Creativity and epistemologies of the South

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Abstract
This article explores the potential for rethinking creativity coming out of a particular type of socio-cultural critique represented by the ‘epistemologies of the South’. Our premise is that current theories of creativity are not only in close dialogue with larger debates around notions of personhood, agency, society, economy and our relation to the environment, but they also have important societal implications. At the same time, the conceptual and methodological narrowness specific for much theorising in this area makes the psychology of creativity largely incapable to answer calls for social transformation coming from different parts of the world, in particular from communities that experience colonialism and oppression. In order to situate our approach, we will first briefly introduce the Colombian case as a complex social, cultural and geographical space where the implications of Western colonial thinking remain obvious to this day. Second, we will discuss what is characteristic for the new epistemological foundations emerging from the global South and consider their impact on creativity theory. In the end, we will reflect on how a new conception of creativity contributes to thinking differently about the world and about our possibilities of acting within it not only scientifically and practically but also ethically.

Keywords
Creativity, epistemologies of the South, decolonial theory, Colombia

It is undeniable that our current theories of creativity are predominantly the product of Western thinking about this phenomenon. This line of thinking has a long tradition in the Western culture as it relates to some of its oldest creation

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myths and has embedded within it a way of seeing the world and, more than this, of being in the world. Indeed, to theorise the human capacity to produce novelty and change is crucial for any conception of nature and society. It is fundamental for how we conceptualise the place and role of human beings in relation to the natural, the social and the divine. Unsurprisingly, our first conceptions of creativity go back to spiritual and religious beliefs about the creation of the world and, for a long time in the West, the Christian God (or the Gods in ancient mythologies) was taken as the ultimate model of what it means to be a ‘creator’ (Weiner, 2000). Stories of creativity from ancient times often depict the act of creation as godly, male, mysterious, powerful and, because of this, often dangerous (we can be reminded here of the consequences, for Prometheus, of bringing fire to mankind). Centuries later, the rise of modernity radically challenged the divine ‘core’ of creativity and proceeded by placing man (not women) at the centre of creative drives that now, more than ever, were aimed at mastering, exploiting and transforming society and, most of all, nature. The creator remained powerful and highly ingenious, but the greatness of his action was now measured against the impact it had on others and the environment. Many of the attributes of the creative person we emphasise today in psychology derive from such an understanding. Studies of creativity and value, of (mostly male) geniuses and their impact on society and culture, or the emphasis on the special, distinctive, even pathological features of creative individuals, illustrate the pervasiveness of what can be called the Western imaginary (for a similar critique see Montuori & Purser, 1995).

The aim of this article is to problematise this imaginary, to unpack its deeper personal, social, environmental and political consequences, and finally to raise the question of how we can think creativity differently. Two other interrogations become important from the start: (1) Why do we need to rethink creativity after all? and (2) Is there any space for doing this beyond Western modernity and its legacy of underlying assumptions about what counts as valid, scientific knowledge about any phenomenon, including creativity? Our belief is that yes, there is a pressing need to reconsider our models of creativity in light of today’s increasing societal challenges (Glăveanu, 2015), from the urgency of reassessing the sustainability of our relation to the natural environment to the obligation of creating more inclusive and fair societies. It is clear, to us at least, that such enormous tasks require individual and collective creativity and yet present models of this phenomenon, grounded in individualism and methodological reductionism, cannot possibly help us address such problems; even more, current conceptions of what defines creative people foster precisely the kind of exploitative and unidirectional relations between individual and environment that contribute to these problems. Second, there are today multiple spaces of alternative thinking that challenge Western, androcentric and consumerist models, including, among others, critical theory, feminism and socio-cultural approaches to mind and society.

