the above, the outline proposed here will cover decolonial feminist insurgencies, as they fall within the theme of counter-hegemonic architectures when they seek to challenge the dominant praxis both in the theoretical and empirical fields. In this, the researchers are dedicated to providing the necessary ammunition to contribute to militancy for access, to not only countless rights, but to the city for all. Whereas in the former, they help in the struggle waged in the sphere of scientific knowledge production, subject to the dominant notions of universality, neutrality, and objectivity (Sardenberg, 2001). Therefore, with a background of the flags that have been defended by decolonial feminists where academic research is concerned, this article aims to elaborate an analytical approach to one of the counter-hegemonic references: feminist epistemology.

This approximation is proposed to collaborate in the review of some of the existing analytical categories in addition to rethinking delimitations of methods, procedures, and the role of the researcher, with a view to the possibility of a more democratic, engaging, and therefore revolutionary process. In terms of a methodological path, in the first moment we will link to the movement of the “decolonial turn”, which defends the resistance in the “theoretical and practical, political and epistemological instances to the logic of modernity/coloniality” (Ballestrin, 2013, p. 105, our translation). The unfolding of this

posture led to the choice of feminist epistemology as a research itinerary, since this is “one of the first forms of production of scientific knowledge that called into question the hegemonic position of knowledge produced in the bourgeois and western key” (Matos, 2008, p. 346, our translation).

Therefore, it is up to us to position our writing as a manifesto-article, because, in the topics that follow, we will seek: a) not only to denounce the structures of domination active in the production of scientific knowledge (in the first item); but, above all, b) to propose other ways of acting as researchers, sharing a methodological-political-ethical project as a product to make research possible. In the third and final topic, we intend to demonstrate how far we can go when we follow the itinerary proposed by feminist epistemologists.

2 Feminist Epistemology, a (brief) Theoretical Review

The exposed scenario portrays the reality found (mostly) in the field of knowledge production and research in the social sciences of yesterday and today. This scenario where the narrator hides behind a disembodied third person, almost as if he were not a body traversed by several social “markers of difference”¹ (Collins, 1997, p. 378), by their specific contexts, ideologies, and perspectives. Assuming himself universal in this way, he believes to be capable of dealing with questions about each individual. However, still in a not-so-distant yesterday, a possible alternative for the construction of scientific knowledge emerged and began to gain strength in the academic environment, especially in philosophy and its related areas. This other way has been developed by feminists in its most varied strands, as a strategy of resistance to the traditional way of doing science. In it, “the connections and intersections between values, politics, science, and knowledge are emphasized [...], reiterating the impossibility of neutrality and impartiality of being part of the requirements of scientific knowledge” (Neves; Nogueira, 2004, p. 126, our translation).

For sociologist Priscila Williams (2017, p. 7, our translation), feminist epistemologists have sought to develop a “more accessible science, capable of incorporating more groups, starting to consider the particularities, the paradoxes, the contingencies that are part of the large and plural group human”. And she goes on to state that this elaboration goes through the proposition of criticisms of the research, its objectives and justifications, its methods and procedures (Williams, 2017), as well as the review of some key concepts, among them:

'knowledge', 'knowing subject', 'objectivity', 'rationality', 'justification', 'scientific methodology', 'generality', and 'universalization', as flawed and biased concepts, because of a normative, practical, and ideological that recognizes, explains and endorses the partiality and contextuality of our knowledge processes (Sattler, 2019, p. 6, our translation).

In each of their clashes and new propositions, we witness the richness of feminist epistemologies indicated by Ana Garay, Lupicínio Íñiguez, and Luz Martínez (2001 cited in Neves and Nogueira, 2004, p.127, our translation), in their “clear social critical position” and in its commitment to the transformation of social reality (Williams, 2017). Therefore, it is necessary to note that due to its feminist bias, gender plays a central role in approaching this reality, since “It identifies how dominant conceptions and practices of knowledge attribution, acquisition, and justification disadvantage women and other subordinated groups, and strives to reform them to serve the interests” (Anderson, 2020, p. 1).

At the same time, the feminist strands with which we feel identified and, therefore, defend in this manifesto-article, are in line with Linda M. Alcoff and Elizabeth Potter (1993, p. 3), when they conceive what:

[...] cognitive authority is usually associated with a cluster of markings that involve not only gender but also race, class, sexuality, culture, and age. Moreover, developments in feminist theory have demonstrated that gender as a category of analysis cannot be abstracted from a particular context while other factors are held stable; gender can never be observed as a “pure” or solitary influence. Gender identity cannot be adequately understood—or even perceived—except as a component of

¹ An expression that encompasses social categories, such as gender, social class, and race/ethnicity, among others, to assume a critical stance towards such social constructions imposed by the hegemonic patriarchal, capitalist, and racist social structure.

complex interrelationships with other systems of identification and hierarchy (Alcoff; Potter, 1993, p. 3).

