Aisha-Nusrat Ahmad, Maik Fielitz, Johanna Leinius,
Gianna Magdalena Schlichte (eds.)

Knowledge, Normativity and Power in Academia

Critical Interventions

Knowledge, Normativity and Power in Academia

Normative Orders

Publications of the Cluster of Excellence "Formation of Normative Orders" at Goethe University, Frankfurt am Main

Edited by Rainer Forst and Klaus Günther

Volume 24

Aisha-Nusrat Ahmad is a research associate at the International Psychoanalytic University Berlin. *Maik Fielitz* is a research associate at the Institute for Democracy and Civil Society in Jena. *Johanna Leinius* is a research associate at the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Kassel. *Gianna Magdalena Schlichte* is a research associate at the Bremen Institute for Criminal Sciences.

Aisha-Nusrat Ahmad, Maik Fielitz, Johanna Leinius,
Gianna Magdalena Schlichte (eds.)

Knowledge, Normativity and Power in Academia

Critical Interventions

Campus Verlag
Frankfurt/New York

DFG   **NORMATIVE ORDERS**
Exzellenzcluster an der Goethe-Universität Frankfurt am Main

For further information:
www.campus.de
www.press.uchicago.edu

© Campus Verlag GmbH

Contents

II. Challenging the Norms of Academic Forms
   of Knowledge

Introduction: Critical Interventions in Knowledge Production from Within and Without Academia

Aisha-N. Ahmad, Maik Fielitz, Johanna Leinius and Gianna M. Schlichte

Where We Begin

The conditions for conducting critical research have deteriorated globally in the recent decades, which consequently poses fundamental challenges for emancipatory knowledge production. First, the neoliberalization of the university, understood as the permeation of the logic of economic utility and the increasing marketization of knowledge (see Brown 2015), has contributed to enlarging the gap between the production of academic knowledge and its transformative potential for emancipatory social change. Generally evaluated in accordance with its immediate use for advancing national economies or stabilizing political systems, academic knowledge production is, secondly, becoming increasingly decentralized. Specialized research centers with predefined agendas and unclear mandates, with far greater financing and influence than public universities, have mushroomed, thereby diluting academia's independence from the interference of the state and private sector. Third, the recent political shift to the right across the Americas, Europe and Asia, along with the establishment of authoritarian figures in leading liberal democracies, has revitalized the debate on the normative basis of critical research as newly established disciplines within the social sciences are coming to be deemed irrelevant and pseudoscientific.

The allegation that critical research indulges in the creation of escapist ghettos for like-minded people, while broad swaths of the population are endorsing protectionism, nativism and isolation, has become an oft-repeated comment on the state of critical research.[1]

---

1 Situated in the German university context, we refer mainly to the debates observable from this vantage point, including German-speaking countries, Europe and the US. The impression we have is that these views are increasingly being expressed in the media as well as within academia itself. This can be witnessed, for instance, in the recent discussion

The current setting has placed scholars pursuing a critical and emancipatory agenda at a crossroads: On the one hand, and in tandem with the increasingly aggressive anti-academic discourse fueled by far-right ideologues and consumerist mainstream attitudes, the de-centralization of academic knowledge production has put the progressive promise offered by academia in peril. While the close overlap of teaching and research at public universities has ensured to a certain extent, the social and political relevance of academic knowledge, academic research has become deeply compartmentalized within separate disciplines. The spaces in which knowledge is created have multiplied and are no longer confined to the university: a multiplicity of research institutes, think tanks and other organizations are creating and disseminating academic knowledge. At the same time, however, research results are rarely communicated in an approachable form and language.

On the other hand, the expansion of academia has also enlarged the spaces of academic knowledge production, which may generate competing ideas about the potential for effecting broader social transformation. The inherent need to justify research approaches and results potentially exposes academic knowledge production—wherever it is produced and disseminated—to critique from approaches pursuing a normative emancipatory agenda.

