

Seminar Programme Outline

It is the objective of the seminar to investigate and discuss the interconnections between research methodology and epistemology in postcolonial studies. Postcolonial studies cover a field similar to that of development studies, but with an explicit emphasis on history and on relations of power.

All of the invited speakers to the seminar are researchers with experience from research in third world countries. A few among them will as Asians or Latin Americans speak from a third world point of view. Several of the speakers have been inspired by feminist thinking on issues of methodology and epistemology in the social sciences, others have been inspired mainly from other sources. It is a further objective of the seminar to create a space for a debate on methodology and epistemology between researchers with these different backgrounds.

Central for the discussions in the seminar are among others the following questions and issues of debate:

1. According to Francis Bacon knowledge is power. According to Michel Foucault power produces knowledge. What are the types of power and of knowledge they are talking about? How to investigate the interconnections between *knowledge and power*? Does and how does the knowledge of power differ from knowledge of the powerless? To what extent is what conventionally passes as knowledge linked to positions of power in present day global society? What are the conditions for alternative knowledge claims to be articulated and validated?

2. Somewhat connected to this discussion is a widespread *critique and yet ambivalence regarding Enlightenment thinking and Western scientific rationality*. On one hand the scientific paradigms of modernity are examples par excellence of not only dominant, but hierarchical and exclusive modes of thinking, by their very logic counting off alternative modes as irrationality, nonsense. On the other hand the ethos of modernity is and has been for the progress of mankind, social change and emancipation. In the bourgeois and proletarian revolutions new knowledge was conceived and developed against established positions of power.

How to challenge *and* develop the legacy of modernity? How to overcome and mediate the hierarchical dichotomies of modern

thinking (nature/culture, mind/body etc.)? How to think in ways that challenge established powers and will be useful as weapons of the weak?

3. Further connected to all of this are the questions of *different types of knowledge and different ways of knowing*: What counts as knowledge? Whose knowledge counts? Which crucial areas of rationality and of life were excluded when "scientific rationality" was adopted? How is knowledge constructed in other social areas (eg. in the family?), in other cultures? Non-positivist scholars acknowledge that knowledge is socially situated, *embedded* in society. But to what extent is it also *embodied*? What is the relevance and scope of body knowledge?

4. No knowledge without knowers. But what is the relevance of feelings, emotions and values of the knower in relation to the known? How to account for *the subjectivity of the researcher* as an aspect of the research process itself? The terms "reflexivity" and "positionality" indicate that the researcher herself with feelings, emotions and values, should be firmly located within the field of investigation. 'Being an ethnographer means studying the self as well as the other. In this way the self becomes "othered", an object of study, while at the same time the other (...) becomes part of the self' (Pat Caplan 1993:180) But how to practice this in the actual process of research?

5. Questioning types of knowledge and facing challenges of reflexivity and positionality are closely connected to implementation of *qualitative methods of investigation and analysis*.

a. Qualitative research opens possibilities for taking into account the interconnections and *dialogue between (researcher) subject and (researched) object*, proceeding by way of *interpretation*, rather than by simple counting and measuring.

b. Qualitative research thus may *mediate* between subject and object, but also between other dichotomies, as those of *mind and body, and of brain and heart* (cf. Hilary Rose 1987) as the researcher has to use both in the processes of collection and interpretation of data.

c. Qualitative research furthermore may *challenge* the very concepts and methods that it applies, at the same time as they nevertheless have to be applied.

d. Qualitative research also may be *sensitive to unequal power relations*, but how, and under which conditions?

e. What are the *dilemmas and problems of validation* of qualitative research?

It is the aim of the seminar to discuss research experiences of the participants on an epistemological context.

6. All along concepts of *difference* should be investigated and discussed. Difference in a series of meanings, for instance with reference to gender:

a. Difference as difference *between* women, blacks etc., the subject of feminist knowledge is not women per se, but different women, concretely located; and not just difference between women, also difference *within* women, taking account of women's heterogeneous subjectivities and *multiple identities*.

b. Another aspect of difference, relates to differences that *are* and differences that *are not hierarchical*. Class, gender and race/ethnicity differences are mostly hierarchical, ie. they are unequal relations of power, but combating hierarchy does not necessarily mean replacing difference with identity. The battle may be a battle for differences that are *not* hierarchical, and for equality that does *not* mean identity.

c. A final aspect of difference is what has been referred to by Patricia Hill Collins (1990:232) as "*outsiders within*". Sandra Harding talks of 'women as valuable strangers to the social order' (1991:124), meaning that being different, coming as "outsiders" to the dominant institutions of science and knowledge, women may notice things, that for the "insiders" pass unnoticed. As being outside, and inside as well, educated first world women and educated third world women and men are in unique positions both to see with those different eyes, and to mediate between "outsiders" and "insiders".

References

- Caplan, Pat, 1993, Learning Gender, in Bell, Caplan, Karim (eds.): *Gendered Fields*, Routledge.
- Collins, Patricia Hill, 1990, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. Unwin Hyman.
- Harding, Sandra, 1991, *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge?* Open University Press.
- Rose, Hilary, 1987, Hand, Brain and Heart. A Feminist Epistemology for the Natural Sciences, in: Harding and O'Barr (eds.), *Sex and Scientific Inquiry*, University of Chicago Press.