The Geopolitics of Knowledge and Academic Publishing

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| abstract

The geopolitics of knowledge describes and analyzes how states and nations, as well as geographical or linguistic-cultural areas, produce, manage, and disseminate knowledge and culture, often with the aim of maintaining or increasing their geopolitical status and thus their ability to represent, control, and shape lifestyles and worldviews. In this article, I focus in particular on the oligopolies of scientific publishing, showing how the concentration in a few hands – almost all Western and Anglophone – not only distorts the representation of research at the global level, but also constitutes a striking case of epistemic colonialism. After introducing the general context, the analysis focuses on two aspects: the geopolitical implications of the Anglophone hegemony and the open access initiatives of Latin America as a possible alternative to English-speaking oligopolies. However, open access is not sufficient to decolonize the production of knowledge. A profound rethinking of our educational systems and research infrastructures is needed to re-legitimize local knowledge, languages, and research practices, unmasking decades of cognitive subordination and reclaiming our epistemic sovereignty.

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1. The Geopolitics of Knowledge and its Indeterminate Margins

Dominance has never been achieved solely through the recognition and display of superior technological or military might. The true basis of geopolitical influence lies instead in information and education, and in cultural and scientific production (Falk, 2014; Lal, 2005; Paasi, 2015). According to Antonio Gramsci, the exercise of power is most evident in the field of cultural hegemony, where the boundaries of what may or may not be considered knowledge are decided. Gramsci conceived of this hegemony as a "pedagogical relationship" that existed «not only within a nation, between the various forces of which it is composed, but also in the international arena, between civilizations at a national or continental level» (Gramsci, 1971, p. 350).

Research into the inequalities of knowledge production and access increased throughout the 20th century, through books like *The Archaeology of Knowledge* by Michael Foucault (1972) and his writings on biopolitics, where he developed his critique of knowledge-production and the "regimes of veridiction". But it was Edward Said, following Gramsci and Foucault, in his *Orientalism*, who first began to unravel the places and

processes of certification of colonial and imperial knowledge (Said, 1978). Said eventually concluded that Orientalism – the result of the West's cultural representation of the Orient – was fundamentally a *political project*. He concluded that, if all kinds of knowledge are the result of power relationships, then cultural production and politics must be inextricably linked.

However, for the colonial powers, cultural hegemony, economic exploitation and military occupation were not enough. Frantz Fanon, in *The Wretched of the Earth* (Fanon, 2004), was the first to shed light on the colonial paradigm focused not only on the extraction and exploitation of material goods and labor, but also on the cancellation of indigenous cultures. The greatest victory of the colonizer, Fanon wrote, is not to plunder the colonized, but to convince them that their culture is inferior. Once local knowledge has become irrelevant to its owners, the colonizer will offer a "standard" that the colonized cannot fail to adopt. This colonial approach was applied uniformly to education, science, media, health, food production, etc. Western research practices and discourses, starting with the end of World War II, have been interiorized at a global level, and generations of Western-educated Global South elites that traveled to London, Paris or New York to get an education, could not avoid applying in their own countries the epistemic recipes and models learned and absorbed in the great Western knowledge factories. And step by step, year after year, Western scientific prestige became synonymic with "scientific truth".

When we are eating at KFC, or watching Hollywood movies, we are probably aware that we are consuming cultural products made in the USA. However, in the case of science (especially scientific writing and publishing) the influence of cultural hegemony is less obvious. While we readily assume the existence of something called "scientific prestige" (Origgi, 2018, pp. 213-237), evaluated through an objective process of supposedly clear and verifiable steps, the problem is that our unconditional faith in "certified science" and "certified centers of knowledge", namely Western (especially American and British) universities, tends to blind us to the political, economic and cultural implications of these assumptions.

In a nutshell this is the theoretical framework on which I have been working over the last ten years (Fiormonte & Priego, 2016; Fiormonte, 2021a). I want to emphasize here that my twenty years' research experience in several regions of the Global South, India, Latin America and, in the last three years, Sub-Saharan Africa, opened my eyes to what had also happened in my own country, namely, a process of self-colonization and loss of cultural sovereignty that started after WWII. This is nothing new. Gramsci had already observed in "The Southern Question" that southern Italy had, in effect, been colonized by capitalists from northern Italy (Dados & Connell, 2012, p. 12)[1]. In all Europe scientific discourses, methodologies, research evaluation, teaching programs, etc. were colonized and regimented by Anglophone science, to become, as elsewhere, the "golden standard" of the epistemic canon. However, when we consider the present material and immaterial extension of knowledge colonization, does it still make sense to talk of something

1. Interestingly, the idea of exploitation of the North vs South in the last ten years was revived by both progressive and conservative political and intellectual groups (the so-called "sovereigntists" and/or "Eurosceptics"), who have accused the EU, especially Germany and France, of plundering and colonizing the Italian economy, and especially the Italian South. A detailed socio-economic account of this process, involving all the "PIIGS" countries (a derogatory term coined by *The Economist* for the economies of Portugal, Italy, Ireland, Greece and Spain), is provided by Del Monaco, who argued that «the economic austerity transformed southern Europe in a German colony» (Del Monaco, 2017, p. 67). The irony is that many far-right movements, both in Europe and the US, have been using Gramsci's concepts quite consciously, while the left has completely ignored his analysis.

