

The invented periphery: constructing Europe in debates about “Anglo hegemony” in geography

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Abstract. For a few years, a debate has been ongoing about a hegemony (in academic geography) of the English language, of “Anglo-American” journals and of the approaches developed in the North America and the UK. In many of the contributions to the debate, other languages and those who speak them appear as excluded, oppressed and forced to submit to Anglo-hegemony. But what kind of hegemony is this? The situation appears as a postcolonial one, and therefore it should be analysed using postcolonial theory. From this perspective, there is on the one hand an orientalist discourse, in which the coloniser’s knowledge is the only valid one. These discourses can also be applied by elites in the (former) colonies. On the other hand, debates about the oppression of the “own” identity through the (former) colonisers are often means of an emerging postcolonial elite trying to legitimize their position. In order to analyse the debate about Anglo-hegemony, I draw on these concepts of hegemony. The debate is, so the argument of the paper, connected with a European elite formation – an elite that considers itself as transnational, multilingual, hybrid and anti-hegemonic.

1 Introduction

This special issue of the journal is dedicated to the topic of translation, the transport of concepts across languages and the power relations embedded within the process of translating or working across language barriers. The issue of languages and the power relations associated with languages has also been an important thread in a debate in geography that has by now been going on for almost ten years: the debate about an “Anglo hegemony” in academia and publishing. The aim of this paper is – after a brief summary of the

main points of the debate – to question the concept of hegemony employed in many contributions, and in a second step to look at a consequence of this lack of theoretical analysis of power relations. When looking at the various contributions to this debate, it is clear that terms like hegemony, periphery and inequality are frequently used, and a considerable effort is made to empirically document these inequalities, but also that there is very little theoretical reflection about the very concepts used in the debate. Furthermore, as many contributions also draw on variations of postcolonial theory, I will attempt to introduce some concepts from this field and analyse the debate using postcolonial theory.

In this discussion, the question of location has become very important. The location of the author is a European one¹, and this is a reason why this contribution takes the form of a critique of Europe and of the uses of “Europe” in this debate. I show that Europe (understood as non-English-language continental Europe) is pictured as a peripheral location in the global production of geographic knowledge, and I argue that this use of Europe is based on a conceptualisation of Europe that affirms the discourses formed by the EU instead of questioning the role of the EU in global power relations. While there are clear and pressing inequalities in global academia, neither affirmations of Europe nor of the EU – so the argument – are in themselves suitable points of departure for critical academic practice.

2 What hegemony?

“Is there an ‘Anglo-American’ domination in human geography? And, is it bad?” asks Andrés Rodríguez-Pose in an editorial in 2006 (Rodríguez-Pose, 2006:603). Rodríguez-Pose reacts to a still growing body of comments, editorials, and articles on the issue of an “Anglo hegemony”. Generally, the

¹At the time of the corrections, I am located in North America, however.



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idea of an Anglo hegemony in academic geography is taken to indicate an interrelated set of issues. First of all, it is a debate about publishing. In recent years, the idea of “international” journals has been challenged, as the journals that are often considered to be international are mainly run by academics (and published by corporations) based in the UK or North America. The definition of “international” is therefore a very narrow one (Berg and Kearns, 1998; Gutiérrez and López-Nieva, 2001). Authors from other backgrounds have complained that they do not have access to these publications, or if so, then under very specific circumstances – as presenting a “locally relevant” case study, for example, but not an “international theory” (Gregson et al., 2003).

The second, interrelated issue is the issue of languages. This issue has been raised regarding conferences, where English is taken to be the lingua franca, and journals, where those published in English are taken to be international, and the others not. This is often understood as well to mean privileging native English speakers or authors from “Anglo-American” settings, as not only do authors from other settings have to translate their work into English for it to be considered “international”, but even more important, they have to translate their ideas into concepts familiar to the English-language academic discourse (Minca, 2000).

The third issue is that as a consequence of the first two points, concepts developed and discussed in the English-language debate have become agenda-setting also for those academics working in other contexts – and not necessarily because they are “better”, but because they are considered to be international, supported by a large publishing apparatus and definitions of “excellence” in which journal rankings, impact factors and quotation indices favour these journals and the concepts discussed in them (Ramírez, 2004; Paasi, 2005).

