

There is neither a first nor a last word and there are no limits to the dialogic context.
Mikhail Bakhtin

OTHER FORMS OF KNOWLEDGE AND THEIR IMPORTANCE IN OUR SOCIETES: LESSONS FROM CHILE (transl.)

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Francisca Márquez, Universidad Alberto Hurtado, Chile

Interview by Ana Fonseca

This is a translated transcription of our audio interview originally conducted in Spanish, "Otros saberes y su importancia en nuestras sociedades: lecciones de Chile," with Francisca Márquez.

Ana Fonseca: Hello and welcome to Radio Heteroglossia. I'm Ana Fonseca and our guest today is Dr. Francisca Márquez. [Dr. Francisca Márquez](#) is an anthropologist and a sociologist. She is currently a professor and a researcher in the [Department of Anthropology](#) at the university, [Universidad Alberto Hurtado](#), in Santiago de Chile. Today, we will be talking about the article written by Dr. Márquez entitled, "*El desafío ético del respeto a las muchas verdades. Universidad, ciencia y otros saberes*," (in English: "The ethical challenge of respecting different truths. Universities, science and other forms knowledge"), published in 2015 in the academic journal *Polis*. In her article, Dr. Francisca Márquez analyzes the challenges faced by the social sciences while recognizing and accepting the existence and importance of other forms of knowledge and truths produced outside universities. Dr. Francisca Márquez, welcome and thank you for joining us today.

Francisca Márquez: Good morning from Chile.

Ana Fonseca: Thank you and greetings to Chile. I would like to start by referring to the analysis provided in your article about the challenges that the social sciences face given the existence of other forms of knowledge

and truths, through which you highlight a paradox and a very important challenge while emphasizing the distance that exists between society and science when the latter ignores or arbitrarily considers as "illegitimate" other forms of knowledge developed and practiced outside university classrooms and laboratories. I wonder if you can talk more more about this.

Francisca Márquez:

Indeed, universities tend to delegitimize other forms of knowledge that have not been produced within their institutional settings. If we look at the history of the social sciences in Latin America, we will see that the question about the relationship between science and the nation has always been there permanently as in a relationship of tension. Now, the problem is that these other forms of knowledge have had difficulties to make themselves heard. It seems as if there is a certain resistance to incorporate these other voices. In anthropology, we know that without these other forms of knowledge, without these other voices, only relying on documents, we cannot understand what is unfolding in our societies. So, I believe that the challenge is to ask ourselves what we can learn from observing and listening to these quotidian, oral and performative practices, instead of just listening to ourselves. And I think that there is a serious problem in the academia, in the sense that universities have difficulties to effectively incorporate other stories, other memories and especially orality. Along these lines, some even believe that the body does not tell us anything, when we know that the body, when there is a lot of censorship, when we have strong disciplinary regimes, the body speaks. So, I believe that the social sciences and universities are facing a serious problem in terms of imagination and of learning to listen and observe more carefully.

Ana Fonseca:

To provide a historical context about the origins and causes of such distance between the social sciences and other forms of knowledge that you just talked about, your article locates the emergence of that arbitrary division between "legitimate" knowledge produced in universities and "illegitimate" knowledge that is produced outside of such institutions, in colonial interests to establish an authority of knowledge over other forms of knowledge. You also point out how, "paradoxically, universities, centers of thought and scientific knowledge, seem to be outdated and alien to the sense of discontinuity and fragmentation of modern thought that breaks with the illusion of totality and universality of knowledge." These two arguments lead to

reflect on how such a tension between science and society can be approached by engaging in a process of decolonization of knowledge. Do you think that such contradiction and conflict between society and science could be resolved, and the dialogue with other forms of knowledge would be promoted with a decolonization of knowledge? If this is the case, what do you think that a decolonization of knowledge would entail? Or do you consider that the problem nowadays is much more complex and, in addition to its colonial roots, it should be addressed from different angles?

Francisca Márquez:

I would say that the construction of knowledge, in general, has gone hand in hand with processes of symbolic violence. In other words, it has entailed the imposition of certain forms of knowledge over others, such as it was the case with the imposition of writing over orality. So, more than a co-construction of knowledge, or objects, or situations, what we have rather seen is that there is a certain degree of encouragement towards homogeneous thinking. Everything that has to do with heterogeneity or other forms of knowledge has been read as disorder, as chaos. And the consequence of this is that it prevents us from building a university that is much more committed to the community and its diversity. So, clearly, what we need to do nowadays is to reread and revise all scientific work.