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called the "Global South"? Or should we start using rather a different and perhaps more inclusive (and accurate) label? Aren't we all victims of the same epistemic violence? The Portuguese philosopher and sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos aptly suggested a metaphor of the anti-imperial "southern margins", both visible and invisible, that exist within western borders:

> The Global South is thus not a geographical concept, even though the great majority of these populations live in countries of the Southern hemisphere. The South is here rather a metaphor of the human suffering caused by capitalism and colonialism at the global level, and a metaphor as well of the resistance to overcome or minimise such suffering. It is, therefore, an anti-capitalist, anti-colonialist, and anti-imperialist South. It is a South that also exists in the global North in the form of excluded, silenced and marginalised populations, such as undocumented immigrants, the unemployed ethnic or religious minorities, and victims of sexism, homophobia and racism. (Santos, 2012, p. 51)

This South is not exclusively geographical, but "epistemic and political", and contrasts with the many "imperial Souths" scattered around the world (such as China, which has now become "the North of the South"). The real contrast and fractures are no longer based on countries or regions, but on exploitation, and the subsequent desire to build alternatives to these dominant and aggressive paradigms. In a recent contribution I hoped an alliance would form between "epistemic barbarians" (Fiormonte, 2024), or rather between the victims of the cultural and epistemic neocolonialism practiced by major digital platforms, including (as we shall see), those of scientific publishing. This is a new type of colonization that spares no one, least of all the formerly privileged societies of the West. In fact, the "State of exception" (Agamben & Attell, 2005) or endless emergency brought about by the Covid pandemic is nothing more than a violent process of self or internal colonization. No longer able to conquer external regions, the Western empire is now colonizing itself. The process of creating a third world within the first world began many years ago and today seems to be a decision as desperate as it is necessary for Western capitalism. This explains the great difficulties experienced by (not only) EU countries in developing adequate responses to this loss of cultural sovereignty, as in the case of scientific research, which has become completely anglophonized – in its objectives, methodologies, and evaluation processes. The process of self-engulfment and self-colonization is also evident in the scientific field. See, for example, the small number of open access (OA) platforms produced by public scientific institutions in European countries, unlike in Latin America (see section 4). Unfortunately, the existence of a thriving private academic and scientific publishing industry turned out to be the main reason for the drastic reduction in epistemic diversity, and thus constitutes the main obstacle to the democratization of knowledge practices (Knöchelmann, 2021; Tennant, 2020). In the next sections I will illustrate how this global epistemic colonization has developed over time, and how it is possible to create alternatives.

2. The Industry of Academic Knowledge and the Costs of (in)visibility

Obtaining funds, directing research, developing a project, writing an essay or an article, etc., are intellectual and discursive practices that have come to depend on representations and standards set by the great "knowledge

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centers" of the Anglophone West. In 1983, Eugene Garfield, the inventor of the impact factor, argued that Western journals controlled the flow of scientific communication almost as much as Western news agencies monopolized the agenda of international news (Guédon, 2008). But how did this happen?

The process of creating the scientific publishing business began in the early 1950s and continued until about the mid-1980s[2]. It was still a traditional capitalistic model, based on the large profit margins provided by subscription models. Initially, publishers competed to secure the most prestigious scientists to be included in their journals' editorial boards, and the income was ensured by sales to libraries and by public funding. This era of solid profits was dominated by major media players like Robert Maxwell, the tycoon «who turned scientific journals into a spectacular money-making machine» (Buranyi, 2017). In 1951 Maxwell founded Pergamon Press, which, just over ten years later, was publishing 150 journals. His immediate competitor, the later "giant" Elsevier at this time «had just 10 English-language journals, and it would take the company another decade to reach 50» (Buranyi, 2017).

The commercial scientific publishing model created by Maxwell would definitively transform the way science and scientists were represented, creating the system of prestige and power hierarchies of the various journals, by linking success, career and visibility to the "quality" of a particular publication. It was not always so: only a few years ago, scientists were not really tied to the place of publication[3]: content and container were independent entities, and the symbolic capital, to quote Bourdieu (1988, pp. 73-77), resided mainly in the first and much less in the second. But gradually, with the expansion and micro-fragmentation of disciplinary fields, originality, legitimacy and innovation in research started to become synonymous with the title of the journal, as in the case of publications like *Nature*, *Science*, *Cell*, etc., which are still paradigms of scientific prestige. Academic value had undergone a shift, which would ensure a loss of control on the part of its former owners, the researchers and scientists, who, by agreeing to outsource the results of their work to external private entities, would then have to accept blackmail and diktats, from the impact factor to the question of ranking and evaluation.

With digitalization and the spread of the Internet, commercial publishing began a new cycle of even more radical transformations. In a few years the already very profitable business became the goose that laid the golden eggs. Suffice it to say that in the ranking of the world's largest publishers, produced every year by Publishers' Weekly, the first four groups are all scientific-professional publishers[4] who today have profit margins in the order of 30% per year[5]. Publishers, who already did not pay for the labor, stopped selling journals (in paper or electronic format), and instead offered only access to them. This

2. «During the early Cold War, academic publishing became a highly profitable industry. The international expansion of research, coupled with growth of the university sector and relatively generous funding in the UK (and the USA), created a context in which academic publishing could be transformed from something needing support into a way of generating income» (Fyfe et al., 2017, p. 2).

3. As Bourdieu noted, the case is different for social scientists and humanists who are more attached to the monograph and thus to the prestige of the publisher (Bourdieu, 1988, pp. 82-83). However, Bourdieu was analyzing data from the 1960s. For two decades now, research evaluation generally, and not only in Western countries, has favoured the journal article, effectively demolishing the last qualitative and methodological barriers between humanities and natural sciences.