What we will explore in this article is the potential for rethinking creativity of a particular type of socio-cultural critique represented by the growing literature on ‘epistemologies of the South’ (Santos, 2011, 2012). It is precisely this perspective that
brought the two authors together as scholars living and working in two visibly different parts of the world – Europe (Romania and Denmark) and Colombia – and yet sharing the same dissatisfaction with current understandings of creativity and their application in education and society (see also Gla˘ veanu, Sierra, & Tanggaard, 2015). The reflections included here are born out of a sustained dialogue, over more than two years, and visiting each other’s country with the perspective of understanding two contrasting social realities in a North – South collaboration that could be fruitful for both. Necessarily, these reflections are also preliminary and, ultimately, represent an open invitation to scrutinise the nature and consequences of our conceptions of creativity and the way they relate to our model of humanity, society and of the environment. In order to understand, however, the origin of our concerns, we need first to briefly introduce the Colombian context as a complex social, cultural and geographical space where the implications of Western thinking about development are painfully clear. Second, we will discuss what is characteristic for the new epistemological foundations emerging from the global South and consider their impact on creativity theory. In the end, we will reflect on how a new conception of creativity contributes to thinking differently about the world and about our possibilities of acting within it not only scientifically and practically but also ethically.

Reflecting on a unique bio-socio-cultural context: The case of Colombia

The starting point in our journey towards a different conceptualisation of creativity has its roots in discussions concerning the past and present of Colombia, a country that prides itself for being one of the most bio-diverse on earth (fourth after Australia, Brazil and China; Maffi, 1998), while at the same time, experiencing serious social and environmental challenges that endanger precisely this diversity. What is at risk is not only the biological but also the cultural-linguistic diversity of the land, two inseparable sides of the same coin (Maffi, 2005). Indeed, supporting biodiversity means supporting ‘local and indigenous knowledge systems’ established by UNESCO as:

The cumulative and complex bodies of knowledge, know-how, practices and representations that are maintained and developed by peoples with extended histories of interactions with the natural environment. These cognitive systems are part of a complex that also includes language, attachment to place, spirituality and worldview.\(^2\)

Although indigenous and afro-descendent people only represent the 3.4% and 10.6%, respectively, of the total population of the country, estimated at 41 million (DANE, 2007), their more than 88 nations and 67 languages (two afro-descendent) constitute the clearest expression of Colombia’s diverse cultural heritage (Landaburu, 1999). This diversity also includes a distinctive group of mestizo small farmers or campesinos, the equivalent of 25% percentage of the population.\(^3\)
with a tradition of self-sustainable food production and communitarian ties. Although more than two-thirds of the population live today in big cities, the greatest part of the territory (94.4%) is still rural (PNUD, 2011). However, 80% of all cultivable land is the property of only 10% of the population (Rodriguez, 2010), represented by a few families and corporations, which makes Colombia the third most unequal country in Latin America. It is in the indigenous, afro-descendent and campesino territories, where most bio-cultural diversity is still preserved and yet, these are the areas where the population is the poorest and most vulnerable (Maldonado & Mendoza, 2010; Mondragón, 2006; PNUD, 2011). The pressure for the appropriation of their lands keeps being very strong despite the recent recognition of collective titles (29.8% in indigenous reservations and 4.13% in communitarian afro-descendent lands; DANE 2007). Forced displacement of campesinos in the last decades affected 3.5 million people, the equivalent of 7.8% of Colombia’s population, a situation that is second only to Sudan (Ibanez, 2009).

Understanding Colombian present-day difficulties requires us to comprehend the history of colonialism also shared by the other countries in Latin America, Africa and Asia. The structure of the society and its worldview are, in such cases, still strongly influenced by the modern colonial project: a global hegemonic structure of power that has been in place since the European conquest, articulating race and labour, land and people on the basis of material gains (Escobar 2007; Walsh 2012). As Escobar (1998) explains, over the last 50 years, concepts like ‘poverty,’ ‘Third World,’ or ‘underdevelopment’ were coined to promote the First World’s capitalist model of development globally and extend costly credits to other countries. In most Latin American countries, and particularly in Colombia, the rural campesino, afro and indigenous populations are those who suffer predominantly the negative effects of such an oppressive system. This is evidenced by their persistent marginalisation, the loss and neglect of their own languages, knowledge, and culture, their difficult access to good lands and water resources, and the frequent violation of their basic rights – to health, to education, to welfare and protection (Cruces, Casparini, & Carvajal, 2010; PNUD, 2011; UNHCR, 2012).