In Latin America, the social sciences have tended to privilege homogeneity and consensus over the possibility of diversity and heterogeneity. In other words, Latin American thought has been heavily influenced by the Enlightenment and the subsequent desire to whiten our continent, and above all, by the imposition of certain principles and codes that were introduced from colonial times and that influenced the construction of the republics. I would say that particular aspect of the Spanish legacy is still with us, from the royal edicts that imposed the written word over the oral word which in turn led to this idea of the lack of understanding of the written word by indigenous peoples as a basis or proof of their "barbarism" and "ignorance." All this is still with us today in the sense that there are some forms of knowledge that are authorized and legitimate, and other forms of knowledge that are forbidden, or considered as "barbaric" knowledge. And in that process of homogenization, of whitening of other forms of knowledge, everything that diverts from it is silenced. Then, discussions about the nation and the state have costed us enormously in terms of the production of knowledge. This is an ongoing struggle.

What we also see nowadays is that there is a tendency to ignore subalternities. Everything that surpasses boundaries tends to be feared. Therefore, certain scientific and research processes tend to focus on an orderly reading that leads to the creation of categories; and in that sense, homogeneity still remains an obsession; At least in the case of Chile this is very evident, there is an intellectual and political tendency to observe and propose the homogeneity of the population as a virtue of our nation. Now, I think that it is important to differentiate related processes that took place in Mexico, or Peru, or Brazil, where the social sciences did have a greater capacity to include miscegenation and diversity in their work. In Chile, on the other hand, what we see is that sciences are born with a strong evolutionist imprint and a certain disregard for pre-Hispanic societies, for example; where indigenous peoples and mestizos alongside their culture and knowledge are rather feared. Therefore, I believe that the case of Chile is quite peculiar because it is a science that has very conservative roots and that takes a rather 'exotic' approach to indigenous origins, and therefore what it tends to do is to whiten other forms of knowledge. This tendency was very strong until research on pre-Hispanic cultures, with a much more critical perspective, began during the fifties and seventies. But what emerged as critical social science during the fifties and seventies will end abruptly in 1973 with the military coup. So, I would say that the tradition that other Latin American countries have in terms of recognizing the construction of the nation-state based on an indigenous past, in Chile is much weaker, almost nonexistent. And that still persists today almost as a karma, we would say, because the dictatorship did nothing but deepen the distance between national problems and the work of the social sciences done in universities. But all of this was already present and during those seventeen years of the dictatorship, critical thinking has no place in universities. Instead, universities become completely out of date, oblivious to any sense of discontinuity and fragmentation that we saw in modern thought. Therefore, given those precedents, the aim is then to control, homogenize, impose the idea that the truth, the only truth, is found in the world of science, and obviously, in the barracks. Based on that, the possibility of including diversity as a basis for a co-construction of knowledge, a co-construction of the nation is ruled out.

However, I would say that the situation has become much more complex and one of the great problems that we face nowadays is not only the colonial and republican roots, but also a very neoliberal,

mercantile logic, which also adds itself to a nation-state afraid of diversity in order to naturalize a certain logic, and in that logic there are many others that are displaced; expressions of cooperation, social interaction, free expressions of reciprocity, are displaced; they are trivialized in a commercial logic like the one that is operating today, where everything has to have a price because if it does not have a price, it is irrelevant. That is also another way to become political, which is through the commodification of knowledge. Universities are absolutely permeated by this trend. Each article has a price, each writing has a price, and if you do not ascribe to that logic of commodification of knowledge, you don't belong.