4. The 2020 ranking confirmed RELX in first place, Thomson Reuters second, and Pearson third: all three are educational and/or scientific publishers. «Almost 60% of total revenue of companies on the list was generated by professional and academic publishers, while consumer and educational publishers each accounted for slightly more than 20%. The top 10 companies, which have driven most of the growth in recent years, account for 53% of all revenue of companies on the list (with the next 10 companies adding another 21%). The dominance of the top 10 publishers has been firmly in place for about a decade» (Milliot, 2020).

5. Just to have an idea, compare these data: RELX's operating profit margin in 2022 was 31.4%. Profit margin of a major multinational company like Procter & Gamble was 13.77%, while Walmart stores was 3.32% (both averaged over the last five years).

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move started progressively to divest libraries of their role and transform librarians from "custodians of knowledge" into managers of the contracts of access imposed by multinational scientific publishing companies. Libraries no longer own anything, and institutions pay a fee for "rent", which can be revoked at any time with a click, or increased from year to year at will. The big scientific publishers, mainly Elsevier, now holding the whip hand, imposed on institutions lock-in contracts and the notorious "bundle" purchases – if you need one journal you must also pay for ten others that you don't need. This situation, which is both ethically and economically unsustainable, began to provoke a series of reactions. In January 2012, a group of scientists led by the English mathematician Tim Gowers began a boycott of Elsevier, resigning from their editorial boards and refusing to write or carry out peer reviews of the group's journal articles. The protest, known as "The Cost of Knowledge" soon became viral, and while it did not prevent Elsevier from continuing its unfair practices, it had the great merit of drawing to the attention of a wider audience the problems inherent in the subscription model (Monbiot, 2011), especially the oligopolistic practices of the so-called "big five": RELX (formerly Reed-Elsevier), Springer, Wiley-Blackwell, Sage and Taylor & Francis. While the Cost of Knowledge manifesto collected more than twenty thousand signatures[6], academic institutions made their own stand. Harvard, probably the richest university on the planet, announced in April 2012 that it was no longer able to pay the exorbitant costs of journal subscriptions:

> We write to communicate an untenable situation facing the Harvard Library. Many large journal publishers have made the scholarly communication environment fiscally unsustainable and academically restrictive. This situation is exacerbated by efforts of certain publishers (called "providers") to acquire, bundle, and increase the pricing on journals. Harvard's annual cost for journals from these providers now approaches $3.75M. (Gonzalez, 2012)

It was the start of a tug of war between "knowledge centers," which continues to this day, although in different forms. What is at stake is not only the millions of dollars in subscriptions, but also who has control over scientific production: the blackmailed producers or the threatened publishers? In Europe, the best-known case is that of the German network of research institutes, the Max Planck Society, which canceled its subscriptions with Elsevier in 2018 (Havergal, 2018). In 2019, the University of California, the largest public university system in the United States, also declared that it will not renew its subscriptions with Elsevier (UC Office of the President, 2019). In January 2020 it was followed by MIT, which announced that it had failed to negotiate the renewal of its agreements with the Anglo-Dutch multinational[7]. All these institutions, following a general trend, declared that they wanted to promote open access in this way, and were committed to guiding their respective academic communities towards the process of transforming scientific publishing. However, it seems that the systems of publishing and research, that is, large publishers and universities of the Global North, ultimately have very little reason to come into genuine conflict. There are various factors that make such a divorce unlikely, as can be seen in the expansion of transformative agreements (see section 4). The first factor is the interest in keeping the myth of excellence alive, where one system (a high impact journal) legitimizes and supports the other (a prestigious research center). The second

6. See http://thecostofknowledge.com/.
7. «Despite our best efforts, Elsevier was unable to present a proposal that aligned with the framework. After good faith negotiations, it became clear that Elsevier could not meet our needs, so we ended negotiations at the conclusion of our six-month extension on our contract in June 2020» (MIT Libraries, 2023).

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factor is both cultural and geopolitical in nature. The "class solidarity" and superiority complex of anglophone institutions and academic knowledge producers have been weaponized as to represent the interests of the military-financial-industrial complex to an extent that today it became difficult to distinguish "science" from the interests of its political sponsors and funders.

Before investigating the issue of open access in more detail, it should be emphasized that the issue of subscription costs is only the tip of the iceberg. In 2013, a group of Canadian researchers published a work that would become a reference point for studies on oligopolies in scientific publishing (Larivière et al., 2015). Their research, based on 45 million documents indexed in the Web of Science over the period 1973-2013, confirmed that both in the Natural and Medical Sciences and in the Social Sciences and Humanities, "five publishers account for more than half of today's published journal output." The situation in the Social Sciences is even more striking: "combined, the top three commercial publishers alone – Reed-Elsevier, Taylor & Francis and Wiley-Blackwell – represent almost 50% of all papers in 2013" (Larivière et al., 2015). Adding the other two top-publishers, Sage and Springer, raises this to 53% – which gives rise to the term the "big five".

