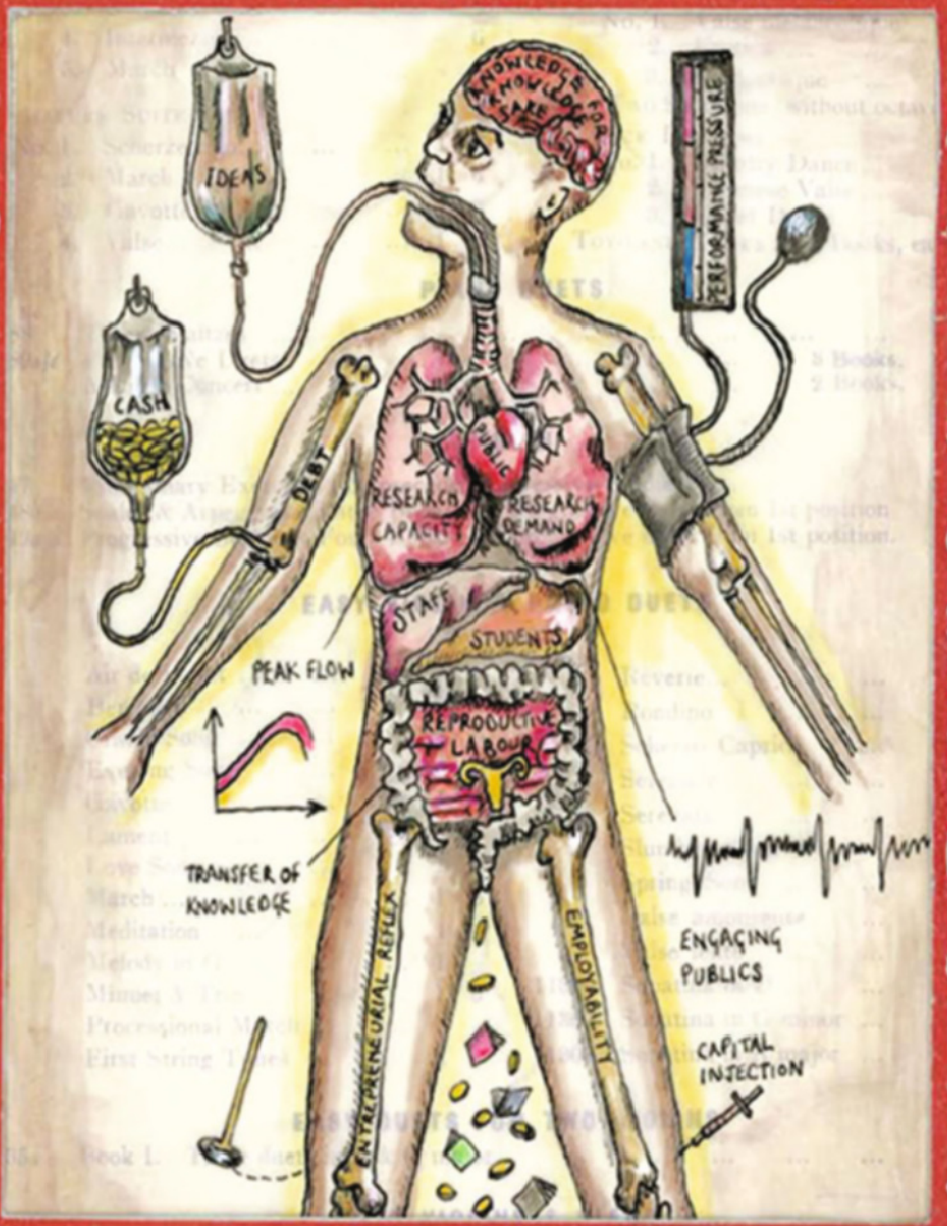
THE ENTREPRENEURIAL UNIVERSITY

ENGAGING PUBLICS, INTERSECTING IMPACTS



EDITED BY YVETTE TAYLOR

The Entrepreneurial University

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Engaging Publics, Intersecting Impacts

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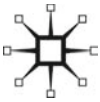

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1

Academia Without Walls? Multiple Belongings and the Implications of Feminist and LGBT/Queer Political Engagement

Ana Cristina Santos

Introduction

Feminist and LGBT/queer researchers have variously demonstrated the situated character of all knowledge, presenting a systematic and well-substantiated critique against positivist ambitions of neutrality. In the context of increasingly fluid boundaries, shifting identities and economic precariousness in general – and for scholars in LGBT/queer studies in particular – researchers' multiple belongings necessarily impact on the topics and methodologies used in research (Ryan-Flood and Gill, 2010; Taylor et al., 2010). Despite the increasing concern with intersectionality and the myriad impacts stemming from feminist and LGBT/queer contributions, mainstream academic praxis exercises both subjective and direct constraints upon politicised epistemologies, thereby often influencing the course and the impact of politically engaged research. Moreover, positivist practices and analyses still endure in mainstream institutions, often influencing academic curricula and criteria for granting funding.