Against this backdrop, we distinctly position this volume as an intervention into the prevailing atmosphere of control and enclosure that has imposed itself at the crossroads of politics and academia. We argue that there is a need for academia to articulate an emancipatory perspective and approach which challenges the dichotomies and hierarchies that inhibit the achievement of social justice and equality. The purpose of this volume is put forth an understanding of academia as a normative order that adheres to certain rules of self-justification (Forst and Günther 2011, 15–20) and to reflect on the repercussions of this paradigmatic shift, not only in regards to the practice and norms of knowledge production but also for the sake of identifying possibilities for critique itself, without or within academia.

Approaching academic knowledge production as a normative order means acknowledging the complex and at times ambivalent processes of critical knowledge production within the plurality of spaces and locations which together constitute academia. As such, the volume is an attempt to explore

concerning the (ir-)relevance of political science as a discipline, featured in various German newspapers and blogs (see, for example, Debus, Faas, and Schäfer 2017).

"a place for science between an impossible certainty and an interminable deconstruction, a science of both reference and mistrust, a science possible after our disappointments in science." (Lather 2007, 1)

We set out to critically engage with how knowledge is created and disseminated in academia—and hence with the very conditions of our day-to-day work—, with its effects and, consequently, with the very setting of our intervention (not least resulting from a critical engagement with the heritage of the Frankfurt School). As, for all of us, endeavoring to *critique* always implies a reflection of one's own inevitable embeddedness in the reproduction of the very normative orders we strive to critique (see Forst 2015, 17), scrutinizing our positionality within academia from Campus Westend in Frankfurt, Germany is the starting point of our endeavor. In a building with the capital letters NORMATIVE ORDERS affixed on the entrance—located on Max Horkheimer Street, not far from Theodor W. Adorno Square—, our location provided us with the impetus to scrutinize the Frankfurt School's stance on the invariably political nature of scholarship.

This necessarily involves a serious consideration the role of knowledge in legitimizing violence and contributing to the perpetration of atrocities: the campus is located on the former premises of the IG-Farben Company, which, during the Second World War, profited massively from the slave labor performed by concentration camp prisoners, and which produced Zyklon B for the gas chambers through its affiliated firm, Degussa.

We invite you to follow us on a journey through a selection of the times and places in which scholarship has turned its critical gaze onto itself or has been forced to do so by actors and processes beyond academia. All the while, we ask how the critical sting of emancipatory research can be directed towards the heart of an ever-more enclosed environment. This volume discusses the hierarchies and exclusionary practices within academia that reproduce certain ontological and epistemological perspectives along with certain forms of knowledge while relegating others to the margins. It also highlights the critical potential of interventions originating within and without academia. Instead of providing definite answers, we strive to open a space which fosters the critical self-reflexivity of academia by providing room for a variety of voices and practices to enter the debate.

The introduction to the volume aims to outline the scope in which these encounters take place. We first turn to the origins of the Frankfurt School and its debates surrounding the role knowledge in the transformation of so-

ciety, juxtaposing this with more recent interventions spearheaded by post-colonial and feminist scholars. In an attempt to think through the challenges and potentials of critical knowledge production from within and without academia, we then turn our focus to the normative order of academia, examining its rationales and the context in which it is embedded. In a third step, we discuss how these debates have been translated into the practice of conducting research and how the hierarchical ordering of knowledge is reproduced, yet also challenged, through qualitative research. We conclude by presenting our approach to challenging the exclusionary practices of academic knowledge production, both in the conference from which this volume has emerged and in this volume.