Before pointing out a few open questions about the points listed here, let me point out some of the solutions that have been proposed to undo the “Anglo-hegemony”. On the issue of publications, there have been calls for more international contributors and editorial boards. A different suggestion has been the creation of new journals – for example a “European” geography journal (Aalbers and Rossi, 2006). Regarding the issue of languages, there have been attempts to have more multi-lingual conferences (see Minca, 2003 on the mixed success of one such attempt) and multi-lingual journals. The journal ACME, for example, also accepts submissions in languages other than English. It should also be remarked that the issue of languages and publishing power is strongly connected to the International Critical Geography Group (ICGG), at whose conferences the issue of language was much debated, and out of which many of the key contributions to the debate have come. This issue was indeed one of the driving forces behind the establishment of ACME.

The final point – the agenda-setting power of English-language concepts – has recently been taken up in a number of more nuanced case studies and in contributions

analysing situated interactions between different “national geographies” (see for example the special issue of *GeoJournal* 1/2004 which looks at the interactions between “American” geography and “other” geographies). However, as this final point is also the widest-ranging issue and encapsulates the “Anglo-hegemony” as it is often defined in the debate, I would like to use it to point out a number of critiques of the debate.

3 Criticizing the hegemony-debate

One important point of reference in the Anglo hegemony debate has been the idea of the “periphery”. In a 2000 editorial, Claudio Minca used the term with a certain hesitancy when he referred to “scholars representing (allow me the deliberately provocative term) ‘peripheral’ European geographies” (Minca, 2000:287). In 2003, this had changed, when the title of his new editorial was “critical peripheries”. Vaiou (2003) also considers her contribution a “view from the periphery”. Raju (2004) and also Gregson, Simonsen and Vaiou (2003) write about centres and margins in the academic production of knowledge. In an editorial in *Political Geography*, O’Loughlin, Sidaway and Raento chose the term “relative peripheries” (2008:3).

There have been a number of criticisms of the use of the notion of periphery in this debate. Some chose to claim that the many contributions were “devoid of facts” and “driven by feelings” (Rodríguez-Pose, 2006:603), that while there might be a certain overrepresentation of British and North-American authors in many international journals, this was decreasing (*ibid.*), others put into question the homogeneity of an “Anglo-American” geography (Samers and Sidaway, 2000). One rarely made criticism was that most of the contributors to the debate are located in places which would not normally – on a global scale of power relations – be considered peripheral. This means that there needs to be a very specific construction of the notion of periphery. It is this conceptual critique of the debate that I will focus on in this paper. This is not a contribution that claims to be “from the periphery”. My own location is (at the time of writing, not when I did the revisions) in Europe, specifically in Germany, historically much more an imperialist state with claims to “centrality” than a peripheral one – both in the geopolitical and the academic field. The EU as the wider context of the production of this paper is equally far from being a global periphery, but rather (post-crisis) the richest area of the world² with its own claims to global power and world-leading academic production. It is from this point of view that I am particularly interested in how European academic settings with their own colonialist legacies and ideas of centrality can be constructed as peripheral – and how they are related to the politics of the EU. In order to do so the first question that needs to be asked

²This comparison obviously always depends on exchange rates and the current post-crisis prospects.

is what concepts of centre and periphery are employed in the debate.

The first model used for the power relations in the international academic world is one that draws on a centre-periphery-concept, where the centre is the seat of power (the dominant language, origin of relevant concepts, location of publishers and editors), and the periphery is dominated by this centre – in the words of Braun (2003:131): “a model of intellectual ‘development’ in which the diffusion of theory and critique is imagined from ‘West’ to ‘East’, or from ‘North’ to ‘South.’” This concept is also implied in critiques when publications, citation indexes, the nationality of authors etc are analysed. One solution suggested by this model is that the centre must loosen its grip, that the peripheries need to be empowered – their contributions considered, their languages accepted, their representatives awarded the same rights as those in the centre. The general perspective on this centre-periphery model used in the debate is one that strives for the emancipation of the peripheries, often in a less radical way than the original dependencia-theories (e.g. Gunder Frank, 1978) it could be compared with.