This chapter will offer a critical analysis of disengagement within and beyond academia, doing so by examining the risks and difficulties emerging from the double-agency status of scholar–activists, that is, academics who are also actively engaged in collective action. I argue that in the post-positivist era, new and resilient (albeit discrete) walls are daily re/built, particularly in relation to issues of gender and sexuality. In so doing, a 'hierarchy of credibility' and of worth is reinforced, whereby engaged feminist and LGBT/queer work is often labelled as too political to be academic enough. Therefore, under the dominant power dynamics within academia, scholar-activism is invested with a twofold responsibility: to develop cutting-edge academic scholarship, observing the principles of critical emancipatory research, and

to contribute to a non-hierarchical reciprocal relationship within academia and between academia and civil society. 'Reaching out, giving back' – as the initial call for chapters in this book suggested – encapsulates such challenge and opportunity. The challenge consists of reaching out for wider audiences, using intelligible language and arguments that resonate with people's experiences; the opportunity emerges from the possibility of making academia more inclusive, democratic and relevant, beyond the often-massive walls behind which academic knowledge tends to remain closeted.

Shattering old walls: public sociology and the role of scholar-activism

The pervasive legacy of positivism in academia is mirrored by the ways in which sociology, rather than being proactively engaged in tackling inequality, frequently operates according to dominant ways of thinking and doing. Despite the persistence of positivist tradition in academia, questioning, contesting and subverting have been at the core of sociological intervention since the outset, thus feeding regular opposition to positivistic research methods and analysis. One relatively recent, but consistent, approach designed to tackle well-established positivistic principles is 'public sociology', not as a functionalist, policy-driven compulsory approach, but as a epistemological and ontological position that advances the need for politically engaged academic work.

Before plunging into the different meanings of public sociology and its related implications, it is important to note – given the thematic focus of this chapter – that despite the lively discussions and writing that public sociology has generated in recent years, what inspired this notion is not new. It can be traced to sociological literature in the 1960s, when understanding social conflict and collective action demanded more than desk-based research. More specifically, the influence of feminist and LGBT/queer writings and demands cannot be dismissed from the process through which public sociology became such an acclaimed notion. On the contrary, what could be considered an ethics of political engagement was clearly influenced by this sort of scholarship and activism, which have both been ground-breaking in advancing the notion that the personal is political and the private should be public (Harding and Norberg, 2005; Lister, 1997; Oakley, 1982; Ryan-Flood and Gill, 2010). Therefore, feminist and LGBT/queer scholars were pioneers in the process of shattering the old positivist walls of academia, including the field of sociology (Seidman, 1996; Irvine, 2003; Santos, 2013).

In his book, *The Unfinished Revolution*, Engel offers an example of a politically engaged study situated at the junction between academia and activism. He states that his participation in Washington's candlelight vigil for the murder of the young gay man Matthew Shepard in October 1998

made him ascribe a new meaning to his research, as he realised that 'an emotionally emptied account of this movement fails to do justice to the individuals who work every day so that gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transgender people can live safer and happier lives' (2001: 3). This event impelled Engel to write a book with a pragmatic goal: that the evolution of social theory on social movements would allow for a deeper understanding of gay and lesbian movements. He believed that, ultimately, such a task could help LGBT movements learn how to benefit from political opportunities, so that homophobia and heterosexism would finally be overturned. Engel's stated purpose of the usefulness of his research reveals the potential for engagement between academia and activism. Furthermore, the research highlights that, rather than seeking to erase 'where one comes from', positionings which locate and implicate, should be self-reflexively acknowledged. And embrace it.

Engel's politicised take on scholarly analysis is shared with many scholars throughout the world. The importance of acknowledging one's multiple belongings, and their significance in informing theoretical understandings of the world we inhabit, draw on earlier notions of public sociology. The notion of public sociology has acquired several meanings that have quite distinct implications, both theoretical and political. One understanding of it draws on the instrumentalisation of academic knowledge in light of previously established policy measures. According to this perspective, public sociology would focus on partial data and analysis to serve interest groups, namely those which are dominant in decision-making processes. In other words, sociology becomes an engaged applied science, and this engagement would represent legitimisation through the theoretical reinforcement of the (political) establishment. The question of publics – who gets to be heard and who is silenced, which issues are left unvoiced and unseen – is a significant part of the critique against this functionalist and policy-driven understanding of public sociology (Taylor and Addison, 2011; Sousa Santos, 2002, 2004). Importantly, however, such a functionalist take on public sociology distances itself from its original meaning and purpose.