Frankfurt and Beyond: Challenging Normativity

An engagement with the research of the Frankfurt School is almost inevitable when dealing with the nexus of knowledge production and social transformation from today's perspective. Assembled around the (still existing) Institute for Social Research, an interdisciplinary group of scholars inspired by Marxist thought sought to develop a new branch of science that would contribute to "a critique of ideology and to the development of a non-authoritarian and non-bureaucratic politics" (Held 1980, 21). For Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, the Institute's leading figures, a radical critique of rationality and positivism, as manifestations of the Enlightenment, implied revealing and criticizing the approaches of traditional 'problem-solving' theories, showing them to be complicit in the reproduction of exclusionary systems of power and knowledge. The positivistic approach to science, they argue, claims existing social conditions to be a matter of fact and thereby affirms their inherent exclusions as necessary (see Horkheimer and Adorno 2002, 13).

Building on this radical criticism of the sort of knowledge produced within academia, their seminal work, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, proposes a reflective approach to the Enlightenment as well as to one's own complicity in the scientific structures of knowledge production. They develop their own account of "history [that] does not believe itself elevated above history" (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002, xii). Critical theory not only aims to criticize the conditions of the present based on concrete historical experiences of

injustice and inequality but also the emancipatory ideas of the Enlightenment.[2] In this vein, and from a feminist perspective, Nancy Fraser argues that:

"A critical theory frames its research program and its conceptual framework with an eye on the aims and activities of those oppositional social movements with which it has a partisan though not uncritical identification. […] Thus, for example, if struggles contesting the subordination of women figured among the most significant of a given age, then a critical social theory for that time would aim, among other things, to shed light on the character and bases of such subordination. It would employ categories and explanatory models which revealed rather than occluded relations of male dominance and female subordination." (Fraser 1985, 97)

The so-called second and third generations[3] of the Frankfurt School have emphasized a more normative approach to critique. By grounding normativity in communicative and/or recognitional practices which presume rational subjects and potentially equal conditions for speaking and being heard, they articulate, at least implicitly, a shared hope within historical learning and progress along with the possibility of mutual recognition.

While acknowledging the contingency of normativity and rejecting metaphysical philosophies, the belief in discursive rationality as a normative basis for emancipation is deeply rooted in Enlightenment thinking (Allen 2017, 184–185). The self-understanding of advancing emancipatory purposes has moved away from being cautious and self-reflective vis-à-vis Enlightenment thinking towards embracing the principles of the Enlightenment.

Adhering to this understanding, the university is implicitly understood as a privileged space for criticism: it is here that the theories are developed with

---

2 Adorno and Horkheimer do, however, underline that "the very concept of [Enlightenment] thinking, no less than the concrete historical forms, the institution of society with which it is intertwined, already contains the germ of regression, which is taking place everywhere today. If enlightenment does not assimilate reflection on this regressive moment, it seals its own fate" (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002, xvi). Their caution was certainly caused by their experience with National Socialism. Somewhat contradictory to their questioning of linear progress and at odds with the ongoing violence in the colonies, they referred to the Second World War as a "relapse into the old barbarism" (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002, 9), implying that such atrocities could eventually be overcome.

3 'So-called', because the categorization into first, second and third generation suggests a linear progression of a theoretical family tradition inherited by the sons and the grandchildren from the grandfathers. Not only is this a deeply patriarchal concept of tradition, beyond that, it does not represent the multitude and diversity of critical theory that is dispersed not only cross-generationally but also globally.

which normative orders can be analyzed, understood and criticized. None-theless, the critique of instrumental reason that the Frankfurt School put forward urges us to critically scrutinize the political economy and historical conditions of the university as place of power.

This represents the radical potential of the Frankfurt School to critically engage with Frankfurt's legacy, as well as the seed for feminist and postcolonial theories, among other critical approaches. Echoing the Frankfurt School's self-reflective approach to knowledge production, silences found in the works of Horkheimer and Adorno, for example, have served as a starting point for discussing the rationalities which frame what is intelligible in a certain time and place. In the words of Edward Said:

"Frankfurt School critical theory, despite its seminal insights into the relationship between domination, modern society, and the opportunities of redemption through art as critique is stunningly silent on racist theory, anti-imperialist resistance, and oppositional practice in the empire." (Said, 1994, 278)

Emphasizing the interrelatedness of power, violence and normativity based in rationality,[4] these critiques hold that the Frankfurt School does not sufficiently consider categories such as race and gender, thereby reproducing the colonizing logics inherent to notions of historical and economic progress (Fraser 1985, 98; Dhawan et al. 2016, 6–8; see Allen 2016).

