INTRODUCTION

What is “(un)making” STS ethnographies? Reflections (not exclusively) from Latin America

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In a recent article published in a Colombian Journal, Cristóbal Bonelli invites us to “build on the ontological interest of ANT regarding the ‘politics of things’ by developing the politics of ‘where’”\textsuperscript{1} (2016, 24). It involves producing a conceptual space allowing the features of ethnographic materials to establish the conceptual terms used to ethnographically describe them. He draws on Annemarie Mol’s invitation to rethink politics, as usual, concerned with who can speak and act. Mol and Bonelli encourage to redirect our attention towards what is enacted in every specific context of practice. Thereby, for Mol, politics is open to things in the process of its emerging existence. Bonelli elaborates this distinction for the case of concepts by avoiding the usual differentiation between meanings and materiality. Concepts, inasmuch as empirical objects of the world, are the outcome of the onto-epistemic practices that produce them. Hence, it is plausible to revisit their politics, not only regarding “who” and “what,” but also by reflecting on “where.”

The article offered by Bonelli speaks, in its own way, to the provocations of several scholars about the need to “provincialize” STS concepts. According to Law and Lin (2015), it is necessary to exert a “postcolonial symmetry” given that STS is a “critter gestated in Euro America” to an important extent. There, at the very center of our disciplines, several entities emerge apparently without a place. Some of those entities include “boundary objects,” “multiple realities,” “sociomaterial networks,” “coproductions,” or “nature-culture hybrids.” Whenever we use our STS lens, we often overlook how things, including concepts, emerge somewhere, and how every new location transforms those curious entities. The question about what a concept can make is importantly related to the location of its production and circulation. Consequently, its location should be included in our consideration of any concept at the core of our research from our own locations.

Bonelli puts forward a reflection that echoes the famous quote: “it matters what thoughts think thoughts; it matters what knowledges know knowledges; it matters what relations relate relations; it matters what worlds world worlds” (Haraway 2016). “It matters” then, not only in the sense of what but also where. Indeed, we might argue that the ideas, knowledge and relations that we often use are also the outcomes of their localities of production. Such localities are most of the times overlooked precisely

\textsuperscript{1}Our translation.
due to how and where they were made. It is precisely those places, those whereabouts the US or Europe expressed in the English language, that make objects produce the world in their terms even in empirical contexts radically different from those where they were gestated.

"Politics of where" is in itself a concept. In Bonelli’s article, this onto-epistemic object emerges from a game of tensions between different localities. Bonelli is himself a Chilean author writing, while based in the Netherlands, for a Latin American journal about the agency of a rock located in Chile. The materials of his article include the pages of a Colombian journal, published in Spanish, away from the circles of academic writing where concepts are made and promptly applied elsewhere. Additionally, we cite Bonelli’s publication in a journal edited in the UK, printed in English, seeking to address something called Latin American STS. We also do it by writing an introductory piece both in English and Spanish, struggling with making justice to each language, keeping few clauses in Spanish while pushing the extension limits of English clauses.

Most certainly, the list of “where” keeps growing as we consider other locations of production of the concepts used by Bonelli. We understand “place” as the outcome of different and complex topologies that somehow fold into the concept and partially relate to the place as a geographic site. We are not sure whether we can claim that Bonelli produces his concepts in Chile or the Netherlands because concepts and countries are exceeded by, and correspondingly exceed, those complex places where concepts emerge. For instance, Latin America is so big and small, simple and complex, that it is difficult to consider it as a place where or for which Latin American STS is made. Therefore, we are not entirely sure whether we claim that all the articles included in this cluster are reflections from Latin America. All of our authors have clear connections with such a curious geographic entity, but at the same time, they exceed it in diverse and subtle ways. Because of this, none of these articles are “exclusively” from Latin America, although pointing out their partial connections with Latin America is important in empirical and analytical terms.