Public sociology has been presented as a theoretical approach that acknowledged the highly contingent framework of scientific production as well as science's responsibility in liaising with other actors in order to develop reciprocal and non-hierarchic learning processes. Herbert J. Gans formulated a definition of what being a public sociologist entailed:

> A public sociologist is a public intellectual who applies sociological ideas and findings to social (defined broadly) issues about which sociology (also defined broadly) has something to say. Public intellectuals comment on whatever issues show up on the public agenda; public sociologists do so only on issues to which they can apply their sociological insights and findings. They are specialist public intellectuals. (2002: 2)

Therefore, according to Gans, public sociology would be an intrinsic attribute of sociological intervention: to have something to say, to generate insightful understandings, to share (publicly relevant) findings. Drawing on Gans's work, Michael Burawoy took the definition further, suggesting specific ways in which public sociology can add original contributions to theoretical and methodological knowledge:

> The bulk of public sociology is indeed of an organic kind – sociologists working with a labor movement, neighborhood associations, communities of faith, immigrant rights groups, human rights organisations. Between the organic public sociologist and a public is a dialogue, a process of mutual education. The recognition of public sociology must extend to the organic kind which often remains invisible, private, and is often considered to be apart from our professional lives. The project of such public sociologies is to make visible the invisible, to make the private public, to validate these organic connections as part of our sociological life. (2005: 7–8)

Burawoy's definition of public sociology seems to imply a bilateral (or even multifarious) process of exchange, 'a dialogue' that aims at enhancing reciprocal chances of learning. Such a process involves academia, but also the wider society ('a public') which is expected to be recognised by sociologists as an equally important interlocutor in this dialogue. Furthermore, Burawoy's arguments contain an implicit call for politicised action: sociologists have the power, and the duty, to intervene in the social sphere in order to enhance visibility, participation and inclusion. As such, political engagement is not merely an unintended consequence of sociological work; it is rather a process of willing disclosure through which sociologists become engaged political actors. In other words, public sociology is not a mere 'add-on', something external to the sociological work itself, but a vital part of it. Accordingly, sociologists

> constitute an actor in civil society and as such have a right and an obligation to participate in politics. ... The 'pure science' position that research must be completely insulated from politics is untenable since antipolitics is no less political than public engagement. (2004b: 1605)

In line with the previous quotes, it can be argued that sociologists should interact politically with a world in which realities of exclusion and inequality demand a pro-active role from academics, and from sociologists in particular. In accordance with this rationale, knowledge production should be concerned with audiences beyond academia, investing in outreaching initiatives that disseminate research findings in an accessible language and engaging different types of social actors during the process of knowledge production (Ackerly and True, 2010).

Arguably, sociology benefits from disclosed political engagements, and does so to the extent that sociologists are, themselves, actors in processes and facts under sociological scrutiny. What seems artificial, then, is the alleged distinction between science and politics, as if a strict boundary, however false and precarious, could secure scientific accuracy. I suggest that what is wrong in this equation is the premise of neutrality, which disregards the fundamental fact that all actors, including sociologists, are situated subjects.

To the extent that context informs people's standpoints – from which, then, sociology is produced – it is not possible to escape knowledge which is inextricably bounded and situated. Then, the next logical step, it seems, would be to recognise one's political standpoint and to strive for a 'strong objectivity', defined by Harding as 'a commitment to acknowledge the historical character of every belief or set of beliefs' (1991: 156). Harding underlines the inescapability of 'historical gravity' by saying:

> Political and social interests are not 'add-ons' to an otherwise transcendental science that is inherently indifferent to human society; scientific beliefs, practices, institutions, histories, and problematics are constituted in and through contemporary political and social projects, and always have been. (1991: 145)

Speaking as a standpoint theorist and arguing against the 'conventional view ... [that] politics can only obstruct and damage the production of scientific knowledge' (2004: 1), she correctly points out that

> [t]he more value-neutral a conceptual framework appears, the more likely it is to advance the hegemonous interests of dominant groups, and the less likely it is to be able to detect important actualities of social relations ... . The 'moment of critical insight' is one that comes only through political struggle. (2004: 6, 9)

Therefore, according to Harding, not only is neutrality impossible to achieve but, in fact, alleged neutrality adds an extra layer of strength to already hegemonic thinking to the extent that it presents itself – and the knowledge it replicates – as non-biased, hence 'true'. Importantly, however, Harding also concurs with the idea that a holistic and inclusive understanding can only happen through critical analytical thought which stems from political engagement. As such, the dominant notion of objectivity is nothing but 'weak objectivity' (Harding, 1991).[1] Wylie takes the argument of the usefulness of political engagement a step further, writing that 'considerable epistemic advantage may accrue to those who approach inquiry from an interested standpoint, even a standpoint of political engagement' (2004: 345).

Though an extended debate about standpoint theory and its critiques is beyond the scope of this chapter, the importance of political engagement within academia should not be overlooked. As Harding eloquently put it, standpoints are 'toolboxes enabling new perspectives and new ways of seeing the world to enlarge the horizons of our explanations, understandings and yearnings for a better life' (2004: 5). In this context, the role of those who can be described as 'scholar–activists' (Santos, 2012) – that is, people who are simultaneously academics and activists – becomes not only legitimate, but desirable. The possibility of a desirable role for scholar–activists within academia is clearly informed by the notion of public sociology.