In this complex social and cultural context, the pressing question that arises from members of these largely marginalised communities is how to improve their situation and, collectively, create a better, fairer society for the benefit of all. In our efforts to identify creative processes as they take place within communities (Glaveanu, 2013a,b; Sierra, 2012; Sierra & Sierra, 2011; Sierra, Siniguí & Henao, 2010; Sierra & Romero, 2002), we decided to establish a sustained dialogue in order to understand the role of creativity in relation to societal difficulties and social change, which will hopefully contribute to the co-creation of more culturally adequate educational programmes and research projects in Colombia, according to the diverse demands of rural communities. However, we both recognised from the start the difficulty of addressing such a question with the means of contemporary creativity theories, mostly developed in the US and Europe and focusing on the mental processes of isolated individuals. What is necessary is in fact a radical
rethinking of such perspectives, an endeavour already under way within cultural psychology (see Glăveanu, Gillespie, & Valsiner, 2014). However, the legacy of colonialism and exploitation specific for the Colombian case (and many others around the world) invites us to build on sociocultural theory, while at the same time advancing it in the direction of critical thinking about issues of power and domination. If creativity is to become a mean towards social change in Colombia and similar contexts, then its reconceptualisation should engage with scholarship that gives voices to the marginalised in the global South, recovers their view of the world and, above all, their unique epistemology.

Creativity, decolonial theory and the epistemologies of the South

In spite of more than five centuries of cultural aggressiveness expressed in the imposition of a unique religion (Catholic), two European languages (Spanish and Portuguese), and a compulsory education system with a homogeneous curricula for all ethnic and social groups, many indigenous and afro-descendent populations from South America managed to keep their cultural distinctiveness. Studies of resistance movements explain how a range of survival strategies against colonial powers maintained local languages and cultures alive. This is particularly observable in groups that preserved or developed their own organisational structures, escaped to remote geographical areas, or were affected only later by colonialist expansions (Mosquera, Pardo, & Hoffman, 2002; ONIC, 2002; Walsh, 2012). It is also important to acknowledge here the campesino resistance movement across all Latin America which created recognition of their role in building a sustainable economy and food sovereignty and of their fight for human rights, particularly democratising land property, gaining access to credits and decent labour (Arco Iris, 2013; Colectivo Agroambiental, 2013; MST, 2009; Ploeg, 2010).

Defending the rights of culturally diverse people in Colombia and Latin America more generally is not a matter of the struggle for power of chauvinistic small nationalities. It draws on the resistance of racialised and oppressed groups against the dehumanisation, exploitation and genocide that occurred during five centuries of colonisation and that, in other guises, continues today. It is also a call to recognise the historical efforts and rights of indigenous, afro-descendent, campesino and poor urban communities for a decolonial agenda that allows the recreation of life under new terms, in balance with nature, based on social justice and equity. Strengthening and making visible these efforts contribute to understanding acts of resistance and fostering collective movements towards liberation and the creation of a new future, as the decolonial pedagogies formulated by Walsh (2013) advocate. Understanding and valuing cultural diversity lead us to question the ‘assimilative’ or ‘inclusive’ education policies of many so-called ‘multicultural’ societies, in which the prevailing hegemony of the dominant culture and language works against the expression and development of the cultural heritages of other groups (Banks, 1996; García Castaño, Pulido Moyano, & Montes del Castillo,
Alternative thinking frameworks concerning education and schooling that draw on local forms of knowledge and practice are required if we are to transcend colonialist, monocultural frames. This alternative has been formulated by de Souza Santos in recent years in what he calls ‘the epistemologies of the South’. In his words:

By epistemology of the South I mean the retrieval of new processes of production and valorisation of valid knowledges, whether scientific or non-scientific, and of new relations among different types of knowledge on the basis of the practices of the classes and social groups that have suffered, in a systematic way, the oppression and discrimination caused by capitalism and colonialism. The global South is thus not a geographical concept, even though the great majority of these populations live in countries of the Southern hemisphere. The South is here rather a metaphor of the human suffering caused by capitalism and colonialism at the global level, and a metaphor as well of the resistance to overcome or minimise such suffering. (Santos, 2012, p. 51)