A second, closely related, model draws on modernisation theory. The above-quoted Rodríguez-Pose uses such a model, when he describes his personal move to the UK and compares the British and Spanish university systems. British academics are more productive (and Spanish ones less), he argues, due to the differences in the system. This difference in productivity is a reason for the perceived Anglo hegemony (which he considers to be decreasing). He writes:

“In the UK system I found a combination of incentives, support, and pressure to conduct academic research that would have been difficult to replicate in a Spanish academic setting. The fact that these internal issues are rarely explored in the Anglo-American hegemony debate is telling. It is often easier to consider that some external force or power is preventing scholars from different traditions from fulfilling their true potential, when the root of the problem may be closer to home.” (Rodríguez-Pose, 2006:609)

The model employs the same boundaries as the centre-periphery model, but suggests a different explanation (and solution). The boundary is between those in the centre (here: the UK) and those in the periphery (Spain, in this case), but this time the centre has earned its place. It sets the standard and is simply better than the periphery at achieving this standard. Those in the periphery are not excluded from the centre because of rules set by the centre, but because they fail to imitate the centre well enough. They need to change, to take their chances, like he did, when he gave up his “peripheral” position and moved to the centre.

A third model poses a direct challenge to the two first models and draws on postcolonial theory. While the centre-periphery model and the modernisation model stress boundaries and difference, they have also been criticized exactly

for this drawing of boundaries. Samers and Sidaway for example criticize the idea of a unified “Anglo-American” hegemony and the assumption of clear boundaries between different “national” geographies: “the apparent presumption of bounded national or linguistic spaces/states with their respective nationally or linguistically defined knowledge spheres” (Samers and Sidaway, 2000:664). To counter this assumption, they outline the “already hybrid character of this reputed ‘Anglo-American’ realm of geographical research”, meaning that many of the theories relevant in English-language human geography today are derived from originally French, German, or other theorists and do not have a “pure” lineage (Samers and Sidaway, 2000:665). In his 2003 editorial, Minca takes this up and merges the idea of the periphery with the concept of hybridity, writing about “a peripheral or hybrid position with respect to the agenda-setting centres that produce and legitimise ‘international’ geographical knowledge” (Minca, 2003:165). Braun also reacts to this critique when he claims in the introduction to a set of editorials that “[the] contributors steadfastly refuse such simple binaries as West/East, North/South, Anglo/non-Anglo, focusing instead on the complex negotiations that occur over the translation of concepts and theories across different intellectual, institutional, and political contexts.” (Braun, 2003:131). The third model therefore draws on a concept derived from postcolonial theory in order to point to more complex interactions between academics, institutions and institutional settings. However, “hybridity” can also be interpreted as a quality of the periphery, as exemplified by Minca’s equation of the two terms.

To sum up: there are generally three concepts used to describe the international power relations in academic geography. A centre-periphery-model and a model drawing on modernisation theory, both of which rely on relatively clear boundary drawings between centre and periphery. The hybridity-model attempts to challenge these boundary drawings. There remains a problem with the first two approaches that has been addressed by the third approach, but only in an unsystematic way: the relationship between international inequalities and national power relations. In centre-periphery and modernisation concepts, the “national discipline” seems to be a black box – all periphery or all centre, relatively undifferentiated internally. The discussions of hybridity call into question the delineation of these boxes from at least one point of view – theories have always been the result of interactions, mixed, never pure. I will try to take a closer look “inside” these black boxes, and how this periphery is constructed from positions that proclaim to be peripheral.

4 National elites and international power relations

Outside of geography, the modernisation concept is also a popular model. When French President Nicolas Sarkozy tried to justify his proposed changes to the French university system in early 2009, he claimed that British academics

publish 30–50% more than their French counterparts (which was later shown to be incorrect), and that therefore there need to be more incentives for French professors to catch up and for France to be successful in the “battle for brains” (Sarkozy, 2009). In particular, the directors of the universities need more power over the lecturers, in Sarkozy’s view. Sarkozy did not say that there was an Anglo hegemony that needed to be challenged, but with his image of a battle he was not far from doing so. More importantly, the empirical data he refers to (like publications in “top” journals) are the same as the data used in the Anglo hegemony debate. This example already highlights what is really at stake: the internal control of the university system – be it by the federal or the university administration, by networks of powerful professors, by a wider techno-/bureaucratic regime, or by private companies and business interests. It is not a question of British professors being given control over French professors. This is an internal struggle of the elites, and Sarkozy is firmly on the side of university administrators, against the freedom of science and teaching. He does this, however, by arguing as a defender of the nation in a battle (for brains, see above), against those pictured as doing better. His narrative device is that he wishes to better imitate the British model in order to overcome the supposed deficiencies of French academia. This situation is not quite a typical constellation that would be analysed by postcolonial theory, but it can be instructive to use a model derived from postcolonial theory. After all, Sarkozy talks about international inequalities. He does so in order to change the national system and its power-relations.