By revaluing the notion of standpoint, rather than attempting to shield science from politics, scholar–activists are contributing to a significant sociological turn, one that reinvents sociology as a socially and politically relevant field of study. At least in principle, the practice of scholar-activism also highlights the importance and validity of, otherwise, rather void notions such as interdependence and intersectionality between academia and civil society. Scholar-activism opens up the possibility of rejecting the constraining 'either, or' rationale and, instead, reasserting the spaces 'in-between', embracing ambiguity and revaluing diversity from both within and outside academia. This necessarily leads up to a new ethics of research that is committed to the willing disclosure of researchers' political engagement.

This turn presents opportunities, as well as challenges, stemming from the epistemological and ethical implications of political engagement. Before we return to these in detail, the next section examines academia's attempt to shield itself behind what often remains unacknowledged: the resilience of disciplinary knowledge production and the competing status of different knowledge-producers.

Spotting subliminal walls in present times

In the aftermath of lively discussions around the notion of public sociology (Burawoy, 2004a, 2004b, 2004c, 2005), the idea of mutually engaged scholarship and politics gathered more interest and legitimacy. Deconstructing the 'ivory tower', diluting the boundaries between academics and civil society, overcoming processes of othering and of top-down learning strategies – these became important tasks for politicised academics willing to contribute to social change. And this tendency towards bridging academia and civil society finds its roots in earlier processes of theoretical and political transformation. In the aftermath of the work advanced by T.H. Marshall in the 1950s, citizenship, at least in the Western world, became a keyword, and the knowledge advanced by social sciences seemed to be strongly connected to this pro-citizens turn within academia. Sociology in particular emerged out of the need to understand collective behaviour, especially the one advanced

by social movements and other forms of collective action struggling for civil rights in Europe and the United States.

Nevertheless, the thrill of full immersion in empirical research, often through long periods of ethnographic fieldwork, was traditionally a distinctive feature of anthropological work, something which sociology, wary of its original label as social physics, considered somewhat suspect. The positivist character of early-days sociology pushed sociological analysis into a place of ambivalence and contradiction, according to which one must not get 'too close' to the topic of research, quickly encapsulated in the label 'object'. This leads to an array of both theoretical and political consequences, including the enshrinement of certain issues at the expense of making others hopelessly absent. The Portuguese sociologist, Boaventura de Sousa Santos, has suggested the need for a 'sociology of absences' designed to recognise and counter the dismissal of certain topics produced by hegemonic epistemologies:

> The sociology of absences consists of an inquiry that aims to explain that what does not exist is, in fact, actively produced as non-existent, that is, as a non-credible alternative to what exists. The objective of the sociology of absences is to transform impossible into possible objects, absent into present objects. The logics and processes through which hegemonic criteria of rationality and efficiency produce non-existence are various. Nonexistence is produced whenever a certain entity is disqualified and rendered invisible, unintelligible, or irreversibly discardable. What unites the different logics of production of non-existence is that they are all manifestations of the same rational monoculture. (Sousa Santos, 2004: 14–15)

The positivistic obsession with 'protecting' the researcher against the perils of subjectivity can also be found in disciplines other than sociology. Other fields of knowledge share the legacy of positivism, which contributes to establishing a resilient wall designed to keep outsiders – that is, objects, non-academics, undervalued topics and methods – out of mainstream academia. It was the recognition of such walls that led dissatisfied psychologists to advance subfields such as political psychology and critical psychology (Parker, 1999), for instance.

And even on those (increasingly frequent) occasions when the object becomes impregnated with wilful subjects (Ahmed, 2010) who disobey the fictional boundaries artificially built by mainstream scholarship, social sciences tend to replicate processes of othering, starting from the rhetorical device of 'us' versus 'them'. According to this process, an imagined collective – 'we' – conducts research, discusses findings amongst peers, presents papers in annual conferences and publishes in peer-reviewed academic journals, preferably with high impact. Disregarding our multiple belongings

and the precarious positions that often affect and curtail our entries into academia and our 'standing' as legitimate knowledge subjects, it is suggested that 'we', who inhabit the interiors of academic walls, are legitimate knowledge producers. Consequently 'we' have privileged access to an array of audiences to whom we repeatedly disseminate scientific (i.e., allegedly neutral) results. Then, another imagined collective – 'they' – accept to be part of the research as short-term participants, do not contribute to analysis, lack the ability to remain objective and are destined to write manifestos and press releases and to organise street protests and other forms of collective action and lobbying. They are the subjects whom academics transform into objects of scrutiny, without which any sociological account would be void.