With this, we understand that the epistemology that seeks to be developed by a feminist bias is committed to combating hegemonic values, as well as the dominations and exploitations of their structures. To this end, it strives to build a liberating project, which has the emancipatory objective of unmaking “the web of oppression and reweav[ing] the web of life” (Alcoff; Potter, 1993, p. 4) and expanding “democracy in the production of knowledge” (Alcoff; Potter, 1993, p. 13).

3 Feminist Epistemologies as a Methodological-political-ethical Project

By understanding where feminist epistemologies and their goals come from, we delineate that we are dealing with a self-reflective proposal of knowledge production. Being, therefore, able to “reveal their own social grounds, a revelation made all the more urgent because academic feminists are in a contradictory social position, seeking fundamental changes in the very institutions that empower us to speak and work” (Alcoff and Potter, 1993, p. 14, our translation). In this way, feminist epistemologists intend to compose something like a methodological-political-ethical project, with its new approaches, tools, and methods, as its other possibilities of propositions and positions. In this context, theorist bell hooks² (1994, p. 67) reaffirms that it is necessary to theorize about reality to try to “to understand both the nature of our contemporary predicament and the means by which we might collectively engage in resistance that would transform our current reality”.³

What other way to implement such a suggestion, if not by committing ourselves to a “critical-committed perspective” (Silva, 2018, p. 17, our translation), positioning ourselves against the “ideological doctrines of disembodied scientific objectivity” (which accentuate power hierarchies) and defending, contrary to what is standardized in the academy, “embodied objectivity” (Haraway, 1988, p. 581)? According to the author, this objectivity is characterized as feminist by establishing the real limits found and, therefore, the partiality, which holds responsible those who produce knowledge considered scientific.

In this sense, when seeking feminist writing, in relation to being politically and ethically responsible for what is produced, it is necessary to agree with Donna Haraway, when she states:

[...] The only way to find a larger vision is to be **somewhere in particular**. The science question in feminism is about objectivity as positioned rationality. Its images are not the products of escape and transcendence of limits (the view from above) but the joining of partial views and halting voices into a collective subject position that promises a vision of the means of ongoing finite embodiment, of living within limits and contradictions-of views from **somewhere** (Haraway, 1988, p. 590, emphasis added).

In this context, feminist epistemologists defend the need for those who research to define this “somewhere” from where they are located. This is assuming that the social locus is important, as it marks an ethical position that argues that the “place we occupy socially makes us have different experiences and other perspectives” (Ribeiro, 2019, p. 69, our translation). Besides this, it consequently refutes the established universality as the only possible discursive practice (Collins, 1997; Alcoff, 2016). In addition, situated knowledge seeks to go against other hegemonic canons, imposed between the lines of the disembodied third-person narrator of traditional science: neutrality and impartiality. At these points, feminist epistemologists declare that “there is no way to completely strip ourselves of our beliefs and values, even using scientific methods” (Williams, 2017, p. 6, our translation). Therefore, what we produce necessarily passes through the filters with which we look at the worlds around us.

Concurrently, situating the social position of those who narrate research is also a political act, since:

² According to Natália Silva (2018), the feminist theorist and anti-racist activist Gloria Jean Watkins is better known by her pseudonym bell hooks and chooses to write in lowercase order that her work has more evidence than her figure.

³ In the context of the author, it is about the reality of Afro-Americans and their struggles for the liberation of black women, but it fits into the scenario outlined here.

[...] announcing the place of speech means a lot in epistemological terms, because it **breaks** not only with that science that hides its narrator, but also **denounces** that this way of producing knowledge is geocentric, and was consolidated from the disqualification of other symbolic systems and knowledge production (Pelúcio, 2012, p. 398, our translation and emphasis added).

In this way, the methodological tool of embodied objectivity brings with it countless criticisms and new propositions. It helps in the positioning of those who elaborate on the research, demonstrating that “only partial perspective promises objective vision” (Haraway, 1988, p. 583). Thus, it contextualizes, situates, and limits, while responsibly committing itself to the construction of each moment of the research, recognizing it as an “instrument of power games”, and proposing “to recreate it in a more inclusive, more plural, a more democratic way” (Williams, 2017, p. 11, our translation).

Another tool that makes up feminist epistemologies in its construction as a methodological-political-ethical project, is the “instrument of permanent inquiry into the science that is produced” (Neves; Nogueira, 2004, p. 126, our translation): reflexivity. The use of this instrument demonstrates its relevance by suggesting to understand of how relationships will be built, above all, with the field and with the protagonists of research, as it proposes an “evaluation of the effects of the social and relational dimension in the production of scientific discourses” (Rodrigues, 2013, p. 64, our translation). Therefore, reflexivity contributes to the understanding of the role of the researcher, since it is an invitation to a “process of permanent questioning and analysis, through which researchers assess the impact of their values, their ideologies and their positions on the products they produce, and on the paths they choose to follow to execute them” (Neves; Nogueira, 2004, p. 126, our translation).

In this way, the reported tool presents us with another possibility of intervention with the field and its inhabitants, which can help in the establishment of relationships between the researcher and the researched. In this regard, the method of “PesquisarCOM”, by Márcia Moraes (2010), is added to what has already been discussed, which proposes that:

[...] instead of the asymmetrical distribution that separates the researcher from the researched, another distribution of the ability to act comes into play, that is, the one who is questioned, becomes active in the sense of actively participating in the intervention device (Moraes, 2010, p. 30, our translation).