A central tenant of this approach is that our understanding of the world is wider than the understanding proposed by the global North (or the Western tradition) and this diversity of being, thinking and feeling needs to be recognised and should lead to radical social change. In more concrete terms, Santos (2012, pp. 51–58) suggests the following steps in the construction of proposals from Southern epistemologies: (1) making visible what has been invisible (the sociology of absences); (2) replacing the empty future for other possibilities as alternatives to the present reality (the sociology of emergencies); (3) recognising alternative ways of knowing and working with oppressed groups on equal terms (the ecology of knowledge); and (4) promoting mutual intelligibility between experiences of the world that are available and possible (intercultural translation). The epistemologies of the South represent an attempt to decolonise our knowledge by uncovering its sociocultural and ideological origins and, simultaneously, conceive alternative spaces for thinking and acting outside mainstream systems of thought that validate oppression and exploitation. If creativity has its origin in difference (see Glăveanu & Gillespie, 2014) and it is not merely a mental, individual process but a form of action aimed at transforming self, other, and environment, then this phenomenon is central to the intellectual and social project known as ‘epistemologies of the South’. In this sense, the quest for new foundations for rethinking the world represents itself a creative act, one that, in turn, actively shapes our very understanding of what creativity is.

**New epistemological foundations for the theory of creativity**

In order to fully understand the necessity and impact of rethinking creativity from a decolonial perspective, we will proceed by contrasting current (Western) conceptions of creativity with possible alternatives deriving from new views of society,
humanity and nature. While the portrayal of ‘mainstream’ theory is often based on an analysis of implicit assumptions embedded in the practice of research and intervention, we are not claiming here that all creativity scholars from the North (or the South) adopt, or are more likely to adopt, a particular view. Indeed, what the following set of dichotomies aims is to make us sensitive to dominant ways of thinking while, at the same time, challenge their validity and power to define what is ‘real,’ ‘truthful’ and ‘good’.

1. *A linear view of creative achievements in history versus the recognition of creativity in everyday practice and the history of diverse groups.* The classic paradigm of creativity and creative people developed in the West relies heavily on the image of the genius, of eminent creators who almost singlehandedly revolutionise society and culture. As such, the conception of history developed within this context favours a progressive, linear depiction of events and is essentially a retelling of great and ‘visible’ creative accomplishments. This perspective not only ignores mundane expressions of creativity (Cohen & Ambrose, 1999), but it is also used to delegitimise the contributions of societies considered more ‘primitive’ or belonging to what was later conceptualised as the ‘Third World’. By relating creativity to the making of history and glorifying the history of some over others, this conceptualisation is ultimately used as a political tool to silence the claim to creativity and agency of the marginalised or oppressed. Moreover, the linear view of this process (an idea closely connected to the linearity of human development used as the mirroring image of historical progress; Vygotsky, 1978), is meant to create clear distinctions between what/who is more or less important, more or less developed, more or less creative. In contrast, the epistemologies of the South fundamentally challenge such a view by pointing towards multiplicity of expression and validating forms of knowledge and creativity that, while not making History (with a capital H), nevertheless contribute to the everyday existence and sustainable livelihood of entire communities around the world.

2. *The absence of nature, materiality and the body versus a theory of creativity that connects mind and body, person and environment.* Beside the fascination with historical creative achievements, mainstream psychological conceptions of creativity also operate with a rather strict separation between what is ‘outside’ and ‘inside’ the mind. This Cartesian split (see Jovchelovitch, 2007), fundamental not only for psychology but the natural and social sciences as a whole, has deep consequences for the theory of creativity and leads to locating it inside the head and considering it primarily a thinking process. Such a view neglects the role of the body as well as the social and material environment for creative work and offers, at best, a partial, at worst, a misleading view of the creative process. If the mind (or brain) is the privileged space for creativity, then creativity takes the shape of an internal property, a unique quality that some people possess more than others. Creativity as an innate characteristic goes hand in hand with individualistic and essentialist ways of thinking and, once more, ends up promoting
the creative agency of some while denying it to others (e.g., male versus female creators; artists over other professionals; the educated versus the poor and illiterate). However, there are certainly other ways of considering creativity as a cultural and distributed process and this is where contributions from cultural psychology (see Glăveanu, et al., 2014) meet the critical deconstruction proposed by the epistemologies of the South. What the latter bring above and beyond the recovery of the body and environment in theories of creativity is the idea of nature as a greater context for human action, a space from which creative energies are drawn and towards which they are ultimately directed, as well as an ‘actor’ who is to be taken into account considering the enormous impact of our actions in diverse ecosystems.