This somewhat exaggerated rhetorical device acts on many levels, including the symbolic distinction between science and politics, constructed as two opposite poles. Both academics and activists identify the dangers of mutual 'contamination', and of the nefarious impacts that might result from bringing science and politics closer to each other. Whilst the academics often give in to the positivist criteria of neutrality – what Sandra Harding aptly noted as a form of 'weak objectivity' (Harding, 1991)[2] – the activists quickly dismissed sociological literature on social movements, opting instead for other genres, including history and autobiography (Bevington and Dixon, 2005; Flacks, 2005). Moreover, between academics and activists there is a reciprocal prejudice under an often unacknowledged premise that between these two 'worlds' an 'ecology of knowledges' (Sousa Santos, 2004, 2006) – non-hierarchical, mutual, multiple – is not attainable. For instance, in a cross-institutional event organised by the Weeks Centre for Social and Policy Research, London South Bank University and Newcastle University, under the suggestive theme of 'Problematic Publics? Making Space at the Academic Table', one non-academic attendee stated that it was 'hard to find academic research that is actually helpful' and that 'academic language is hard to grasp – pretentious, designed for academic papers'.[3] Gathering practitioners, activists, policy makers and academics, this event, which was designed to 'cross spaces and subjects and 'reach out' beyond the confines of institutional walls and boundaries as a response to working collaboratively rather than competitively', discussed many of the tensions between academic and non-academic sectors, as well as the other attendant difficulties in 'reaching out, giving back'.

Such events now take place within and through the neoliberal entrepreneurial university. In light of this context, cuts in social sciences and humanities in Europe and beyond mirror a tacit agreement in relation to scientific priorities that place particular emphasis on policy-oriented research, reaching out beyond academic circles, seducing international students willing to pay hefty fees, making research more likely to generate 'impact'. Impact became a multi-headed hydra, encapsulating meanings which are too often competing with one another, but the results of which

successful academics are expected to grasp and enact. These may include the talent in attracting many students to register in a given course; the rates of employability of certain areas of study; the ability to influence legal and cultural change; the number of times a certain research project has its key findings quoted in the media, and so forth. Generating impact seems in many ways to have replaced the earlier need for relevance and accountability, former buzz words which somewhat vanished from application forms and, thus, from applicants' most immediate concerns. In this sense, impact is largely equated with winning, dismissing all the nuances and tensions that generating 'successful' impact implies (Taylor, 2013).

Perhaps, in a contradictory way, this recent fixation on impact seems to coexist with the return of positivist approaches and understandings of science and 'proper' scholarly behavior. Under the current climate, experts in economy acquire central stage, being converted into the guardians of all solutions, after having been the co-producers of many of the problems. Examples of such centrality abound in all sorts of ways, from experts who are invited to primetime TV debates to the impact factor of scientific economy journals. In the mainstream reading of academic worth, gender and LGBT/queer studies emerge at the other end of the spectrum, as marginal concerns of rather extravagant scholars who are likely to be engaged in left-wing party politics and/or feminist and LGBT/queer movements and who, therefore, lack the objective tools to deal with serious issues such as … the financial crisis. In other words, gender and sexuality are not core issues in current societies; markets and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) are.

In fact, what could be read as a contradiction between these two recent tendencies is nothing but an apparent contradiction. Contrary to what the hopeful 'scholar–activist' (Santos, 2012) might wish for, the push for impact beyond academia is not a free pass to engaging with social actors, with community-based networks and minoritised groups, but it is rather a call for closer interaction with decision-makers, with funding bodies, with those who already have a voice, often a louder voice than any top-quality researcher might aspire to achieve. In order words, the push for impact is a push for power, not necessarily for inclusive citizenship and democratisation of knowledge production and access. When it comes to finding a seat at the already-established table, the number of places is restricted, selective and highly precarious. In addition, such features of 'the table' – restriction, selectivity and precariousness – acquire kaleidoscopic readings depending on whichever public is targeted in any given moment or context (Taylor, 2012a). And this is precisely where a tacit – yet persistent and multifarious – hierarchy of worth between disciplines comes in; one in which gender and LGBT/queer issues are often conflated and (allegedly temporarily) dismissed as not 'as important as'.

In mainstream academia, gender and LGBT/queer – as fields of studies – are confronted with the need for constant validation and re-legitimisation. And