In traditional colonial systems, formal knowledge was developed in the centre (or by representatives of the centre) and applied in the periphery. The main opportunity for “natives” to reach an elite position in the periphery was the emulation of the centre’s knowledge, or the establishment of an intermediate position from which one could bring the knowledge of the centre to the periphery. Elite positions within the centre were associated with generalized, formal knowledge, including the incorporation of knowledge about peripheral areas into the knowledge of the centre (in geography analysed by Bell et al., 1995; Driver, 1992; Godlewska and Smith, 1994; Hudson, 1972). In the periphery, the centre was represented through people spreading the knowledge possessed by the centre or developing knowledge about the periphery. Postcolonial theory has provided concepts for an analysis in a framework departing from traditional colonialism. Fanon’s work developed the idea of the “native intellectual” (1981). In a postcolonial situation – with remaining, but less formal unequal international relations – national elites can make a claim to power by claiming to speak for the nation. The “native intellectual” justifies his position by the creation or reworking of national myths and in doing so, creating a tradition from which to derive his speaking position – as a representative of the people versus the former coloniser. This new elite position was further analysed by Amílcar Cabral (1974). He discussed the emergence of a pseudo-bourgeoisie which

used nationalist discourse to maintain a position mediating between the former coloniser and the “nation”, and maintaining their position of power. Partha Chatterjee (1986) added a final layer to this analysis when he described this process as a passive revolution, i.e. an elite-induced transformation, in which one elite (the colonial one) is replaced by another one (the national one).

In the debate about an Anglo-hegemony, there have been a number of contributions which have addressed the role of national elites and international inequality. Ramirez (2004) points out how the Mexican National Council of Science and Technology privileges some approaches over others, using as a criterion how closely Mexican researchers follow US models. This privileges some researchers in Mexico over others – those who have studied at the right universities, for example (many of which are in the US). In a way, this still resembles the traditional colonial model with an intermediate layer of mediators imitating and excelling at the criteria of the centre. “[W]e can assume that Anglo–American hegemony receives support from those at the top of educational policy making,” Ramirez writes (2004:547). However, she does not take the road of a native intellectual by (for example) trying to develop “specifically Mexican” approaches, but rather pointing out how these unequal relations have also made possible the import of critical geography into Mexico. Regarding critical geography, she even adopts a modernisation model, when she writes that “[t]o accept theories from abroad might help us transform the backward state of critical geography in our country” (Ramirez, 2004:546). For the case of Germany, Belina, Best and Naumann (2009) describe a similar development, as does Judit Timár (2003) for Hungary.

In the light of the above, it becomes clear that national elites employ specific strategies dealing with international relations – the nationalist strategy of “fighting for the nation”, or taking the role of a representative of the “international” in their respective contexts. Postcolonial theory however can help not only to situate some of the observations that some participants of the debate make. It can also help to interpret some of the contributions themselves as strategies of an emerging elite.

5 Peripheralizing Europe

In an article on postcolonial political geography, Jenny Robinson discusses global inequalities. In contrast to much of the Anglo hegemony debate, the line she draws is not between “European” and “Anglo-American” geography. It is between the “EU-US heartland”, or the “US-EU as a hegemonic zone of the production of knowledge”, and most of the rest of the world (Robinson, 2003:648/650). In her view, the structure on which this hegemony rests is best described as “a ‘Knowledge-Publishing complex’, not unlike the Military-Industrial complexes which secure real-world geo-political power” (Robinson, 2003:648). Raju (2004) also criticizes “Anglo-Saxon or Euro-American-centred discourses”,

and Timár (2004) titles her editorial “More than ‘Anglo-American’, it is ‘Western’ [hegemony]”. Considering the economic and political power of the EU (or even continental Europe without the UK), it seems indeed unusual that many of the contributors to the debate have chosen to describe “Europe” as a periphery, a margin, or an excluded Other. These descriptions, I would argue, can be interpreted, using post-colonial discourse, as strategies of an elite in formation.³ Even Rodríguez-Pose, firmly positioned in most of his paper as a figure presenting the virtues of the centre to the periphery, is tempted to (and eventually does) imagine himself as excluded Other, and thereby forms a dual alliance, not only as a representative of the centre, but of the periphery at the same time: “If the debate is stuck [. . .], we will let the opportunities and the signs of change that seem to be appearing in recent years pass by and will have lost a unique opportunity to give the ‘Other’ a greater voice and a greater capacity to influence the agenda in human geography.” (Rodríguez-Pose, 2006:609f). The “we” he refers to are those excluded Others. To claim a peripheral position, however, is not even necessary for a critique of unequal power relations in academia – as already argued in 1998 by Berg and Kearns, who explicitly avoided a self-designation as marginal, when they wrote:

“Our purpose in highlighting the elisions of [Anglo-American hegemony] is not, however, to claim a position of marginality for ourselves. Similarly, we are not suggesting that adding New Zealand geographies (and geographers) into ‘the core’ of geographic publishing would provide a solution to the kinds of marginalisation problems we outline. Indeed, any such approach is likely merely to reinforce the exclusionary binaries inherent in the already powerful production of centres and margins” (Berg and Kearns, 1998:130)

To claim the status of periphery/marginality therefore can be interpreted as a specific strategy employed in a specific context, with a specific aim. My interest in this paper is to analyse European contributions to the “Anglo hegemony” debate which do so constructing a specific idea of Europe. These contributions are all based in specific national backgrounds and academic settings, which are nevertheless being increasingly influenced by attempts by the EU to integrate the national academic and research sectors to form the European Research Area (ERA). The ERA, which includes making researchers more mobile, interconnected and “excellent”, has the aim of „making the European Union the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world“ (European Council Lisbon, 2000:12). The Lisbon Strategy, which formulates this aim, places the European Research Area next to the further liberalisation of energy and

³That I interpret them as such does not necessarily mean that the strategies are indeed employed strategically in the cases that I analyse or – if they are employed strategically – that they are successful for every individual that employs them.

transport sectors, the creation of a more business-friendly environment, of an entrepreneurial culture and a modernization of the “European social model” (ibid.). While the specific conditions of the European “political economy and cultural politics of academic accumulation strategies” (Berg, 2004:554), cannot be analysed here at greater detail, this forms the background for the following consideration of constructions of Europe. I analyse four contributions to the debate in chronological order, starting with Minca (2000), followed by Gregson et al. (2003), Amin (2004) and Aalbers and Rossi (2006).

In an early contribution to the Anglo-hegemony debate, Claudio Minca used an editorial to reflect on a conference he had organised in Venice with the aim of bringing together European and American “postmodern” geographers. This is the editorial which was criticized by Samers and Sidaway, who claimed that Minca drew oversimplified boundaries along national or linguistic lines (see above). However, Minca did not so much stress national lines – he stressed the Europeanness of the “periphery”. In this editorial, Minca was still hesitant to label Europe a periphery, but drew clear boundaries. He spoke of “those of us who navigate only on the edges of the Anglo-American academic empire but are firmly emplaced within other geographical traditions” (Minca, 2000:285). These traditions he defined on the one hand as national, but on the other hand as quintessentially European. He used the location Venice as a starting point for his description of these Europeans. “Then there is Venezia, itself an urban theatre par excellence, and increasingly a sort of ideal, almost extra-territorial, space of/global cultural experiments; an emergent ‘European’ place within which international institutions seem more at home than their local counterparts” (Minca, 2000:286). In this location “young geographers coming from all corners of Europe” converged (Minca, 2000:286)⁴. These young geographers made up a “virtual community”, “well versed in the main themes of Anglo-American geographical debates but also firmly located within their own particular national and theoretical traditions” (Minca, 2000:286f). These people constantly mediate between “academic universes”, “a condition of living in incessant and permanent translation between two or more cultural universes.” (Minca, 2000:287 – the specific identification of Europe with a geopolitics of translation is also made in a later article, Bialasiewicz and Minca, 2005) In this description, Minca already combines two models: on the one hand there is a clear delineation of “Anglo” centre and “Euro” periphery. On the other hand, the virtual community of European geographers is hybrid, multi-lingual, heterogeneous.⁵ Minca positions himself on the side

⁴Minca notes however “a complete absence of geographers from the developing world, from the Southern Mediterranean and even from Central and Eastern Europe” (Minca, 2000:286).

⁵This description in itself, it should be noted, follows a traditional trait of colonialist literature, in which the periphery is described as heterogeneous and the centre as homogeneous – a trait

of the heterogeneous Europeanness which he presents (and represents) to the centre – in a way calling into being the “virtual community” that he speaks for.