3. **Universalism versus diversity in the theory of creativity.** Despite a long debate within the psychology of creativity on the topic of whether creative expression is domain-general or domain-specific (Baer, 1998; Plucker, 2005), as well as today’s dominant view that, in fact, creative action involves both generality and specificity (Lubart, 2003), universalism remains central for scholars working in this field. The quest to find the most basic and universal thinking processes or operations that underpin all forms of creativity is intrinsic to a scientific project that emphasises sameness over diversity. Whether it is called divergent thinking or association and combination (Guilford, 1950; Finke, Ward, & Smith, 1992), the ideal remains to discover a model of the creative process with the greatest explanatory and, ultimately, predictive power. In this quest, differences and context are either downplayed or outright excluded. Paradoxically thus, what seems to be a widely ‘democratic’ way of theorising creativity – in the sense that all people at all times share certain ways of being creative – becomes in fact a tool used to make reality uniform and silence those voices critical of current scientific research. The question we are therefore pressed to ask is how well our models of creativity represent or capture the manifestation and experience of being creative in various parts of the world, from West to East, from North to South? In other words, how is the local knowledge and practice of creativity incorporated into our thinking about this phenomenon, if at all? Research grounded in epistemologies of the South starts, in this regard, from the specific and local rather than the universal and, as far as generalising scientific knowledge goes, it proposes diversity as the true ‘norm’ of human existence.

4. **Expert validation versus multiple perspectives on creativity.** In close connection to a universalistic view of creativity stands the methodological use of expert validation to assess creative outcomes and place them within a hierarchy based on their cultural value. This practice stands at the core not only of historiometric investigations of celebrated creators and creations (Simonton, 1999), but also underpins one of the common methods for creativity assessment used by psychologists – the ‘consensual assessment technique’ (Amabile, 1996). In both cases, the premise is that people who possess a certain expertise within a domain of cultural production (like education, science, art, etc.) are better equipped to judge the degree of creativity for outcomes produced by others in that
domain. Not only does this give power to a small group of people over what is considered creative (Csikszentmihalyi, 1988), but it also excludes the view of the creator him or herself (considered very often too ‘biased’ for an objective evaluation; Kaufman, Evans, & Baer, 2010). In opposition to this elitist model that tends to perpetuate existing hierarchies, the cultural psychology of creativity operates with a multiple feedback framework (Gláveanu, 2012) in which diversity of opinion is favoured to averaging the evaluations of a selected few. A methodology grounded within epistemologies of the South would take this perspective a step further by not only unpacking the social system of validation, but also challenging it, in particular the position of ‘expert’ and ‘expert knowledge’. From this standpoint, the recognition of creativity is as much a social as it is a political act and, therefore, exploring the multiplicity of constructions around creativity should help us not only overcome the singularity of the expert position, but reveal and question the power relations that tie together any multiplicity of views.

5. Androcentric perspectives and a focus on competition versus acknowledging the role of collaboration, solidarity, and complementarity. Much of the past literature on creative people dealt almost exclusively with male creators (see also a discussion of the He-paradigm in Gláveanu, 2010). This gender asymmetry is supported by an ideology that associated males with the active, creative genius and females with the more passive, receptive principle (i.e., the difference between culture and its transformative role in relation to nature; Keller, 1989; Ortner, 1979). But more than privileging the creative agency of men, the theory of creativity is marked by a patriarchal-oriented view of the creative process as well, one based on hierarchies that tend to emphasise competition over collaboration, singularity over solidarity, exclusion over complementarity. In more detail,

Patriarchalism is a form of political, economic, religious and social organisation based on the idea of authority and leadership of men over women, husband over wife, father over mother, boys over girls, elders over youth, and the father descendent line over the mother descendent line. Patriarchalism emerged from the historical control exercised by men, who appropriated women’s sexuality and reproduction and its product, children, creating at the same time a symbolic order, through myths and religion, which perpetuates it as the only possible structure. (Reguant in Varela, 2005, p. 177; our translation)

Either because patriarchalism existed also in non-Western cultures or because it was imposed/enhanced by colonialism, scholars engaged in developing epistemologies of the South are trying to recover female perspectives on creativity, making visible women’s active role in every aspect of society, particularly within oppressed groups (Cogollo Flórez-Flórez, & Nañez, 2004; Mujeres Zapatistas, 2013; Rivera, 2008) and giving voice to stories of collaboration and solidarity specific, for instance, for the arts and crafts women from various communities around the world engage in (e.g., Cooper & Allan, 1999; Mall, 2007). More than this, a shift in our thinking beyond androcentric models has the potential of
reconnecting education (another social practice often associated with women) and creativity, and making us sensitive to the fact that collaborative learning processes are not simply the less creative stage of preparation for later creative achievements; on the contrary, learning is both a social and creative process dependent on dialogue between teachers and learners and on the cooperation between learners and their peers.