so, well intentioned colleagues exchange well intentioned, yet patronising, smiles before saying: 'In the current climate of financial crisis, women's movements or LGBT movements are not so important as X or Y'; 'feminist theory is too political, too ideological'; 'sure, gender is an important dimension, but it would be best to widen your scope of interest, to address something else'; 'gender is too specific, too narrow as a field'. Surely we have heard it countless times before, more or less wordy or subtle. The push for constant reassertion of gender and LGBT/queer studies is part of the process of disciplining knowledge, containing transformation and safeguarding boundaries – that is, walls – that contribute to remaking the artificial distinction between science and politics. Despite differences stemming from the specificity and historical legacy of each field, such a disciplining process has been observed in relation to other aspects of dis/belonging, 'race' and class in particular. Drawing on Beverley Skeggs' (1997) work on social distinctions as sites of struggle and tension, Michelle Addison (2012) has noted the increased significance of classed performances in higher education in the United Kingdom and its relation to the 'valued worker identity' that equates the 'good worker' with the 'happy worker' – the one who is able and willing to fit in, hence avoiding being labeled as troublemaker. Addison's analysis highlights the constricted ways in which employees seek to become successful (i.e., 'generate impact') through a particular understanding of what success might be, and how academia generates places of exclusion within. Similar results can be found in Sara Ahmed's input regarding black feminists who have 'made it' into academia (Ahmed, 2012), as well as in Yvette Taylor's work on intersecting class, gender and sexual positionalities in academia (Taylor, 2012b). These and other contributions in the same vein demonstrate the impact of disciplining scholarly knowledge on the possibilities for becoming recognised as worthy topics, objects, subjects and publics. The constraints imposed by mainstream academia translate into an absence of methodological and theoretical creativity, and into the subsequent shrinking of the hermeneutic potential. Furthermore, the restrictive crafting of 'worthy' scholarly knowledge also tends to replicate those who have – and have not – access to results and analytical outputs, as well as those who count as 'worthy' publics.

The hierarchy of worth between different fields of studies within mainstream academia is clearly represented by the list of indexed academic journals, as well as by its related impact factor. Gender and sexuality related journals find a rare place in international academic indexes, and when they do get to be included, their impact factor is comparatively insignificant. This is an objective sign of the arbitrary value ascribed to different research topics and related fields, with the (unintended) consequence of encouraging funding and further research in some areas at the expense of others, constituting a rather perverse 'catch-22' situation in which gender and LGBT/queer studies found themselves invariably in the losing end of the continuum

of 'worthy' knowledge. And power. Spotting these often-unacknowledged (however resilient) walls in academia is a necessary step in finding ways to overcome the excluding hierarchical knowledge these walls imitate. The next step, then, is to implode these sturdy walls and finally embrace what they had been attempting to keep outside.

Imploding sturdy walls: who said anything about minor?

To reiterate: gender and LGBT/queer studies are never self-evident or taken for granted as mandatory and legitimate. They need to be constantly retold, redone, reasserted. Perhaps more so here than in any other field, the pattern of suspicion against what is often labeled as too politicised is enlarged by the need for pushing formerly private issues, not to the domestic sphere, but certainly away from the scholarly canon. Hence, the hard labour of delivering top-quality research, of publishing in indexed journals, of getting positive evaluation from students over and over again.[4] Decades after the emergence and consolidation of the women's and LGBT/queer movements in Europe and beyond, the question remains: Why is it still so difficult within mainstream academia to recognise the centrality of gender and LGBT/queer studies, with no longer due?

In an inspirational essay published in 2009, Rosalind Gill discusses the perils of the neoliberal university and how 'full-on' academic work generates never-ending expectations, commitments and demands which simultaneously enable the 'good academic life' and hinder any prospects of achieving an actual good life. Gill links the current state of academia to more encompassing changes in the field of new information technologies that render obsolete the need for the physically confined office space where scholars would develop their work for a definite number of daily hours. It is suggested that such confinement was, in fact, liberating to the extent that it made working hours clearer, self-contained and, therefore, more manageable. To put it differently, before i-pad and i-phone those were the days when it was acceptable that we would not check – let alone provide answers to – emails over the weekend or in the evening. A recent turn in academic work transformed unlimited flexibility into an actuality that must not be challenged by those who aspire to achieve a respectable professional status. And under these circumstances, current academic work can easily become non-stoppable, an eager creature that will happily take over anything that resembles, for instance, family time or leisure.

Such a picture of an overarching academia that reaches way beyond its physical walls seems to be in sharp contrast with the seemingly more-resilient symbolic walls separating academic disciplines,(as well as academia) from whatever lies beyond the ivory tower. The contradiction is obvious: while on one hand academic work left the building and is now to be conducted everywhere and at any time, on the other hand academic work

is not to be contaminated by other forms of knowledge and intervention. Eager to protect its symbolic boundaries against what it perceives as 'subjective' and temporary, academia fell into the trap of disregarding its own (and in fact highly precarious) subjectivity and temporality.