However, nowadays this "barbaric" knowledge, these forbidden forms of knowledge, are also much more visible. I would say that the struggle is no longer inside universities. It has moved towards public spaces, in the streets, in the public squares, and I think that it is there where the democratization of knowledge can really take place; I do not think that the democratization of knowledge will take place at universities, not at all. Rather, it is the practices that occupy such spaces that will make it happen. The great monumental institutions, the great historical monuments of the nation are strongly questioned nowadays. You have to learn to look at the walls, the graffiti. Something that I have been able to do throughout these years is to read those graffiti and drawings against the great republican institutions on the streets. And one realizes that people's discontent is very strong, that their anger is very strong too. And what graffiti tell us is that we must learn to re-read what is being said beyond those walls. It is about a search for respect too, behind anger there is also a search for respect. These subalternities and those other imaginaries are always fighting to have a voice, even during dictatorial and re-foundational periods, because what the dictatorship wanted at the end of the day was to restructure the nation.

Ana Fonseca:

And that leads me to my last question. Your article highlights the importance and the determining role of those other forms of knowledge specially in contexts of violence and repression like the one that Chile endured under the Pinochet dictatorship. I wonder if you can talk more about how and why those other forms of knowledge were so crucial during that very difficult time in Chilean history, and what we can learn from the Chilean experience in how we consider

these other forms of knowledge within the academic community and beyond the academia.

Francisca Márquez:

Once the dictatorship took over on September 11, 1973, and given that the classic political structure was dismantled, there was a need to reconstitute a sense of country. These other forms of knowledge have always found a way to make themselves heard. During the dictatorship period, we saw great performances as well as oral practices which, even though they were forbidden, they still found a way to communicate their views. During those seventeen years of dictatorship, critical thinking will not take place within universities. Orality was one of the most powerful means that the resistance had during those times, without leaving traces, so that they wouldn't be repressed. The number of oral histories that were recovered from those times of brutal repression are impressive. There were expressions like *Las Yeguas del Apocalipsis*, for example, which marked a milestone in the history of the resistance; they taught us how such spaces could be used to show a different form of sexuality, namely homosexuality, which was absolutely punished and repressed. By doing so, they also showed us that it was possible to oppose the sexist and misogynist regime that was in power. The dictatorial period was full of expressions like *Las Yeguas del Apocalipsis*. So, when you look at people's responses, you discover the strength that women also had to deploy. *Las Ollas Comunes* which were collective community spaces to be able to feed themselves became spaces not only of survival, but also of a reinvention of a certain traditional knowledge to be able to create spaces that combined and articulated political resistance with the feeding of their own families.

So, it is full of practices in which one discovers how politics is going to be infused and camouflaged by the kind of knowledge that is produced in everyday life. In other words, the quotidian becomes central to articulate people's resistance, they will improvise safe houses, they will improvise and recreate spaces to be able to take care of each other. And those other practices and forms of knowledge have epistemological consequences. In other words, during those years, they teach us that the quotidian, through everyday performances and oral expressions, also contains practices that not only reproduce knowledge, but also create new forms of knowledge. I would say that is the most important lesson from those times: if the political does not articulate itself with the quotidian, it does not have deep roots. The

political stops being discursive to become an active practice. And during all the years of the dictatorship there is no other option than that. It is the subversive and daily small practices that will finally puncture the dictatorial system, the military system that was installed. The latter sometimes, or rather often, I would say since the nineties, seems to have weakened, and the political parties have pushed to institutionalize the work of politics. But we cannot forget that those years showed us that when politics does not have strong roots in the everyday, it is empty. The “active life” of which Hannah Arendt spoke so much. I think the notion of the active life makes more sense than ever nowadays. An active life: a policy that is expressed in workplaces, in the exercise of work with dignity, that is expressed in culture and that is also expressed in political discussions, is the only thing that can solidify democracy; it is the only thing that can combat a strongly corrupt system. I would say that those are the lessons from the times of the dictatorship, to do politics from everyday resistance; every gesture, every walk, every conversation was a political construction. And that cannot be forgotten. That is the most important lesson of those years. And today I believe that this is still present, in the student movements of different types, in gender equality movements, and so on.

Ana Fonseca: And in a context as complex as the one that you explained earlier, in which the homogenization of knowledge that has taken place for centuries and the mercantilist aspect of the neoliberal wave during the last decades trivialize diversity and daily gestures of cooperation and reciprocity, the existence of these other forms of knowledge in everyday practices and in public spaces become very important.

Francisca Márquez: Yes.

Ana Fonseca: Dr. Francisca Márquez, thank you very much for joining us today and for sharing your knowledge and points of view on these issues.

Francisca Márquez: Thank you, Ana.

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