6. **Solitary creators versus participative creativity and communitarian efforts.** The andocentric view of creativity discussed above strongly relates to an image of creators as solitary individuals. Even if nowadays our conception of the genius is becoming more and more socialised (see the discussion of networks of creativity in Gaggioli, Riva, Milani, & Mazzoni, 2013), the fact remains that we are still likely to think that our most creative moments are those in which we are alone, separate from others and the ‘noise’ of our communal, daily existence (Storr, 1988). Moreover, past studies of group creativity have consistently shown, on the whole, that individuals working alone outperform groups, a finding explained both in terms of social and cognitive processes (for a critique of this type of research see Glâveanu, 2011a). Such a perspective is challenged by the fact that, in daily life, creativity takes place within community contexts and the existence of solitary moments in creative work does not render the process itself (or even those moments of isolation and individual activity) a-social. The conception of creativity promoted by the epistemologies of the South emphasises precisely the participative and communitarian nature of creative acts. Any act of creativity is, in essence, a *relational act* bringing together self and other, the old and the new, an act of participation in culture (Glâveanu, 2011b). More than this, the study of participative creativity does not deny the individual. On the contrary, to participate in community requires the existence of an agentic self that is, at once, the result of one’s life experience and can be defined as an ongoing process of relating to the world. The position of existing or creating ‘outside’ of this network of sociality is excluded, which does not mean that detachment and solitude are not important for creativity. Such an understanding is embedded in the meaning of participation, where ‘taking part’ is possible only in its relation to a greater, emergent ‘whole’.

7. **Monocultivation of the mind versus the creation of possible worlds.** Modern society is characterised by a rationalisation of the economy and by mass production. It requires people to be over-specialised in one task and less likely to experience integral creative processes. The producer becomes often alienated from the final creative product. Only a few people have the privilege of consciously participating in the creative development of a piece of art, a research project, in economy or politics. In the rural world, the clearing of land for large-scale mono-cultivation across Europe and North America drove people away from agriculture, decreased the number of farms while increasing farm size. Intensification and specialisation have contributed to a surge in the amount of food but with a significant impact for the environment. Farmers are now using more fertilisers, pesticides and other chemicals than ever before and the consequent pollution of
groundwater from nitrates and pesticides is approaching dangerous levels. Intensive animal production has opened up the possibility of serious leakages of slurry and animal waste into the soil and water bodies. Monoculture has also led to a drastic reduction in the number of wild animal and plant species and their habitats. This economic model based on extractivism, large-scale manufacturing and monocultivation, while being under scrutiny and increased regulation in the North hemisphere, is being imposed as economic development in the former colonies through so called ‘free trade agreements,’ which benefit a few elites, while disintegrating local economies, increasing poverty and affecting negatively the environment. Schooling in many countries from Latin America reflects this monoculture model: only one curriculum oriented to gaining labour skills and standardised testing as the main measure of learning. In contrast, from the perspective of the epistemologies of the South, a radical rethinking of the current situation concerns precisely the diversification of worlds and realities creators inhabit, an exercise that invites us to imagine and construct new visions of the same reality and transform it. The pluricultivation of the mind implies, in this sense, not only contact with other worlds but, above all, being able to envision and shape the future based on this experience.