The attempts to challenge such positivistic understanding of academia are not by no means recent or isolated. As previously discussed in the chapter, the contributions of public sociology, gender and LGBT/queer studies have significantly challenged narrow assumptions of what rigor and objectivity mean in the academic context, and how mutually beneficial it is to conduct empirically engaged research. Similarly, the push for interdisciplinary teams and subjects,[5] with mainstream funding bodies recognising interdisciplinarity as a plus rather than a weakness, could be interpreted under the light of rejecting the always-precarious boundaries that guard different areas of knowledge from reciprocal exchange. Arguably, such subversive interpretation of the usefulness of *interdisciplining* – that is, proactively seeking interdisciplinary scholars, as well as modes of doing empirical research, interpreting, theorising and disseminating which would be relevant across a range of experiences and fields, both within and beyond academia – could generate more exciting results than sticking to the rather lazy coalition of researchers with different backgrounds in one single research project, who will each remain stubbornly faithful to their 'school of thought', their masters, their foundational books from the 1980s throughout the number of years the bid foresees.[6]

In line with this move away from strict (however precarious) walls, it is crucial to extend the project of an ecology of knowledges (Sousa Santos, 2004, 2006) to the fields of gender and LGBT/queer studies. The fundamental premise underlying the ecology of knowledges is the following:

> There is no ignorance or knowledge in general. All ignorance is ignorant of a certain knowledge, and all knowledge is the overcoming of a particular ignorance. ... The principle of incompleteness of all knowledges is the condition of the possibility of epistemological dialogue and debate among the different knowledges. (2004: 18)

This tendency to enshrine certain disciplines at the expense of others can be better understood through what could be called the myth of the Russian doll (aka matrioska). According to this myth, which abounds in mainstream academia, there is a wide, wide scenario in which one should move in academia. This can be social sciences or humanities, for example. It is from these major domains that the authors of reference are carefully identified and quoted. Very often, this equals to saying DWEM: dead, white, European, male authors of reference. Then, on a second layer, smaller but still with some holistic potential, there are disciplines such as psychology, geography, law, amongst others. People know they are legitimate areas;

there are professional associations attached; experts are invited for regular commentary in the media; there are bids for specific funding; and consolidated graduate and post-graduate programmes in each field. There is a third level, the level of subfields. Cognitive psychology, sociology of religions and administrative law all would fit here.

None of the three successive matrioskas capture what gender and LGBT/queer studies (engaged) academics do. In fact, the need for constant retelling, redoing and reasserting of gender and LGBT/queer studies proves that this is the smallest matrioska, the one which is considered unable to encapsulate anything else, the one which lacks the skills or power to unfold itself to accommodate what is 'really' relevant, according to hegemonic epistemologies. And this is the myth that begs for nomination and dismantling. The failure in understanding that gender and sexuality are anything but specific or narrow bears witness to the epistemological inability to bridge gaps, to generate links, symbolic translations, intersectional synergies that consider what are the common features – of oppression and resistance – shared by different identities, experiences, senses of belonging, ways of interpreting the world. For instance, the austerity measures that have been constraining thousands of people since 2010, especially in Southern Europe, can usefully be analysed through a gendered perspective that highlights the additional impact of the financial crisis on young, migrant or disabled women. The inability to take intersectionality seriously (Cole, 2008; Davis, 2008; Santos, 2011; Taylor et al., 2010) or to see the theoretical and political links between different issues ultimately signals a rather serious unwillingness to offer recognition – recognition in the etymological sense of knowing again, in conditions of equal and mutual learning.

Perhaps such bridges, links, translations, synergies are already on their way in relation to other (equally valid) topics. Ronald Barnett (2012, 2013), for instance, suggests that we take into account the need for an 'ecological university':

> Ecological in the sense of being seized of its interconnectedness with and responsibilities in the world ... beyond aiding the sustainability of the world by also looking to advance global well-being. And here well-being relates to all of the ecologies attendant on the university – including knowledge ecologies, institutional ecologies, social ecologies, economic ecologies, cultural ecologies, personal ecologies and ecologies of reasoning and understanding. (2013: 39)

This may represent one amongst other welcome signs of change, and alongside alternative notions such as the previously mentioned 'ecology of knowledges' (Sousa Santos, 2004, 2006).

Mainstream academia may well repeat that gender and LGBT/queer studies are inter/trans/multidisciplinary – hence, one might expect wider

than (otherwise) narrow fields of knowledge. But the symbolic exchanges that still push some fields to the bottom of the hierarchy of worthy knowledge leave no room for wishful thinking. Hence, the need for shattering old walls, spotting subliminal walls and imploding sturdy walls, over and over again.

Concluding thoughts

Walls are designed to sustain, to shield and to delimit. Per definition they keep elements within at the same time as they exclude, prevent access to, and generate asymmetries. This chapter addressed some of the remaining walls in academia as devices, purposively in place, that replicate the canon at the expense of devaluing non-mainstream topics, theories and publics. The often-unacknowledged distinction between scholarship and activism remains one of the most resilient practices in mainstream academia, constituting a de facto wall that thwarts the advancement of useful contributions in areas such as social movement studies, gender studies and LGBT/queer studies, to name but a few examples. Precisely due to its unacknowledged character, this wall often feels too sturdy and tall to be undone – as borne witness to by the obstacles experienced by scholars in gender and LGBT/queer studies.