After Minca’s editorial, the debate gained considerable momentum. The 2002 ICGG conference in Békéscsaba (Hungary) was already strongly marked by the Anglo hegemony debate. At this point, the idea of an Anglo hegemony had become established as a point of reference. The following two contributions (as well as a theme issue of *Geoforum*, a collection of editorial statements in *Society and Space* and other contributions) are – at least in part – outcomes of this conference.

Gregson, Simonsen and Vaiou directly address the debate. They analyse the contributions to two sets of journals – those that are considered “leading international journals” and those that label themselves “European”. They argue that “these journal spaces are both constituted through a centre-margin imaginary (one which positions Britain, and the US, as the centre and others, depending on their degree of incorporation, as ‘the margins’) and, through what appears in their pages, constitutive of this power geometry” (Gregson et al., 2003:5). Their aim is to “critique dominant (Northern/Western) representations of contemporary Europe, to disrupt the lines of power that enable these, and to explore ways of writing Europe which reflect its cultural heterogeneity and which promote cross-cultural dialogic exchange” (Gregson et al., 2003:5f). The disruption they have in mind consists of “[p]roducing a European writing space [that] requires us, at least in part, to work together, collaborate together, and indeed to research and write together across Europe [and] to foreground dialogic and interlocutory relationships” (Gregson et al., 2003:13f).

In most journals, Gregson, Simonsen and Vaiou argue, “the only positions left for continental European geographers to occupy in British (and North American) writing spaces are either applications of British/North American takes on ‘theory’ or translator-cum-exotic, as Other.” (Gregson et al., 2003:9). Theory, claim Gregson, Simonsen and Vaiou, is produced in Anglo-American geography and Europe can only be written about as a local case study, in “secondary” journals. This even applies to those journals that profess “European” ambitions: “crossing borders, being open to Europe, promoting exchange and so on” (Gregson et al., 2003:12).

Gregson, Simonsen and Vaiou voice their disappointment with those journals claiming to be European but still caught in Anglo-American power geometries. However, they still put their hopes on a European writing space. One founding element of this writing space are EU-programmes like the academic exchange programme Erasmus: “This contributed to the creation of European academic networks, to a more regular and systematic ‘crossing of borders’ within Europe

taken up and inverted by postcolonial literature, where heterogeneity is valued over homogeneity. The periphery can thus be portrayed as more productive than the centre.

so to speak.” (Gregson et al., 2003:11). In this European writing space that Gregson, Simonsen and Vaiou aim to develop, they “are involved in a constant process of translation between cultures” and “construct differentiated representations of Europe” (Gregson et al., 2003:15). Central to this undertaking is “working with place itself, in ways that might disrupt the power-geometries of centre–margin. So, in our own practices of working, if not so much writing, we have experimented not just with meeting and working outside academic and everyday domestic spaces but with doing so in different parts of Europe.” (Gregson et al., 2003:15).

Like Minca in the above quoted editorial, Gregson, Simonsen and Vaiou align “Europe” with heterogeneity, translation, and the margins. The centre is domination, homogeneity, and power. The “marginal Europe” is associated with the EU and official EU programmes. This Europe comes into being by participating in these programmes and travelling across Europe for meetings. Gregson, Simonsen and Vaiou do not (in this paper) differentiate between their European writing space and the EU as a project of governance. These programmes are then presented as “disrupting” British/North American power geometries.

At the same conference in Békéscsaba, an introductory lecture was given by Ash Amin (published in 2004). He likewise sought a positive reference to “Europe”. This Europe that Amin discerned was not the Europe of national boundaries or of racism, but a Europe that “acknowledges cultural difference [...] and one that is also able to forge a new commons based on values and principles that resonate across Europe’s diverse communities” (Amin, 2004:3). The opponents in Amin’s vision are “ethno-nationalists and xenophobes” (Amin, 2004:4), what needs to be overcome is “the fiction of homeland cultural identities in Europe” (ibid.). Amin’s envisioned Europe is a highly theorized one – one that “happens to dig deep into a Socratic (European) definition of freedom as the product of dialogue and engagement rather than the product of pre-given orders of worth. Such a starting point suggests that empathy/engagement with the stranger could become the essence of what it is to be ‘European’” (Amin, 2004:3). Considering EU border policies and the regular racist riots in numerous EU countries, it seems an odd idea to think that Europe is about empathy with the stranger. Amin’s paper also contains a reference to a critique of hybridity, in which the promoters of hybridity are described as a “restricted cultural elite – ‘post-colonial border-crossers’ such as poets, artists and intellectuals” (Amin, 2004:9). Nevertheless, he takes this road. His vision is one for the future – a “becoming European” (Amin, 2004:4/18). Amin is aware of “exclusions of varying intensity in the name of cultural difference” (Amin, 2004:12f), but hopes for “a Europe of ‘minor politics’, following Gilles Deleuze’s distinction between minority and minor politics.” (Amin, 2004:18).