8. Creativity and consumption versus creativity and Living Well. One of the possible worlds imagined by those engaged in the study of epistemologies of the South brings to the fore our capacity to create fair and sustainable societies where creativity is not used for more efficient forms of exploitation (of the environment and of other people). Indeed, there is a strong connection between creativity becoming a value in the new globalised world and the advent of industrialism, capitalism and consumerism (Weiner, 2000). To create means to produce and, as such, it is a capacity our societies are based on. However, when production is overtaken by an ever-increasing urge to consume, the balance of our relationship to the natural environment and to people living outside of the dominant society of the ‘First World’ is seriously jeopardised. We unfortunately live in a world where the ‘creative’ actions of one society, aimed at achieving or sustaining a high level of consumption, have serious consequences for the prosperity of others. In this zero-sum game of limited natural and social resources, the value of creativity can no longer be measured against capitalist and consumerist standards but, on the contrary, needs to be associated with finding solutions for the unfolding crisis generated by both. This is where a focus on other cultures and their understanding and model of the world, a specific feature of the epistemologies of the South, can revitalise existing theories of creativity. Striving to achieve ‘Living Well’ (or Buen Vivir, Choquehuanca, 2010; Walsh, 2010, 2011), a concept that goes back to ancient Andean civilizations and was recently included as a state policy in Bolivia and Ecuador in an effort to build balanced relations with the natural environment and other communities, can serve as an alternative goal to the dominant exploitative mindset. If creativity has distinguished itself in the West as the capacity to master, control and transform nature in unsustainable ways, its greater call today is to revise our connection to the
world and to one another and create new, healthier foundations for it based on fairness and respect for the environment.

9. An ethics-free science of creativity versus active involvement in societal debates. Despite the many limitations of dominant theories of creativity highlighted above – among them, their individualism, reductionism, universalism, androcentrism, disembodiment, and emphasis on monocultivation, exploitation and consumption – it is rare for psychologists working in this area to question their own science. This is not surprising considering the fact that science, following the Enlightenment, has taken upon itself the role of producing ‘objective’ knowledge, separate from ethics or personal biases. And yet, one of the key lessons of engaging with the epistemologies of the South is precisely that no type of knowledge exists in a social and political vacuum; on the contrary, scientific models of creativity are extremely consequential for how we envision education, economy and society as a whole. This is even more the case when scientific findings about creativity (and any other human and social phenomenon for this matter) are deliberately cut off from their socio-cultural and ideological context. Such detachment is easily noticed as well in the methodologies one uses to study creativity, mainly tests and experiments that create an artificial distance between researcher and participants, between the topic under investigation and the life or reality of those being studied. A radical change of perspective calls towards contributing to endogenous knowledge (Fals Borda & Mora-Osejo, 2004; Haverkort & Reijntjes, 2006; Haverkort & Rist, 2007; Haverkort, Millar, Shankar & Delgado, 2012) and for the use of more participative methods, including Participatory Action Research (Fals Borda, 1995), in order to explore not only what creativity ‘is’ but what its expression ‘does’ for both researcher and researched. It is high time to reconnect theory and practice and, in light of this, recognise the fact that mainstream conceptions of creativity carry with them and endorse a view of the natural and social world that benefits some while discriminating and marginalising others.

Why creativity and epistemologies of the South?

In this article, our aim was to introduce a socio-cultural, critical perspective on creativity drawing inspiration from a growing body of literature that tries to formulate new epistemological positions from which to think about self, society and nature, in ways that challenge dominant Western conceptions. This line of thinking is closely connected to the experience of oppression and marginalisation of people living in the global South, in places like Colombia, a context which we described only briefly at the beginning of the paper. The challenges faced by indigenous, afro and campesino populations in this country, as well as many other ethnic minorities around the world, are enormous. But it is precisely because of the enormity of this task, of creating a new type of society based on social justice and a balanced relation to the natural environment, that a radical transformation of our usual
thinking and action can be envisioned. And this, in itself, is an exceptionally cre-
ative act. What the epistemologies of the South advocate are ways of conceiving the
world that go beyond individualism, andocentrism, exploitation and a model of
growth based solely on consumption. They struggle against the ethos of modernity
and its construction of science as neutral, objective and superior knowledge aimed
at classifying people, establishing hierarchies and ultimately justifying oppression.
It is the collective call of populations that have experienced centuries of colonialism
(and now neo-colonialism), racism, sexism, exploitation and exclusion. More than
this, it is the call shared by millions of people dealing with these challenges in their
daily existence irrespective of where they are in the world, in the South but also
elsewhere, including what we came to see as the ‘First World’ nations. Their efforts
to reconsider the epistemological foundations of science and society are, for this
reason, very important for psychologists and social scientists at large. They are
important, as we tried to argue here, for creativity researchers in particular. The
question to address in the end is why exactly.