One of the aspects producing the colonial difference that “postcolonial symmetry” invites us to reconsider is the equivalence between place and geography. The authors of the articles in this cluster express discomfort against such equivalence in a variety of ways. This is remarkable considering the ethnographic attribute of these articles. Indeed, ethnography involves a series of practices that make places that are topologically complex. In its basic form, ethnography is only possible in the relationship between different sites. Also, because the writing site is the field reproduced and transformed by the object itself.

Thus, one of the core features of ethnography consists of folding any kind of objects and places in its own onto-epistemic procedure. In her provoking invitation, Amade M’charek (2014) argues that objects are political not because of what is written in them but because of the ways they are folded. If this is the case, the task of a postcolonial symmetry should consist of providing a set of foldings in which it is not easy to establish what
counts as Latin American or Euro American, resisting the simplistic reduction of place to geography. We consider such reflection particularly important when introducing a special cluster about ethnographies informed and transformed by STS in a journal seeking to discuss and reflect openly for and from Latin America. Only by being careful with the simplistic equivalence between Latin America and its geography in the global context, we avoid and resist a colonial exercise demanded from us: to complete the STS knowledge produced in places that do not need to be geographically situated since they are imagined as central.

The articles included in this special cluster incorporate the kind of complications addressed above. Yet, it is impossible that ethnography as a practice is not interrogated and remade in every piece of work. Because of this, we invite you to think of every contribution as a deployment of STS ethnography, in which they respond to a set of repertoires, questions and sensitivities. Likewise, as you are probably concluding by now, ethnography has effects on STS. For example, making central the questions about the place and its folding into the concepts that we have addressed up to this point. In other words, our interest in this postcolonial symmetry can find creative and interesting answers in the ethnographic practice.

Scholars engaging in the interdisciplinary field of STS have employed ethnographic methods to produce situated knowledge about their research concerns. Likewise, STS has offered a set of discussions permeating ethnographic practice. Hence, STS oriented ethnography consists of an interface or contact surface that continuously unmakes and remakes ethnographic objects, concepts, and descriptions. These processes of cross-pollination are of interest for us. In this special cluster, we address the possibility of rethinking STS engaged ethnographies as experimental in that they destabilize the meaning of knowing. STS ethnographies are made, unmade, and remade. The situated answers of the authors in this special cluster offer insights about how procedures and reflections cannot simply be allocated in other places where we comfortably and traditionally allocate academic production. This game of discomfort about the very idea of place – geographic, disciplinary, and others- inspired the call for papers for this special issue. As editors, we hope to contribute to the complication of this fruitful surface of contact between ethnography and STS. We are convinced that we must expand the folding that makes this connection denser.

¿En qué consiste (des)hacer etnografías desde los ESCT? Reflexiones (no exclusivamente) desde latinoamérica

En un artículo reciente, publicado en español en una revista Colombiana, Cristóbal Bonelli (2016) propone “complementar el interés ontológico consolidado de la TAR sobre las “políticas del qué” con el desarrollo de las “políticas del dónde.” Se trata de “crear un espacio conceptual que permita que las características propias de los mismos materiales etnográficos establezcan los términos conceptuales a través de los cuales ellos se expresan en la escritura etnográfica.” Su inspiración conceptual está claramente situada en el texto de

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2Kristina Lyons was initially associated as guest editor for this cluster of Tapuya but did not participate in the writing of this introductory piece.
Annemarie Mol, en el que se propone pensar la pregunta política usual, pensada en términos de quién puede hablar y hacer, para enfocar la atención en aquello que es enactuado en cada contexto específico de práctica. Así, enseña el ya clásico texto de Mol, la política se abre a las cosas en el proceso mismo de su devenir existente. Bonelli lleva esta reflexión a los conceptos, valiéndose de evitar la usual distinción entre significados y materialidad. De esta manera, los conceptos, como objetos empíricos en el mundo, son el resultado de las prácticas ontoepistémicas que les dan lugar, y por ello son susceptibles no sólo de un análisis sobre la política del quién y del qué, sino también del dónde.