Embracing critical theory's call for a self-reflective approach to the (im-)possibilities of emancipation through knowledge, post-structural approaches have called into question the very categories on which one relies when articulating critique. They have argued for the close scrutiny and deconstruction of the normative criteria that determine the emancipatory potential of knowledge, proposing, for example, an ever-forthcoming conception of justice (Derrida 2002), the notion of the "always already lacking" subject (Žižek 2000; see Lacan 2006), and a decentralized understanding of the subject (Foucault 2001).

Feminist and post-colonial thinkers have developed critical approaches which rely on these post-structuralist notions, revealing the exclusive (en)closures of emancipative universalism and its related frames of legibility (Butler 2013, 223–224; see Spivak 1988). They question the foundations of

---

4 Referring to Edward Said, Amy Allen argues that these silences are "motivated". This means that they remain dependent on a false universalism that is rooted in the imperialist framing of global hierarchies. This basis permeates the "left-Hegelian strategy for grounding, or justifying the normativity of critical theory" (Allen 2017, 184).

academic knowledge and its legitimizing references. Moreover, they challenge them for their complicity in justifying imperialist politics and male dominance by affirming their own superiority and naturalizing the subordination of the Other (see Said 1978; Mohanty 2003[1991]; Castro-Gomez 2005). Framing the Enlightenment ideals of modernity as entangled and complicit in discriminatory structures, they argue that, as a pre-condition for critique, critical scholarship must confront the affirmative role of theory in processes of subordination as well as the contradictions and ambivalences of knowledge production (see Reiff et al., as well as the other contributions in the first section of this volume). Since we cannot assume a position on the outside, we have to position ourselves outside-in, turning the critical gaze onto ourselves and rejecting any separation of theory and practice: "It is not that we cannot think theory trumping experience; but for the outside insiders it will remain a double bind, not an opposition." (Spivak,1993, xiv) Approaching academia as a normative order provides us with an entry point into the critical self-scrutiny demanded by these scholars.

Academia as a Normative Order

The increasing separation between the spheres of academia and society is a consequence of the attempt to marginalize critical research within the everyday functioning of academia. One facet of this entails the importance of science management for acquiring funding, prestige and influential administrative positions (see Federici 2009). Here, a consensual, conflict-avoiding position which abstains from questioning existing power structures is privileged by university institutions and external donors. Another facet we conceive in our daily practice is the trend of co-opting elements of critical theory-building in mainstream research and decoupling research methodologies from any emancipatory objectives. However, if critical research means anything at all, the nexus of social research and social transformation is inevitable in the way power/knowledge shapes the logic and dynamics of both.

The Frankfurt School, along with post-structural, postcolonial and feminist approaches, would agree with this stance. What unites these numerous approaches of critical theory, despite their differences, is their pursuit of emancipatory goals paired with a critical regard for the contradictions which stem from their own inevitable embeddedness in unequal relations of power

and domination. In differing ways, rationality, universality and progress are revealed as contingent upon a hierarchical structuring of knowledge. This insight, in turn, demands the acceptance of contingency and the deconstruction of that which is taken for granted. Consequently, the very categories which form the normative basis of critique must be deconstructed and their inherent exclusiveness revealed (see Butler 2013, 223).