This implies, therefore, assuming the construction of a research that dialogues with the other, and not for him/she (Alcoff, 1991). So, it implies being open to questioning and being questioned by the Other; to affect and be affected (Moraes, 2010; Silva, Gomes; Lopes, 2014); in creating an “additive relationship (...), taking into account the reference of the other” (Moraes, 2010, p. 28, our translation).

At the same time, we feel the need, once again, to place ourselves alongside those who share the argument that there is no neutrality in the academy (Mohanty, 2008; Hooks, 1997; Rodrigues, 2013; Nogueira, 2001; Moraes, 2010; Alcoff, 2016; Souza; Francisco, 2016; Torralba, 2018), since “what is considered to be material only truly becomes “data” after the theoretical decisions of the researchers” (Nogueira, 2001, p. 33, our translation). From this point of view, it is always necessary to keep in mind that:

[...]there is no unmediated photograph or passive camera obscura in scientific accounts of bodies and machines; there are only **highly specific visual possibilities**, each with a wonderfully detailed, active, **partial way** of organizing worlds (Haraway, 1988, p. 583, emphasis added).

Finally, at least in what is intended to be covered in this manifest of approximations and revisions, there is another proposal by feminist epistemologists for the construction of a methodological-political-ethical project: methodological plurality. This is defended by feminist researchers as “a deliberate technical option, insofar as it expresses concerns in favor of the commitment that this vision of science assumes in the face of social change” (Neves; Nogueira, 2004, p. 50, our translation). This commitment to social change is expressed in the selection of multiple methodological instruments, believing that the complexity of a phenomenon (or reality) must be approached in different ways, thus expanding the understanding and credibility of what was apprehended (Rodrigues, 2013). Therefore, there are countless possibilities for data production tools,

some of which are: documentary research, urban wanderings, field diaries, semi-structured interviews, body cartography, and participant observation.

4 Final Considerations: Where Have We Arrived

In this manifest, we sought to corroborate the debate that aims to refute the hegemonic thinking in the disciplinary field of architecture and urbanism, especially in what concerns the production of scientific knowledge. To do so, we chose to position ourselves in the “feminist border thinking” proposed by the philosopher and activist Maria Lugones (2010, p. 753), the one that seeks to recognize the colonial difference and resist its own “epistemological habit of erasing it” (Lugones, 2010, p. 753). From this feminist frontier, we pursued to contribute to the discussions on counter-hegemonic architectures, bringing feminist epistemologies to the center of the argument. This movement implies a commitment to breaking traditional paradigms, which occurs when we propose to refute the notions of “objectivity, [of universality], of truth and neutrality” (Rodrigues, 2013, p. 64, our translation), in the way they are imposed by hegemonic groups rooted in the academic environment.

Besides that, feminist epistemologies call us to the struggle for social transformation, by inviting us to establish (and get involved in) a movement in favor of defending “the production of theory as a social practice” (Hooks, 1994, p. 67). In this way, feminist epistemologists not only seek to destroy what is established, in terms of hegemonic bases and values, but also present a new possible alternative in its place. In this alternative, we saw that a powerful methodological-political-ethical project is proposed, which helps us to build research based on the tools of embodied objectivity, reflexivity, and methodological plurality.

Thus, it calls us to the responsibility for what we produce; for how we approach the field and, above all, for how we understand and delimit the relationships with the other who builds the research with us. However, it must be made clear that we did not intend to exhaust this vast and complex topic. We sought only an approximation of it and the feminist epistemologists who have been building all this theoretical support, to, in this way, present another possibility of doing research and of doing it in a non-conformist way (with what is established), questioning (of what is presented as the standard) and committed (with the creation of something new, more inclusive, democratic, and revolutionary).

Finally, we believe that perhaps a brief sharing is in order here, so that we too can leave the third person behind and put ourselves in the place where we find ourselves behind this screen. We would just like to reinforce that embracing the development of research grounded in a decolonial feminist theoretical-epistemological project is challenging in multiple spheres and levels. This occurs due to the requirement of an ethical and political position throughout the process of building scientific knowledge. Because working with the presented tools, immersed in an atmosphere of reflexivity, demands a constant movement of self-questioning about our place of speech, our reality, and our privileges. Because it evokes and brings out feelings that until then are “kept out of consciousness” (Kilomba, 2012, cited in Ribeiro, 2019, p. 79, our translation).

Although demanding, the use of the shared feminist theoretical support positions our manifest on the path of the desired revolution. In the one that does not seek to reconcile, but to break, since “we do not create a new society with comfortable discourses for those who benefit from structural privileges” (Ribeiro, 2019, p. 262, our translation). Once committed to social change, “this way of producing science [proposed here] will have an important relationship with minority groups, groups that are in a situation of social inequality, especially women” (Rodrigues, 2013, p. 64, our translation).

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