



Eurocentrism, capitalism and tourism knowledge

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ABSTRACT

Global hegemonic structures of power have been a subject of debate among social scientists for decades. However, issues addressing the 'subjugation of the intellect' and forces shaping knowledge production – globalisation, capitalism and neo-colonialism – remain understudied in tourism. Drawing upon critical theories of Eurocentrism and capitalism, in this paper we explore and address the ideological impacts of existing global power structures on the next generation of tourism 'knowledge producers' in Asia. More specifically, this work critically discusses the ontological and epistemological beliefs – and subsequent methodological choices – of a group of Asian PhD scholars. The empirical material presented in this paper highlights that persisting forms of Eurocentric ideology embedded in capitalist structures of power permeate non-Western academic circles.

1. Introduction

Although tourism as a scientific field of inquiry has evolved in the last forty years (Airey, 2015), there remains a lack of research on tourism doctoral students' experiences. Since the first study conducted by Jafari and Aaser (1988), there have been studies focusing on tourism postgraduate research (i.e. Chung & Petrick, 2011; Carr & Hayes, 2017; Hall & Pedrazzini, 1989; Ruhanen & McLennan, 2011). However, much of the research conducted has been limited to examining completed theses in order to explore disciplinary and subject trends, publication patterns and motivational factors (i.e. Afifi, 2009; Meyer-Arendt & Justice, 2002; Weiler, Moyle, & McLennan, 2012). Little has been written on the experiences of tourism doctoral students during the PhD process (i.e. Pansiri, 2009; Cohen, 2013), and so, an in-depth understanding of tourism doctoral students' ontological, epistemological and methodological choices and the structures of power shaping their postgraduate journeys is lacking in the tourism literature. This is particularly true within the context of Asian PhD tourism scholars, a group that deserves particular attention as it embodies subordinated epistemologies (Wilson & Hollinshead, 2015), which have not always been represented in the tourism literature. As Carr and Hayes (2017, p.31) argue, "Recognising that the PhD students of today are the potential research leaders of tomorrow, exploring their experiences has the potential to indicate the possible future direction of tourism research".

This study was conceived as an attempt to give voice to Asian PhD students in tourism. As such, the current study explores the ontological and epistemological beliefs of Asian PhD students in order to

understand whether and how they influence their methodological choices in research. More specifically, we aim to cast light on students' experiences, philosophical understandings and research journeys against the backdrop of academic and global power structures. This is aligned to what Bianchi (2009, p.484) has advocated, namely that "tourism research needs to further engage with some of the major themes and theoretical debates related to process of globalisation, capitalism, and structural power if it is to engage with issues of substantive import related to critical scholarship." Drawing on Bianchi (2009) and the call for the *critical turn in tourism studies* (Ateljevic, Harris, Wilson, & Collins, 2005), this study presents a discussion of Eurocentric and capitalist academic structures of power that have been influencing and moulding the next generation of Asian tourism scholars. As Wijesinghe, Mura, and Bouchon (2017) have pointed out, there remains a lack of understanding concerning the colonial (and neo-colonial) power structures that continue to subjugate the intellect of the former colonised. As such, at a time when critical discourses are being called for within the tourism academy, this study enhances our understanding of these power structures as it focuses on the PhD scholarship conducted in a region that was formerly colonised (and still subjected to global neo-colonial structures of power). Overall, this work aims to highlight the ways in which Eurocentric ideologies, deeply embedded in capitalist structures, consciously or un/sub-consciously still shape the minds of non-Western academics.

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2. Theoretical background

2.1. Eurocentrism and capitalism - an overview

In the so called ‘globalised’ world, ideological thinking and doing permeate every aspect of our existences. The liquid nature of globalisation has been debated within academic circles (Bauman, 2000); still, the dominant ideologies of the West/Western thought/Westernisation hold a strong position in the making and breaking of trends. As Amin (1989, p. 107) explains, “The Westernisation of the world would impose on everyone the adoption of the recipes for European superiority”. These recipes include the adoption of specific systems, such as free enterprise and market, democracy and capitalism. The tenets of the assumed ‘European superiority’ are encapsulated in the theory of Eurocentrism, which began during the European enlightenment, and rapidly spread to the rest of the world through colonisation. Eurocentrism contributed to transform and shape the “coloniser’s model of the world” (Blaut, 1993, p. 14) radically, and designed ethnocentric views of the world and its people, knowledge, and culture. The term ‘Eurocentrism’ denotes a view of the world that, overtly and covertly, suggests that European history and values are superior to others. Based on this assumption, it aids to produce and justify a Western/European dominant position in the global capitalist world system.