The exclusionary and hierarchizing rationales of knowledge, according to Marie Louise Pratt, originate from the European desire to integrate the previously unknown into hierarchically ordered systems of classification (Pratt 1992, see Epple and Erhart 2015). In Europe in the mid-eighteenth century, she argues, "the emergence of natural history as a structure of knowledge" (Pratt 1992, 9) represented the logic of knowledge through which colonial encounters took place:[5] Carl Linné's botanical classificatory system, which made it possible to order any known or yet unknown plant into a single system based on a taxonomy of visual distinctions, changed the way Europeans made sense of their place in the world (see Pratt 1992, 29). The enormous popularity of this system and its impact on knowledge production not only resulted from geopolitical variables, but likewise from the pull it had on the imagination; it allowed order to emerge from chaos:

"One by one the planet's life forms were to be drawn out of the tangled threads of their life surroundings and rewoven into European-based patterns of global unity and order. The (lettered, male, European) eye that held the system could familiarize ('naturalize') new sites/sights immediately upon contact, by incorporating them into the language of the system." (Pratt 1992, 38)

Historizing the normative ground for critique, as Pratt does, reveals its contingency. While academic scholarship plays a crucial role in analyzing and critiquing social, economic, ecological and political inequalities, it is simultaneously inextricably linked to its social context and its inherent relations of power and domination.

---

5 The rise of the natural sciences coincided with other processes which, today, are subsumed under the umbrella term of modernity. As another characteristic of modernity, Pratt lists the emergence of "bourgeois forms of subjectivity and power, the inauguration of a new territorial phase of capitalism propelled by searches for raw materials, […] and overseas territory in order to prevent its being seized by rival European powers" (Pratt 1992, 9). While capitalist modernity emerged in the West and is closely linked to the Enlightenment, scholars have posited the notion of 'alternative' or 'multiple' modernities to denote the relational character of the emergence of modernity as global phenomenon (see Eisenstadt 2003; Ashcroft 2009, 83).

Approaching the normative order of academia from its embeddedness in neoliberal modernity, on the one hand, enables us to acquire deeper insight into the power structures that may facilitate more precise interventions. It implies seriously considering exclusions based on naturalized categories such as race, gender, class or other markers of differentiation, both within academic knowledge production and without (see Ahmad & Hernandez and Künstler in this volume). On the other hand, it requires the deconstruction of one's own practices: Researchers reproduce this normative order through everyday acts such as networking in elitist circles for funding, publishing in high-ranking journals, and only teaching certain texts as the canon of their respective discipline (see Levi in this volume).

In this way, critical research needs to rearticulate a political position and lend its power to those unheard. It must prove that 'another academia is possible' by questioning the recent state of affairs in academia and articulating the imaginations, hopes and desires which contain collective efforts to transform the foundations of modern academia and politicize the conditions which direct it (Haiven and Khasnabish 2014).

The Academic Order and Society: Challenges from Without

Convinced that academia must confront its self-referentiality and also responding to the depreciation of academic knowledge among parts of society, appeals calling for a political counter-offensive driven by critical intellectuals have recently proliferated. For instance, in their *Manifesto,* de Lagasnerie and Louis (2015) identify academic disengagement and silence as the main causes behind the weakening of the position of critical research and they invoke political intervention as an indispensable tool during these times of brutal border patrolling and growing poverty. De Lagasnerie (2017) also advocates for abandoning the romantic imagination of university as a space of freedom and dissent. He argues that the inherent mechanisms of censorship with regard to which sort of knowledge is produced and which content is published clearly designates political struggles over meaning while the existent state of affairs reflects the power relations within academia.

In this line of argumentation, the neoliberal status quo is being aggravated by the growing influence of neoconservative think tanks and New Right intellectuals. Critics disdain the privileged position of the intellectual

in these scenarios and the supposed contradiction in relation to workers and migrants, thereby reproducing the separations that critical approaches have already challenged (see Stiegler 2015). As knowledge always constitutes a social relation between human beings, critical research needs to pull down the barriers of knowledge that separate those who produce knowledge and those who offer their experiences as raw material to be converted into theory by the well-meaning researcher.