This concentration of epistemic power has a distorting effect globally on various fronts. The first effect, as we will see in the next section, is the threat it poses to linguistic, cultural and epistemic diversity. But let's first address the issue of academic evaluation. RELX (Elsevier) and Thomson Reuters (since 2016 Clarivate Analytics) own Scopus and Web of Science (WoS) respectively. These are the platforms that generate the impact indices of scientific production, that is, they provide the altar on which all the scientific institutions in the world offer themselves for sacrifice. Researchers' careers and access to funding sources depend on the journal's impact index, which in turn has a direct impact on university rankings (Chavarro et al., 2017, pp. 1667-1669). The rankings have a similar purpose (and effect) to international bank ratings, providing an assessment based on highly questionable criteria[8]. And yet rectors and administrators of large and small universities around the globe await these "rankings" just as governments of the world wait for Moody's or Standard & Poor's verdict on sovereign debt securities every year. For this and other reasons, institutions push their researchers to publish in journals that are mostly controlled and indexed by oligopolists, who become the managers and de facto "owners" of content they did not produce. This is essentially a mechanism of procurement whereby the public good (research) is transferred to the private publisher-platforms, which indirectly evaluate its quality at the end of the process. The way in which a journal's prestige is built, and the means of evaluating the academic output of the researcher or university who produces, reflect a perverse circularity, using an algorithm that may be simplified as follows:

1. Publishers publish journals;
2. Universities buy them;
3. Journals are indexed in large databases – mostly by the same publishers who produce them: e.g. Elsevier, Thomson Reuters;
4. Universities adopt indices: Scopus = Elsevier, Web of Science WoS = formerly Thomson Reuters, now Clarivate Analytics, to evaluate their researchers, that is, themselves;
5. Researchers struggle to publish their work on indexed journals.

8. For a discussion on ranking criteria and their impact on academic institutions and scholars see Amsler & Bolsmann, 2012, Hazelkorn, 2017 and Jöns & Hoyler, 2013.

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And the cycle continues...

Large "grey" areas are excluded from this *ouroboros* (the snake that bites its own tail): entire regions, geographies and cultures whose invisibility, and therefore irrelevance, are certified by the rating/ranking system of the Scopus-WoS duopoly. These are the vital margins of knowledge that the sociologist Geoffrey Bowker spoke about twenty years ago (Bowker, 2010), and today are the protagonists of pluriversal epistemologies (Kothari et al., 2019). The South is therefore dangerous but useful, as long as it remains irrelevant: to be surrounded, exploited, perhaps used for landfill, but obviously devoid of "real" knowledge. And on the other hand it is now a problem that concerns the entire scientific community:

> WoS and Scopus are both commercial and for-profit services that, irrespective of their methods, have a fiduciary duty and accountability to their shareholders and investors – not a duty to science or to the public. The reality is that the global research community has outsourced the critical functions of acting as custodians for our scholarly ecosystem to a handful of private companies. And not just that, but organizations with an incredible track record of harm to the scholarly community. (Tennant, 2020, p. 2)

3. Whose Knowlege? The Anglophone Empire

The issue of the Scopus-WoS duopoly, and the major repercussions it has on the entire process of the production, distribution and evaluation of science, has its roots at a deeper level: the dominance of English language. In 2007 Machin and van Leeuwen, among others, highlighted the hegemonic role of English in the field of knowledge and culture:

> English is the official language of over 60 countries and 85 per cent of international organisations. [...] It is the dominant language in the areas of entertainment and information, economics and management, and science and technology. Two-thirds of the world's scientists write in English, and most journals have shifted from other languages to English. In Germany, for instance, not only 98 per cent of physicists and 81 per cent of biologists, but also 72 per cent of sociologists and 50 per cent of philosophers use English as their main working language, and even two-thirds of France's scientific publications are in English. (Machin & van Leeuwen, 2007, p. 125)

The two authors concluded: «there can be no doubt that the dominance of language is, and always has been, directly related to other forms of dominance, in the past mostly military, and now also economic and technological». Nearly two decades later, how much has the situation changed?[9] At the general level perceptions seem to have changed, and in fact many studies, initiatives and international organizations have focused on multilingualism and cultural diversity, for example UNESCO (2003; 2021) and

9. It is worth recalling an important piece of research which, over two decades ago, first identified the problem of language bias: «The United States and the United Kingdom publish more indexed journals than the rest of the world combined. Western Europe, in particular Germany and the Netherlands, also score relatively well. Most of the rest of the world then scarcely shows up in these rankings. One of the starkest contrasts is that Switzerland is represented at more than three times the size of the entire continent of Africa. The non-Western world is not only under-represented in these rankings, but also ranks poorly on average citation score measures. Despite the large number and diversity of journals in the United States and United Kingdom, those countries manage to maintain higher average impact scores than almost all other countries» (Graham et al., 2011, p. 14).

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the Helsinki Initiative on Multilingualism in Scholarly Communication (2019). According to the Task force on Supporting Multilingualism and non-English Content in Repositories, formed by COAR (Confederation of Open Access Repositories) in 2022: «After decades of policies that have directed researchers to publish in English, we are starting to see a reversal of this trend. In Europe, Asia, and many other jurisdictions, policy makers are introducing new measures that encourage researchers to publish in local and indigenous languages» (COAR, 2023, p. 3).

However, a number of studies focusing on various aspects of the global system of scientific publication, seems to show that the dominance of English has actually been consolidated (Arbuckle et al., 2024; Chavarro et al., 2017; Kiriya, 2017; Marí Sáez & Martins do Nascimento, 2021; Paasi, 2015; Snijder & Kingsley, 2024; Vera Baceta et al., 2019):

> English dominates both WoS and Scopus (92.64% of the documents indexed in Scopus are in English and this percentage is even higher in the WoS with 95.37% compared to the second language with the highest number of documents in Scopus, Chinese, with 2.76% and the second language in WoS, Spanish, with 1.26%). (Vera Baceta et al., 2019, p. 1804)