El propósito de Bonelli con su artículo es responder, a su manera, al llamado de varios autores de los ESCT sobre la necesidad de “provincializar” los conceptos de la disciplina. De acuerdo con Law y Lin (2015), es necesario practicar una “simetría poscolonial,” en la medida en que los ESCT siguen siendo una “creatura gestada en euroamérica.” Es allí, en los centros de nuestras disciplinas, donde emergen este tipo de entidades que parecen no tener lugar. A la postre, encontramos “objetos frontera,” “realidades múltiples,” “redes sociomateriales,” “coproducciones” o “híbridos de naturaleza cultura” donde sea que pongamos nuestros ojos de analistas ESCT, pasando muchas veces por alto que las cosas, incluidos los conceptos, devienen siempre en algún lugar, y que cada nueva localización debe hacer algo a estas curiosas entidades. El punto es que la pregunta de lo “que es capaz” o “puede” un concepto refiere también al dónde de su gestación y circulación, por lo que deberíamos tener una actitud más atenta a la hora de considerar cualquier concepto en el seno de nuestras propias investigaciones desde nuestros propios lugares.

La reflexión de Bonelli resuena de manera interesante con el ya famoso moto “it matters what thoughts think thoughts; it matters what knowledges know knowledges; it matters what relations relate relations; it matters what worlds world worlds” (Haraway 2016). “It matters” no solo en el sentido del qué sino del dónde. De hecho, podemos decir que los pensamientos, conocimientos y relaciones que utilizamos con mayor frecuencia son también el resultado de sus lugares de producción, localizaciones que la inmensa mayoría de las veces pasamos por alto, precisamente por cómo y dónde fueron producidos. Es justamente el lugar, ese dónde en EEUU o Europa, que es además un dónde en inglés, el que hace capaces a estos curiosos objetos que son los conceptos, producir el mundo en sus términos aún en contextos empíricos radicalmente diferentes a aquellos donde tuvieron lugar.

“Políticas del dónde” es también un concepto. En el artículo de Bonelli, este objeto ontoepistémico emerge en un juego de tensiones entre distintas localizaciones. Bonelli mismo es un autor chileno escribiendo en Holanda, para una revista latinoamericana, sobre lo que puede hacer una piedra en algún rincón de Chile. Nos interesa mucho que su material sean también las páginas de una revista colombiana, que haya sido publicado en español, lejos de los círculos de publicación académica donde se hacen los conceptos que luego aplicamos sin demora en tantos sitios distintos de práctica. Ahora nosotros traemos a colación su publicación, en una revista editada en Inglaterra, publicada en inglés exclusivamente, que tiene además la pretensión de referirse a algo como los ESCT latinoamericanos. Lo hacemos también escribiendo este texto introductorio tanto en inglés como en español, procurando hacer justicia con cada lengua, manteniendo referencias en español mientras empujamos los límites de las referencias en inglés en su relación con la otra lengua.
Todos esos dónde son el dónde del concepto de Bonelli. Con seguridad, la lista de localizaciones se multiplica aún más en la medida en que consideremos los otros muchos dónde de los que proceden los conceptos que el autor utiliza para elaborar su argumento. Lugar es, desde este punto de vista, el resultado de una serie de topologías complejas, que de alguna manera tienen la particularidad de plegarse en el concepto, y que solo parcialmente se relacionan con el lugar como sitio geográfico. No estamos seguros si pueda decirse que Bonelli produce sus conceptos en Chile o en Holanda, porque tanto lo uno como lo otro son excedidos, y exceden con creces, estos lugares complejos donde emergen los conceptos. Lo mismo podría decirse de cualquier lugar geográfico. Latinoamérica, por ejemplo, es a la vez algo tan grande y tan pequeño, tan simple y a la vez tan complejo, que nos es difícil considerarlo como un sitio desde donde o para donde se hace ESCT latinoamericano. Por eso no estamos seguros de decir que los artículos incluidos en este número sean reflexiones desde Latinoamérica. Todos nuestros autores tienen claras relaciones con esa curiosa entidad geográfica, pero a la vez la exceden de mil maneras distintas y sutiles. Por ello, ninguno de estos artículos es “exclusivamente” desde Latinoamérica, aunque señalar su conexión parcial con Latinoamérica sea un dato importante en términos analíticos y empíricos.