This debate on the coercive and hierarchizing aspects of academic knowledge production has been led by different research communities. They have critically questioned their relation to processes of social transformation, asking:

"Whose knowledge is this? Why (as a researcher) do I choose to construct this problem? What assumptions are hidden within my research practices? How could this work produce exclusions? What do I do as I encounter those unexpected exclusions or oppressions that result from the work? What is my privilege (or power position) in this research? How am I subtly re-inscribing my own universals and/or discrediting others?" (Canella and Lincoln 2007, 316)

Research ethics has emerged as a field that explicitly confronts the inequalities and exclusions that academic knowledge production generates. This orientation holds that critical researchers need to scrutinize their methodological approaches and confront difficult situations "as ethically important moments", as Guillemin and Gillam (2004) put it. However, ethics in academia have a rather brief history: in the face of the atrocities committed during the Nazi regime, the Helsinki Declaration in 1964 represented the first attempt to set up guidelines for biomedical research with human beings (Lincoln and Canella, 2009 274). Since the 1960s, social scientists have similarly engaged with ethics in qualitative research (see Bulmer 1982; Kimmel 1988; Orb, Eisenhauer and Wynaden 2001).

But the question remains as to whether research ethics are the appropriate tool to challenge historically anchored and normalized relations of power and domination, especially in neoliberal times. One of the crucial concerns is that, within neoliberalism, ethical regulations and rules tend to create an "illusion of ethical practice": regulations are being increasingly followed as though they were universal "benchmarks" of ethical behavior. This global move toward the regulation of research ethics (though imposed somewhat differently within different contexts) can also strengthen the belief that

moral concerns, power issues, justice and the need for protecting other hu-
man beings are being addressed when ethical reviews or other institutional-
ized forms of regulation are passed (Canella and Lincoln 2007, 316).

Various critical scholars have proposed conceiving of reflexivity and eth-
ics together, since reflexivity in research is an active and ongoing process
not limited to a single moment (Guillemin and Gillam 2004, 274; Lincoln
and Canella 2009). Reflexive, critical ethics must therefore include a concern
for transformative egalitarianism, attention to the problems of representa-
tion, and the continued examination of the power relations that develop
during research. These approaches hold that research should focus on ex-
amining and challenging social systems, fostering egalitarian systems that
support social justice, and constructing a nonviolent revolutionary ethical
consciousness (Lincoln and Canella 2009, 279).

However, while critical researchers cannot dismiss their responsibility
and commitment to emancipation, they cannot deny the fact that they tend
to abstract from reality: academia translates experiential reality to preexisting
patterns of knowledge articulation and distribution. Its intent to produce
critical theory as a social practice which does not presuppose privileged
knowledge remains the key to mutually fertilizing academic knowledge and
activist practice (Celikates 2009; see also Boltanski 2010). Nonetheless, by
allowing researchers to become the authority on others and to take decisions
about how the knowledge produced about them is to be presented and dis-
seminated, these practices have also tended to reproduce unequal power re-
lations. Prescribing critical ethics as a necessary orientation of critical schol-
arship is therefore but the first step; whether or not this perspective can
challenge the exclusionary norms of academia must be continuously con-
fronted throughout the actual practice of research.

Academia is not—and has never been—the sole context which produces
knowledge for emancipation. The flourishing, revision and abandonment of
social theory has always been inextricably connected to the practices carried
out by social movements, unions and indigenous peoples, who have gener-
ated knowledge about their realities and formulated ways to change them—
though not always in forms and expressions readily intelligible for academia
(Choudry and Kapoor 2016; Decoloniality Europe 2013).