As we have seen, so long as universities and research institutions around the world continue to embrace the narrative of pseudo-internationalization – or rather Anglophone standardization – and its consequent ranking, impact factor, h-index, etc.[10] nothing will change, because the producers of "excellence", its distributors and evaluators, are actors within the same geopolitical and cultural zone. And even when they pretend to quarrel, as mentioned above, they are actually defending common interests. Geopolitical polarization, war scenarios and the difficult birth of a multipolar world are pushing the West towards a weaponization of the media and its cultural industry that goes far beyond the historical cases of the cold war between the USA and the USSR (Bennett, 2015; Saunders, 1999; Parmar, 2012). In this scenario, it is evident the power exercised by the "five eyes" military and intelligence alliance between the CANZUS countries (Canada, Australia, New Zealand, United States) plus obviously the United Kingdom (Pfluke, 2019). They form an imperial bloc unprecedented in history, both in terms of geographical extension as well as linguistic-cultural unity. Anglophony has been a geopolitical, cultural and ideological project at least since 1943, when Winston Churchill pronounced at Harvard University is famous speech on Anglo-American Unity[11]. Science, media and education systems enter this big game by the front door and are becoming increasingly militarized, as can be seen during the pandemic with the repression of dissent, the platformization of education (Fiormonte, 2021b) and finally the vaccine war, played out through competing claims by the great pharmaceutical superpowers (China, India, United States, Russia and Europe [Malacalza & Fagaburu, 2022; Mlambo & Mlambo, 2022; Vankovska, 2021]).

More than twenty-five years ago, Robert Phillipson coined the term "linguistic imperialism," adding "linguicism" to the other forms of discrimination:

10. «Indeed, in the case of predominantly Anglophone universities, the domination of Western epistemic perspectives both affirms and perpetuates a monolingual (English) and monocultural (Eurocentric) model of knowledge production that ignores any divergent perspectives. [...] it has become evident that traditional models of knowledge transmission, production and dissemination (re)produced by universities around the world, and particularly those in influential, privileged positions such as the ones in predominantly Anglophone countries, are no longer sustainable» (Díaz, 2018, pp. 23, 32).

11. «It would certainly be a grand convenience for us all to be able to move freely about the world [...] and be able to find everywhere a medium, albeit primitive, of intercourse and understanding. Might it not also be an advantage to many races, and an aid to the building-up of our new structure for preserving peace? [...] Such plans offer far better prizes than taking away other people's provinces or lands or grinding them down in exploitation. The empires of the future are the empires of the mind» (Churchill, 1943).

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> Just as racism studies were revitalised in the 1970s by Black scholars speaking from a Black perspective, linguicism studies attempt to put the sociology of language and education into a form which furthers scrutiny of how language contributes to unequal access to societal power and how linguistic hierarchies operate and are legitimated. Drawing on the perspectives of minorities, of speakers of dominated languages, is important, since somehow speakers of dominant languages such as English and French tend to see the expanded use of their languages as unproblematical [...]. 'Linguistic imperialism' is shorthand for a multitude of activities, ideologies, and structural relationships. Linguistic imperialism takes place within an overarching structure of asymmetrical North/South relations, where language interlocks with other dimensions, cultural (particularly in education, science, and the media), economic and political. (Phillipson, 1997, p. 239)

Language imperialism, therefore, plays a deeper and more structural role in grounding epistemic injustices. The linguistic and rhetorical-discursive advantages of the Global Anglophone North (GAN) in the creation of academic knowledge have been investigated in the pioneering work of Suresh Canagarajah (2002). The questions he raised help summarize the main points of the problem: What role does writing play in peripheral academic communities? What kind of challenges in knowledge representation do they face when adopting the epistemological standards and conventions of the "center"? And above all, how are the experiences and knowledge of these communities shaped and reformulated by this process? Although Canagarajah's approach is sometimes based on a vision of a dichotomous center/periphery model, which, following China's intrusion into the "market" of scientific production (MoChridhe, 2020; Nature Editorial, 2020; Tollefson, 2018; Veugelers, 2017)[12], is now weakening, we know that in the academic communities of ex-colonial countries there is a kind of intellectual dependency that has its roots in the education system[13]:

> Periphery students are taught to be consumers of center knowledge rather than producers of knowledge. Often this attitude of dependency develops very early in a periphery subject's educational life ... Furthermore, Western-based (nonindigenous) literacy practices exacerbate this intellectual dependency ... From the above perspective it is easy to understand the feeling of many that the democratization of academic literacy should start in schools. (Canagarajah, 2002, pp. 283-284)

Canagarajah's perspective repeats the basic question: why is there a "necessary" and inextricable relationship between international visibility, language of publication and quality of research? It is impossible to disentangle these three elements: excel-

12. China seems to be the only conscious player (besides the Anglophones) in the geopolitics of knowledge dimension. After it had surpassed the United States in 2018 in the number of published STEM articles (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics), in 2020 the Chinese government announced a reform of the research evaluation system (and therefore of universities) that aims to curb the Anglophone power over science: «Elaborating the academic reform that President Xi has pursued since 2016, they provide the first detailed steps for dramatically reducing the role of the Science Citation Index (SCI) in evaluating Chinese research. For twenty years, the SCI – a prestige listing of "high impact" scientific journals – controlled the careers of Chinese researchers. It and various derived indices are commonly used for university rankings and research evaluation» (MoChridhe, 2020).

13. Among the many research studies that show and expose the influence of the West on the educational systems of the former colonies and the global South in general, I find particularly effective the accounts of two Iranian scholars who trace their personal and professional experiences (Doostdar, 2012) and more specifically (Rostampour, 2012) the Western bias in the Arabic language and literature textbooks: «While studying contemporary Arabic literature, I discovered that the majority of the resources were written by Orientalists and graduates from Western universities who attempted to introduce events like Napoleon Bonaparte's invasion of Egypt as the onset of contemporary Arab culture. (...) Throughout this process, Western figures became the new pioneers of contemporary Arabic literature» (Rostampour, 2012, pp. 263, 265).