The theory of creativity developed in psychology (and it is mainly psychologists
who study creativity; other domains tend to refer to similar phenomena as innovation,
imagination, or improvisation) gradually reduced the meaning of what it is to create to
such an extent that we are nowadays incapable of seeing the practical relevance of
studying this phenomenon. Psychologists tend to associate creativity with mental
processes taking place inside the head, but how are we then to account for the fact
that creative production unfolds mainly in collaborations between people (John-
Steiner, 1997)? We devise numerous methodological tools like creativity tests to
assess the ‘potential’ to create, but what do these tell us about actual achievement
(in other words, what is their predictive validity; Zeng, Proctor, & Salvendy, 2011)?
Finally, we study the creativity of celebrated artists and scientists, but how does this
support everyday life creativity and particularly the creativity of the poor, marginalised
or oppressed (Jovchelovitch, 2014; Jovchelovitch & Priego-Hernandez, 2013; Walsh
2013)? While building ‘scientific’ knowledge about the cognitive or personality bases of
creativity, we are forgetting that our science has serious social and moral implications,
and it can be used to justify differences and exclusion based on an apparent lack in
potential or capacity. But, more than this, we are missing one of the greatest oppor-
tunities to participate in the transformation of the way we build theory, we conduct
research and we contribute to our society. Rethinking the epistemological foundations
shared by a rapidly globalised world that faces obvious signs of crisis, is a collective act
of creativity; it draws together more and more critical perspectives, from eco-feminism
(Pascual & Herrero, 2010; Gebara, 1999, 2000) and agro-ecology (Peterson, 2011) to
symbiosynergy (Paquette & Fallon, 2010), decolonial pedagogies (Walsh, 2013) and
socio-cultural approaches advocating a ‘We’ type of paradigm (see Gla ˘ veanu, 2010).
The theory of creativity cannot and should not remain unchanged when faced with
these calls for deep intellectual and societal transformation.

In order to respond to this task, the theory of creativity itself is in need of a
radical reconstruction. We have suggested in this paper a set of initial lines of
critique in the form of nine dichotomies concerning the nature and role of

creativity. This reconstructive effort is certainly work in progress. It is not a call to dismiss everything we have built before and start the field anew but to reflect on existing frameworks in light of new epistemological horizons, to reconsider our assumptions and to observe more closely their social consequences. It might seem for some that this is also a call to take off the scientist (or psychologist) hat and put on the activist one. This is not the case. Or rather, adopting the lenses specific for the new epistemologies of the South we will discover that being a creativity scholar means already being an active participant in societal debates about agency, culture, society and nature. It is the task of each one of us to decide if and how we want to take responsibility for holding such a privileged position.

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Notes

1. In this article, we make reference to different geographical locations in relation to certain types of thinking or certain epistemological views. For us here both ‘Western thinking’ and ‘epistemologies of the North’ are associated with the colonising intellectual project of the Enlightenment and the ethos of modernity, while the South, considering its history of exploitation and marginalisation, is understood as the place from where new decolonising epistemological views can emerge in an effort to think beyond modernity. It is to be noted, however that, although Europe and North America are considered, by and large, the (North-Western) place of origin for current dominant epistemologies, the geographical association is loosely used and should not obscure the nuanced reality of the ‘South’ existing in the ‘North’ and vice versa. The North and South are not monolithic realities and using them as a reference is not meant to suggest an absolute dichotomy that reifies geographical spaces, nationalities or ethnicities (see also Cassano’s, 2012, work on ‘Southern thought’ and the Mediterranean space). Indeed, populations that have historically been colonisers, in military, economic, politic and epistemological terms, have numerous groups that are constantly colonised by forms of knowledge that exclude or marginalised them. Reversely, the ruling class in many Southern places of the world is actively, even if in a different guise, carrying on the oppressive process of colonisation with adverse consequences for local populations.
3. The statistics are very imprecise. See http://www.elespectador.com/noticias/economia/no-se-sabe-cuantos-campesinos-hay-articulo-381588
6. EU Environmental Information and Legislation Database. Sponsored by the EU Representation in Ireland. Site hosted by the NCTE: http://www.ncte.ie/environ/

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