One should not forget that the critical theoretical knowledge which has
fundamentally altered understandings of truths, rationality and universality
within academia had its origins in workers' movements, feminist move-
ments, civil rights and postcolonial struggles. Learning from and listening to

social movements accordingly is one point of departure considering the political within academia, and it is likewise a starting point for reflecting upon one's own methodologies. The striving to challenge hierarchies in research, as proponents of decolonial and postcolonial feminist research argue, entails, first and foremost, politicizing the position of the researcher and the research. This means challenging the boundaries that protect the supposed objectivity of scientific research from the politics of 'the field':

> "Decolonial research is not close to decolonial struggles located outside of the academic realm, nor in solidarity with them. Decolonial research is existentially and politically committed to decolonization." (Decoloniality Europe 2013)

The Normativity of Knowledge Production: Decolonizing Research Practices

Referring to a "third space as critical engagement" (Routledge 1996), critical scholars have tried to break the dichotomy between the insider and the outsider perspective by deconstructing the barriers of knowledge. In Latin America, there has been a long tradition of such endeavors: Popular Education[6] and Participatory Action Research[7] have aimed to produce transformative knowledge with and from local communities, challenging the boundaries between the academic producers of knowledge and those providing the experience to be converted into knowledge by the researcher.
Postcolonial, as well as feminist research, in turn, has aspired to challenge even the emancipatory modes of producing critical knowledge through "the

---

6 Popular education methodologies often refer to the work of Paulo Freire, a Brazilian Catholic educator who, in the 1980s, created adult literacy programs aimed at the consciousness-raising and politicization of the participants, mostly the poor and marginalized. His conviction that people cannot be liberated, but can only liberate themselves through collective reflection and action, has been the inspiration for many participatory methods and workshop formats (see Mejía Jímenez 2011).

7 Participatory action research (PAR) was developed in the 1960s and 1970s by the Colombian sociologists Orlando Fals-Borda and Camilo Torres. Drawing on Marxist thought, PAR was seen as a tool for both the researcher and the research participants to challenge the oppression of the latter through the production of knowledge. Politically committed researchers were urged to work closely and horizontally with peasant and indigenous groups.

unsettling of where epistemic authority lies between 'researcher' and 'subject'" (Lock Swarr and Nagar 2010, 6). It has challenged the "theoretical absence and empirical presence of the Other [and] the authority and privilege of the writer" (Lock Swarr and Nagar 2010, see also Richardson 2010; Sabaratnam 2011, 801). Emphasizing that knowledge is necessarily situated and partial, these approaches have underlined the positionality and reflexivity of the researcher, they have enacted accountability by sharing interview transcripts and the academic texts produced with the research subjects, and they have embarked on representational experiments seeking to interrupt the researcher's authority through other practices of writing.

Nonetheless, such practices often reproduce the hierarchization between researcher and researched, even while working with the "subjects on the ground" (see Lock Swarr and Nagar, 8). The central dichotomies that hierarchically structure research practice—representing the divide between the academic and the activist, theory and practice, individual and collective processes of knowledge production—tend to remain in place (ibid.). Consequently,

"at best, the critique that emerges through praxis gets reduced to another form of representational device or labeled as "participatory action research," and, in the process, gets bureaucratically controlled or abstracted from its embeddedness in lived struggles. […] And we are left again with a recurring problem: academic knowledges that dominate and languages that exclude, to safeguard the closed interpretive communities that have become constantly shrinking fiefdoms forbidden to the uninitiated." (ibid.)

Amanda Lock Swarr and Richa Nagar propose "transnational feminist collaboration" (ibid., 12) as a collective project that fosters the connections between hitherto unconnected worlds, and not with the aim of generating "new debates in narrowly defined academic circles" (ibid.) but of transforming power relations at the sites connected by this collaborative knowledge production—most crucially including academia. Similarly, Chandra Talpede Mohanty has proposed engaging in research as a dialogue which incorporates reflexive solidarity through a politics of commitment (Mohanty 2003). She proposes conducting analyses that are location-specific, but not location-bound, in the sense that, while they respond to local concerns and work towards transformative change in specific localities, they concurrently uncover and challenge broader structures of domination such as neoliberal capitalism.