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lence of places, means of publication (journals, platforms, etc.) and the English language[14], because they are the key pillars of the Western hegemony of Anglophone-led science. The only possible antidote to this Trimurti must be a "cognitive" decolonization in which, as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o wrote, the richness of our local languages represents a bulwark of resistance, and at the same time the source of our renewed creativity:

> It is an ever-continuing struggle to seize back their creative initiative in history through a real control of all the means of communal self-definition in time and space. The choice of language and the use to which language is put is central to a people's definition of themselves in relation to their natural and social environment, indeed in relation to the entire universe. (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1986, p. 4)

4. Is Open Access the Solution to Knowledge Decolonization?

In recent years, the countries of the Global South (or former South, such as China), have established a series of initiatives and projects to combat publishing oligopolies and their harmful effects on local scientific production, on the evaluation of researchers, and, in general, on the epistemic sovereignty of countries outside the magic circle of CANZUS[15]. In this area, the systems and infrastructures created in Latin America to publish research produced by their public institutions on OA platforms are particularly noteworthy. Latin America has also moved at a legislative and regulatory level[16] to promote open access to its scientific production for various reasons (Alperin et al., 2014; De Filippo & D'Onofrio, 2019; Ramírez & Samoilovich, 2021), three of which are worth special mention:

1. the cultural richness of the continent – according to the uniRank database in 2023 there are currently 1,869 officially recognized higher-education institutions in Latin America[17];
2. the two main languages, Spanish and Portuguese, are mutually intelligible, especially at the level of scientific-academic texts, which increases possibilities for collaboration, exchange and mutual support;

14. A non-negligible factor in this context is the so-called "native speakerism," a supremacist ideology that permeates the TESOL market globally. It is a "neo-racist ubiquitous belief" establishing that «native speakers are superior teachers that possess the ideal cultural background to deliver language teaching materials. Native speakerism is argued to be especially problematic because it privileges the idealized language standards of so-called Western cultures over the local needs of students» (Jenks & Won Lee, 2019, p. 3).

15. It is interesting to reflect on the OA trends in the BRICS countries: «Brazil has published the highest number of OA publications (21%) regarding its total Publications. China has the highest contribution (65%) in OA publications in comparison to other BRICS countries. Although, there has been a constant growth in OA publications in BRICS countries from 66,481 in 2011 to 280,150 in 2020. China has the highest publications in all open access models» (Verma & Sonkar, 2021, p. 2).

16. «The documentary analysis carried out, based on official bodies shows that in Latin America different public initiatives in the field of open science policies have been identified for a little more than a decade. According to documentary material collected from National Science and Technology Agencies, only 6 of the 20 countries are the most active in this field: in alphabetical order, these are Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico and Peru. Many of the actions detected are linked to the development of infrastructures for open access to publications, as in the case of Brazil with the Brazilian Portal for Open Access for Scientific Information (OASISBR), the initial version of which was launched in 2007» (De Filippo & D'Onofrio 2019, p. 36; our translation).

17. The number of universities (https://www.4icu.org/Latin-America/) in Latin America should be related to a population of 664,155,299 (https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/). The comparison with Africa gives an idea of the difference in "epistemic power" between the two continents. Africa has a population that is almost three times the size of Latin America (1,495,434,668 based on the latest United Nations estimates: https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/africa-population/), but according to the uniRank database in 2023 there are currently only 1,279 officially recognized higher-education institutions.

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3. for the vast majority of public research institutions in Latin America it would be impossible to sustain the prohibitive costs of subscriptions to the journals of the oligopolistic scientific publishing cartels of the GAN. To these reasons, or even advantages, may be added the historical resistance of Latin America to the political-cultural interference of its ponderous "neighbor" North America (Calandra, 2011).

But let us briefly review the main non-commercial projects and platforms for publishing and disseminating scientific research in Latin America and in the Hispanic world in general. Although there is some overlap between the resources they index and distribute, these are:

- **Latindex**. A network of 24 academic institutions from Latin America, the Caribbean, Spain and Portugal, which gather and disseminate information about the scientific journals published in the region. Created in 1997, it is currently hosted by the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM), and gives access to more than 27,000 journals, both online and in print.
- **SciELO** (Scientific Electronic Library Online)[18]. It defines itself as «a program to support open access research communication», devoted to the «promotion, and enhancement of journals published by universities, scientific societies, and professional associations, primarily operated in non-profit contexts». Initially developed in Brazil in 1997, the SciELO platform publishes and indexes full-text articles from more than 1,600 academic journals from sixteen countries: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Ecuador, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru, Portugal, South Africa, Spain, Uruguay, and Venezuela.
- **Redalyc** (Network of Scientific Journals of Latin America, the Caribbean, Spain and Portugal), founded in 2003 by a group of scholars from the Universidad Autónoma del Estado de México «with the aim of giving visibility, consolidating and improving the editorial quality of Social Sciences and Humanities journals in the Latin American region. In 2006 it was opened to all areas of knowledge and included journals from the Iberian Peninsula»[19]. Redalyc now publishes over 1,700 journals from 823 institutions, hosting over 800,000 articles and other classes of documents. Interestingly, in recent years, the project has opened up to South-South collaboration (Becerril-García et al., 2022), and the number of journals from other regions of the world has increased.
- **CLACSO** (Consejo Latinoamericano de Ciencias Sociales). The Latin American Council of Social Sciences, founded in 1967, is a network of almost 700 research centres and teaching institutions from 51 countries in Latin America, the Caribbean and beyond. The publication area of CLACSO features the Virtual Libraries Network[20], which gives free access to three kinds of online resources: 1) a Digital Repository with full texts of books, lectures and working documents; 2) a portal of refereed journals (in collaboration with Redalyc); 3) multimedia content from the various producers of the CLACSO network.
- **AmeliCA**. This is probably the most ambitious of all the projects mentioned so far.