However, this wall is constantly being challenged, both from within and from outside academia. Activism – and scholar–activists in particular – offers a valuable contribution in the process of scaling, if not undoing, the wall. In the history of both gender studies and LGBT/queer studies, academia and activism were frequently allies, and those who generated ground-breaking theories and gave passionate lectures were often the same people who organised demonstrations and lobbied parliamentarians against Section 28, for instance (Weeks, 2007). Prominent social scientists also engaged in political change include Ken Plummer, Jeffrey Weeks, Lynne Segal, Mary McIntosh and Sasha Roseneil, to give but a few examples. Therefore, the role of 'scholar–activists' already has a tradition, even if an often-unacknowledged one. In the field of LGBT/queer studies, such engagement is politicised to the extent that the choice of topic is already political.

In a context in which discrimination represents invisibility, oppression and violence, sociologists who study LGBT/queer issues are certainly expected to use relevant knowledge and resources to counter the effects of such discrimination (Santos, 2006, 2012). Discrimination heightens the call for sociologists to become scholar–activists. As noted by Halberstam, 'The academic might be the archivist or a co-archivist or they might be a fully-fledged participant in the subcultural scene that they write about. Only rarely does the queer theorist stand wholly apart from the subculture, examining it with an expert's gaze' (2003: 322). Therefore, disclosing political engagement within academia becomes not only a possibility but also a

duty in relation to the dominant framework of sexism, heterosexism and homo-, bi- or transphobia. And, indeed, such a duty is not harmful, but in fact is conducive to generating relevant (and empirically grounded) scholarly knowledge. As Harding eloquently framed it, '[W]e need not – indeed, must not – choose between "good politics" and "good science" ... for the former can produce the latter' (2004: 6).

The political engagement of academics working in gender and/or LGBT/queer studies impacts upon epistemological and ethical choices because struggling against discrimination becomes a permanent concern, a personal commitment and a fundamental aim in any research process (Hines and Taylor, 2012; Santos, 2013). Such engagement has also contributed to community building and mutual academic support which are particularly relevant in contexts in which both (often interconnected) fields of study still face hostility and scepticism within mainstream academia.

Scholar–activists are in a privileged position to access target groups – including policy and lawmakers, politicians and the media – which can be crucial agents for enacting social, legal and political change. More specifically, in the field of LGBT/queer studies, scholar–activists are invested with the trust and hope of social actors who experience the ongoing effects of daily discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. This equips scholar–activists with the ethical duty of producing science which is accessible to a general audience and disseminated amongst groups and institutions that have the power to counter discrimination. Arguably, this willingness to reveal oneself as a politically engaged academic will make sociology more socially and scientifically accountable and, equally importantly, more relevant for countering inequality and discrimination, within academia and beyond.

A central point of this chapter is that our multiple sense of belonging impacts on our knowledge production in ways which are always political, whether we acknowledge it or not. As Stephen Pfohl puts it, '[O]ur own personal and institutional locations within matrices of power always partially shape what we see and what escapes our sight. ... We are never simply ourselves alone, but always also complex social personae, enacting cultural scripts not entirely of our own making' (2004: 114–115). The examples discussed throughout the chapter highlight our multiple, and often competing, belongings as socially – and politically – embedded actors. In a political context which is still largely hostile to gender and LGBT/queer studies (albeit more and more subtle in style), the urgency to advance the centrality of these related fields should not be overlooked.

Notes

1. According to Harding, 'Weak objectivity is located in a conceptual interdependency that includes (weak) subjectivity and judgmental relativism' (1991: 156).

2. According to Harding, 'Weak objectivity is located in a conceptual interdependency that includes (weak) subjectivity and judgmental relativism' (1991: 156).
3. More information about this event is available at http://weekscentreforsocialandpolicyresearch.wordpress.com/2012/10/01/problematic-publics-making-space-at-the-academic-table/#_ftn1 [accessed 20/03/2013].
4. And yet, gender and LGBT/queer issues were never as public as today; furthermore, never were they so apparently legitimized by mainstream academia than today. A couple of examples should suffice: in 2011, the British Sociological Association (BSA) created the Gender Study Group, the same year that the Portuguese Sociological Association created its Sexuality and Gender Research Network. And in 2012, the prestigious BSA Philip Abrams Memorial Prize for the best first and sole-authored book within the discipline of Sociology was awarded ex aequo to Zowie Davy, for her engaging book, *Recognizing Transsexuals: Personal, Political and Medicolegal Embodiment* (Ashgate).
5. For example, the European Research Council clearly values interdisciplinarity as a positive asset. In their website, it is stated that 'Research proposals of a multi and inter disciplinary nature are strongly encouraged throughout the ERC's schemes'. Available at http://erc.europa.eu/evaluation-panels [accessed 09/05/2013].
6. For a thought-provoking critical analysis of disciplines and the extent to which they have been harmful to the free exercise of imagination in academia and beyond, please refer to Halberstam, 2011.

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