Uno de los elementos que producen la diferencia colonial que la “simetría poscolonial” nos pide considerar es, a nuestro modo de ver, la equiparación del lugar con geografía. Los autores de los artículos a continuación expresan, de formas distintas, esta incomodidad. Esto es particularmente importante si se tiene en cuenta la vocación etnográfica de todos estos textos. Efectivamente, la etnografía implica una serie de prácticas que no hacen sino hacer lugares topológicamente muy complejos. En su formulación más simple, etnografía solo es posible en la relación entre el campo y la escritura, clásicamente pensados como ocurriendo en dos lugares distintos, aunque esta sea una obvia y excesiva simplificación. Para Marilyn Strathern, de hecho, el momento etnográfico, que podríamos considerar como el objeto ontoepistémico básico del ejercicio del etnógrafo, es el resultado complejo de la doble y mutua inclusión entre campo y escritura (1999). No existe pues ningún concepto etnográfico que estrictamente hablando haya emergido en la comodidad del lugar de la escritura, no solo porque la etnografía sea posible en la relación entre localizaciones en principio distintas, sino porque el mismo lugar de la escritura es el campo reproducido y transformado por el aparato.

Así, una de las capacidades centrales de la etnografía es la de plegar toda clase de objetos y lugares en su mismo procedimiento ontoepistémico. Si es verdad la sugerente propuesta de Amade M’charek (2014), según la cual los objetos son políticos no por lo que esté en ellos inscrito, sino por cómo están plegados, la tarea de esta nueva “simetría poscolonial” debería ser procurar plegamientos en los que, para empezar, no sea fácil decir que esto o lo otro es latinoamericano o euroamericano, resistiendo la simplista reducción del lugar a la geografía. Sin duda consideramos que esta reflexión es particularmente importante a la hora de abrir un número de etnografías informadas y transformadas por los ESCT en una revista que abiertamente quiere hablar y reflexionar por y desde Latinoamérica. Solamente siendo muy precavidos con la obvia equiparación entre Latinoamérica y su geografía en el contexto mundial, podremos evitar el claro ejercicio colonial que nos pide, desde estos países, complementar el conocimiento ESCT
produced in places that it is not necessary to situate geographically by being imagined as central places.

The articles included in this number assume this type of complications. In that sense, it is impossible to study ethnography as a practice that is not problematized and redeveloped in each of the proposals. Therefore, it can be thought of each contribution as a bringing to action of ethnography ESCT, in which ethnography responds to a type of repertoires, questions, and sensibilities peculiar to the ESCT. In addition, as can already be concluded from this reflection, ethnography has effects on ESCT, for example, making the problem of place and its folding in the concepts that we have been referring to here. In another way, our concern for this “symmetry postcolonial,” can find creative and interesting responses in ethnographic practice.

The scholars who work in the interdisciplinary field of ESCT have employed ethnography to produce situated knowledge about their research questions. At the same time, ESCT has permeated ethnography. ESCT ethnography consists of an interface or surface of contact that continuously makes and unmake the objects, concepts, and ethnographic descriptions. This process of mutual influence is interesting for us. In this special number, we assume the possibility of rethinking ethnography from the ESCT as an experimental practice in the sense that it destabilizes the same sense of knowledge. ESCT ethnographies should be made and unmade, and the situated responses of the authors included here provide clues about a series of procedures and reflections that, like the places of production, cannot be simply placed in those other places where we easily place academic productions. This game of inconveniences with the idea of place—geographical, disciplinary and of other types—is what encouraged the invitation that gave rise to this number. We hope, as editors, to contribute thus to complicate this fruitful surface of contact between ethnography and ESCT, to extend thus the folds that make this connection more dense.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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