18. «The raison d'être and relevance of the SciELO Program lie in the recognition, promotion, and enhancement of journals published by universities, scientific societies, and professional associations, primarily operated in non-profit contexts» (https://scielo.org/en/about-scielo/program-publication-model-and-scielo-network/). It should be noted that since January 2014 SciELO is integrated in WoS (Packer, 2014).
19. See https://www.redalyc.org/redalyc/acerca-de/mision.html.
20. https://biblioteca-repositorio.clacso.edu.ar/.

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> It was launched in 2019 as an international open science portal to offer not only traditional content (books, journals, etc.) in open access form, but also to design processes and common infrastructures for the regional integration of various academic communities, and to facilitate South-South collaboration. The project is led by Redalyc and enjoys the support of UNESCO and the CLACSO network[21].

The prestige and dissemination of the social sciences in South America act as a driving force for a kind of epistemic sovereignty which seems still unattainable in many Western countries. Neither the United States nor Europe, the latter with the ambitious but still unrealized Plan S for open science (Rabesandratana, 2019)[22], have yet managed to achieve anything like it. It is necessary to reflect carefully on these elements of the geopolitics of knowledge (Beigel, 2013; Perrotta, 2017) if we intend to replicate elsewhere the success of an open access infrastructure for the dissemination of scientific publications, which has so far not been equalled elsewhere in the world.

If, as Nora Schmidt writes in reference to South Africa, it seems too late «to build an infrastructure from scratch» (Schmidt, 2020, p. 242), it may still be possible and desirable to reinforce South-South collaboration projects that share both methodologies and infrastructure. This is demonstrated, for example, by the OA project for access to Angolan academic journals created in collaboration with the Mexican researchers of Redalyc (Becerril-García, 2021).

However, it should be also recognized that OA by itself cannot provide a solution to structural, social and economic inequalities, or to historical epistemic injustices (Dutta et al., 2021; Piron et al., 2016; Piron et al., 2017). OA may help to democratize the distribution of peer-reviewed research, improve access and reduce cost, but it does not address hierarchy and domination. «Nor does it transform the peer review system, which for different reasons appears weighted in favour of a self-selecting elite» and often perpetuates knowledge that legitimizes and reproduces inequality (Piron et al., 2016). In fact, if the journal hierarchy is created by academics, then open access may aggravate rather than reduce the problem (Chandrasekhar, 2014, p. 129).

Today it seems clear that OA has not yet achieved that “democratization of knowledge” (Knöchelmann, 2021) and “unprecedented public good” aspired to by the declarations of Budapest (2001) and Berlin (2003)[23]. The Article Processing Charges (APC) system, which some believe is an acceptable “transition” to save precious library resources, has become yet another ploy to exploit the push for OA among researchers and institutions. In fact, publishers have increased in some cases by 40–50% the number of journals offering authors the possibility of publishing in OA for a fee (Pooley, 2020). These are the “transformative agreements”, from which the oligopolies have drawn enormous profits:

> We estimate that the five publishers included in our study generated $1.06 billion in revenues from gold and hybrid APCs from 2015–2018. Our results highlight that APCs have become a considerable source of revenue in addition to the traditional business model of subscription fees paid by academic libraries. (Butler et al., 2023, p. 793)

21. http://amelica.org/.
22. https://www.coalition-s.org/.
23. See the Budapest Open Access Initiative: https://www.budapestopenaccessinitiative.org/read/ and the Berlin Declaration on Open Access to Knowledge in the Sciences and Humanities: https://openaccess.mpg.de/Berlin-Declaration.

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Traditionally, the contracts signed between multinational publishing companies and public research institutions are subject to non-disclosure agreements, but over the years various studies have been carried out that paint a disturbing picture (Bergstrom et al., 2014). There are obviously very marked differences between different countries, so here I select few examples from Italy: the University of Milan, one of the top four universities in the country, paid around 47,000 euros on publishing in OA in 2017. An article published in golden OA in one of the journals of the Springer Nature group cost on average 2,850 euros and more than 3,000 for the Wiley-Blackwell group (Campbell, 2019). My own university, Roma Tre – a medium to large institution with around thirty thousand students and a thousand teaching staff – spent an average of 1,625 euros per publication on APC in 2023, out of a total budget for bibliographic material of 1,281,624 euros. From this budget 710,605 euros was spent on digital periodicals (56%) and 381,851 on databases (30%)[24]. If we consider that in Italy the average salary of a junior researcher varies between 800 euros (the national average) and a maximum of around 2,000 euros per month[25], we have a clear picture of what it means for the public research system of a Western country today to keep the private oligopolies of scientific publishing alive.