However, it should be noted that the words ‘Eurocentrism’ or ‘Western-centrism’ do not primarily denote all the countries geographically belonging to Europe/West but only specific areas, such as north western Europe (i.e. the UK, France, Germany, Netherlands and Belgium), Southern Europe (i.e. Spain, Portugal), North America (i.e. the United States, Canada), and also other centres like Australia and New Zealand. The effects and the saturation of Eurocentric beliefs differ therefore according to historical narratives (i.e. predominant Spanish and American influence in Latin America and even in The Philippines or British influence in South Asia). Therefore, Euro/western-centrism does not refer to specific geographical locations but is rather indicative of geo-political crystallisations of power after colonisation. Eurocentrism created binary views of the world and its people, which we have gradually internalised and to a certain extent accepted as true – ‘superior’ and ‘inferior’, ‘developed’ and ‘developing’, ‘first world’ and ‘third world’, ‘modern’ and ‘primitive’. These terms have assumed a specific meaning over the years based on the prejudicial views of the coloniser and have produced what we call ‘dominant discourses’. With the crystallisation of these assumptions, we have, for centuries, consciously or unconsciously, adopted Western/European models and ideologies and regarded them as ‘normal’ (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

Propelled by Eurocentric ‘grand narratives’, binary concepts concerning class (international division of labour) and culture have become the central tenets of the capitalist system. As these capitalist structures developed further, they permeated any aspect of society, our socio-economic lives, and, as Quijano (2010) asserts, have produced inequalities and hierarchies that still remain strongly in place in (post) modern societies. Thus, as Grosfoguel (2007, p.219) argues, “To call ‘capitalist’ the present world system, is to say the least, misleading. Given the hegemonic Eurocentric ‘common sense’, the moment we use the word ‘capitalism’ people immediately think that we are talking about the ‘economy.’ Capitalism is only one of the multiple entangled constellations of the colonial power matrix of the European modern/colonial capitalist/patriarchal world system”. Importantly, capitalism cultivates the ‘systematic abuse of power’ in every aspect of our lives (i.e. class, race), including academia.

2.2. Eurocentrism, capitalism and academic knowledge

Eurocentrism was, as Grosfoguel (2007) and Quijano (2010) point out, primarily about the domination of intellect and culture. In this regard, the current capitalised/globalised academic system of higher education is one of the other habitats in which Eurocentric values and

ideologies have flourished. As Pennycook (1996, p. 64) observes, universities have become the “key sites of cultural and epistemological invasion, where inappropriate and irrelevant forms of Western culture and knowledge are thrust upon an unwitting student population”. These Eurocentric educational and academic systems in the non-West (former colonies) made sure that the colonised would, even after their so called ‘independence’, stay “dependent upon the West for answers and solutions” (Subramani & Kempner, 2002, p. 233). Ngugi wa Thiong’o (1983, p.96) adds, “it is through education that the physically absent agents of Western imperialism continue their hegemony after decolonisation”. Intellectuals of the non-West, according to Alatas (2004), thus remain in the state of a ‘captive mind’, structuring their knowledge around the tenets of scientism and valuing objectivity, free ethics, and universalism (Mirande, 1978), all of which lay at the heart of Eurocentric ideology and were propelled during the colonial era. One must understand that the Western/masculinist idea that we can produce somehow forms of knowledge that are “un-positioned, un-located, neutral and universalistic” (Grosfoguel, 2002, p. 209) is a myth in the colonial world. Such ideologies were kept in place only to control and dominate the ‘captive mind’ in the Eurocentric/capitalist world system.

Unfortunately, even after more than sixty years since the ‘colonised’ obtained independence, much of the ideologies functioning within higher education systems in the non-West, especially in terms of knowledge production and dissemination, remains Eurocentric. The non-Western production of knowledge is predominantly delivered in the English language (including local journals), primarily because the Lingua Franca of academia in many parts of the non-West (through colonisation and globalisation of course), is English (Mura & Sharif, 2015). In this scenario, monolingual scholars of the periphery are further excluded from the English speaking academic circles of the non-West (another centre within the periphery). Paradoxically, this phenomenon (propelled by globalization and internationalisation) also affects non-English speaking countries in the West, such as France, the Netherlands and Germany. Furthermore, in the capitalist structure that universities are functioning in, priority is now given to ranking systems, which encourage scholars to write in English and publish in Tier 1 and Tier 2 ISI/Scopus journals. The reward system currently in place within academia makes any attempts of breaking away from these ideological frames impossible, primarily because academic performance and promotion are largely based on research publications (predominantly articles in ISI Journals). As Buranyi (2017) notes, “the pursuit of high impact publications for rewards is as rotten as the incentive system of banking bonuses”.

In this scenario, peripheral nations and scholars “are not only obligated to the industrialised nations for books, journals, applied research findings, and for the majority of knowledge in the scientific and technical fields, but ironically also for research and knowledge about their own countries” (Subramani & Kempner, 2002, p. 240). In other words, scholars are compelled to accept dominant discourses – and also reiterate them – to climb the academic career ladder (Hall, 2004). Scholars in the periphery have to constantly relate their ideas to the work produced by those representing the ‘centre’, causing ideological conundrums that many are not even aware of due to lack of critical thinking and the system’s enforcement mechanisms. This status quo also refers to the work produced in the non-West. In this respect, Canagarajah (1996, p.460) provides an exemplary case when he states that “to present my data on culture in rural Tamil Saiva communities in Sri Lanka, I had to frame my paper in relation to the work previously published by David (1974), McGilbyray (1982) and Pfaffenberger (1982), each of whom spent only a few months in my community”. From this perspective, the ontological (objective), epistemological (detached) and methodological (quantitative) traditions of the Western academy still dominate the intellectual site of the non-West. Therefore, despite ‘globalisation’, within the domain of the social sciences, majority of scholars and their theories keep emanating from the ‘West’ to the ‘Rest’ (Wallerstein, 1997).

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