5. Conclusions. From AI challenges to the decolonization of educational systems

Scientific publication as we understand it in the modern era, that is, the dissemination of knowledge in originally printed form, began in the second half of the 1600s and remained essentially unchanged for four centuries. The digitization that began in the early 2000s, while it transformed production and concentrated power in in the hands of large publishing oligopolies, did not change the epistemological structure that had remained stable since Isaac Newton's time (Bazermann, 1988, pp. 59-127): that is, the existence of an author, a medium of dissemination, and readers or "peers" who evaluate its quality and scientific validity. This centuries-old framework has been disrupted by two factors: the process of knowledge platformization (Lehdonvirta, 2022) and more recently the advent of AI. The main business of publishers today is no longer the still lucrative business of subscriptions, as examined above, but the collection of every trace left by our passage on their various platforms (such as those acquired by Elsevier: Mendeley, SSRN, bepress, etc.): ranging from consulting and reading a source (article, book, etc.) to the development of an experiment, from the search for financial resources to academic job searching, etc. (Posada & Chen, 2017; Share & Joseph, 2017). This system of control (and therefore direction) of research, known also as "surveillance publishing" (Pooley, 2022) is being enhanced by AI, as the large publishing multinationals, which now derive the greatest profits from data brokerage, aim to develop their own AI tools, which will eventually feed the Ed-Tech market, through both the supply of teaching tools as an alternative or even replacement for traditional teaching (Carroll, 2024), as well as research and writing tools (Stokel-Walker, 2023)[26].

24. Data available from the Roma Tre library system report for the year 2023: https://portalestudente.uniroma3.it/en/articoli/pubblicata-la-relazione-monitoraggio-sba-2024-dati-2023-453540/.

25. Monthly updated data on both private and public research jobs in Italy are provided by https://it.indeed.com/guida-alla-carriera/retribuzione-stipendio/stipendio-ricercatore. Of course, in Northern European countries the situation is very different. In Germany, for example, the monthly basic salary (gross, rounded, 2022) for a postdoctoral researcher is between 4,500 and 4,900 euros (https://www.research-in-germany.org/en/plan-your-stay/finances/salary.html).

26. As Pooley notes, «the field of bibliometrics, all the way back to its early-1960s emergence, was already enmeshed in data capitalism» (Pooley, 2022). So academia has been always part of the data extraction business. It was American chemist

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If global academic publishing and scholarly communications form a substantial part of a neo-colonial system of cultural and epistemic injustice, AI, as it has been deployed so far by the known imperial subjects, is only going to make things worse. For this reason, it would be extremely important to create national or regional infrastructures that support open access, following the successful model of Latin America (Godínez-Larios & Aguado-López, 2024). Also the global indigenous data movement could represent a positive and innovative model of resistance (Walter et al., 2020). However, although important, these steps on their own will not be enough. We must also first self-decolonize, that is, reset and transform the colonial or neocolonial mindset, in which all the epistemic peripheries still perceive and evaluate themselves. Knowledge-sharing and universal access are crucial, but we also need to work on the idea of the equality of all knowledge and knowledge sovereignty (Latulippe & Klenk, 2020). The solution cannot be to simply buy AI tools from China, the US or even India. New dependences will not save our material, cultural and epistemic resources. We need to accept the limits and strengths of our own territories and societies, respecting and preserving what needs to be protected and enhanced, and then work collectively to improve the visibility of local academic knowledge. Correspondent Keerti Gedela, commenting on Bhakuni & Abimbola's paper on epistemic injustice in academic global health, observed:

> If institutions and academics abide by systems that contribute to inequality (to drive their reputation), and if elite journals only publish articles from authors with high-level written English, these problems need addressing. We should face the possibility that current systems of academia, conceived during colonial times, are not fit for purpose outside of high-income settings and therefore ill equipped to advance equity in global health. (Gedela, 2021)

This is a transformative process that naturally affects not just global health, but all disciplines, all scholarly fields, all institutions. In order to redefine and decolonize our geographical, epistemological and political hierarchies, we should be ready to build a completely new educational and research system (Alvares and Faruqi, 2012; Bhambra et al., 2018; Marí Sáez & Martins do Nascimento, 2021, pp. 320-321)[27].

Speaking of reinventing and decolonizing African universities, Anthony Bogues asked: «what about the idea that there may be African knowledges which are of importance not only for Africa but for the world stock of knowledge? One has to ask as well, whose knowledge of Africa? One also has to ask, how does a university become an engine of community development if it does not understand the community from inside?» (Bogues, 2007, p. 206). After almost twenty years these are still the issues that need to be addressed in Africa and in the rest of the non-Anglophone world: how to revive and re-legitimize our knowledge, and how to preserve and nurture it through local community connections.

There is no alternative path: the GAN will never relinquish the sceptre of epistemic power, and as long as we adopt its terms, conditions, platforms and methodologies, as

and entrepreneur Eugene Garfield who founded in 1956 the private company Institute for Scientific Information (ISI), which would later produce the Science Citation Index. Garfield in 1992 would sell ISI to Thomson Reuters that transformed it into the Web of Science. Few remember, however, that Garfield's projects and initiatives obtained conspicuous grants from U.S. funding agencies (Wouters, 2017). Which again confirms the strategic geopolitical value for the US of controlling and managing scientific knowledge evaluation (and production) tools.

27. «Decolonisation of our universities is not an exercise in flag-waving nationalism. Its aim is ameliorative. Diversity and pluralism of knowledge systems are vital for meeting many of the moral, social and economic challenges of the times and for avoiding the frightening economic, educational and cultural consequences of Europe's near-total intellectual and educational monopoly over Asia, Africa and Latin America» (Alvares and Faruqi, 2012, p. 8).

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long as we remain with our hats in our hands in the waiting rooms of the powerhouses of knowledge, waiting to be admitted into the "heavens of scientific excellence", we will only legitimize our rulers and continue to self-delegitimize ourselves.

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