Amin’s paper is discussed here in the debate about an “Anglo hegemony” because this was the context of his talk and his paper also served as a reference for later contributions.

However, in the paper, there is a different virtual community of Europeans: it is present in the very selection of references, where Amin quotes numerous “continental” philosophers which have been incorporated into the English-language debate. It is also present in the strict avoidance of any greater consideration of the EU from the perspective of economic or political inequalities. Amin’s article could be interpreted as the development of a formal, culturalist utopian discourse on Europe, an abstract and general discourse about values, about what “Europeans” should do. Amin’s paper was published in a journal that considers itself as “cutting edge” and “highly ranked, high impact factor” (Sage, 2009). Insofar, it could be interpreted as the type of writing that Gregson, Simonsen and Vaiou associate with the “hegemony” – only that the hegemony seems to write in much the same terms as they do, without their relatively applied perspective.

Finally, I would like to look at a paper which is also directly connected to the Anglo hegemony debate and develops some of the ideas of Gregson, Simonsen and Vaiou. Aalbers and Rossi pick up the idea of “European journals” and the existing EU programmes. They refer to an existing community of European researchers and to an Anglo hegemony in academic journals. They wish to challenge this hegemony with a European geography journal and echo Gregson, Simonsen and Vaiou, when they declare as their aim “a more cross-cultural and post-national research and writing space in Europe” (Aalbers and Rossi, 2006:141). Rossi and Aalbers start off with a definition of Europe directly building on Amin:

“Europe is considered here as a distinctively multi-faceted geographical entity, not only because of more recent multiethnic transformations of European societies (see Amin, 2004), but also because the historical constitution of ‘Europeanness’ as a collective sense of belonging has drawn on a multiplicity of identities, religions and cultures, particularly encompassing the contribution of a-national and territorially dispersed religious and ethnic minorities (such as the Jews and the gypsy communities [...])” (Aalbers and Rossi, 2006:142)

Europe is pictured as a place of multiplicity and a collectivity⁶. Amin’s theoretical framework originally does not claim to represent “reality”, it represents (in my interpretation) a formal utopian discourse. For Rossi and Aalbers, however, it has already become real: Europe *is* multiplicity, multiculturalism etc: “an ideal space for the building of a post-national community of scholars” (Aalbers and Rossi, 2006:142, similarly also on p. 138 and 145).

In addition to the idea of Europe, Rossi and Aalbers take as their second starting point the existing international col-

⁶That Jews and Roma are picked as evidence of this existing utopia is particularly questionable, considering not only the history of the 20th century, but also the neofascist riots in Germany in the 1990s and the recent riots against Roma and Romanians in Italy.

laborations in academia. They link the rise of these collaborations to EU programmes, to the point of almost replicating the terminology of these programmes, as with the concept of an “integrated research area”: these collaborations have developed “thanks primarily to the role played by EU-funded programmes and initiatives in stimulating the constitution of a more integrated research area in Europe.” (Aalbers and Rossi, 2006:138).

Aalbers and Rossi acknowledge that this process of internationalisation “has been vigorously enforced by international organisations and, in many countries, also by national governments from the late 1980s onwards” (Aalbers and Rossi, 2006:138), but their only critique is that this internationalisation suffers from the effects of Anglo hegemony and from the Europeans “persisting limited willingness to embark on cross-cultural collaborative research” (Aalbers and Rossi, 2006:138). The point of view that Aalbers and Rossi take here is again that of the enforcers of international co-operation. In spite of the fact that this project is clearly a top-down project run by governments, they imagine it as a bottom up process: “the process of Europeanising human geography should be sustained ‘from the bottom-up’ by scholars mobilising around the goal of a more international and cohesive geographical research space at the European level.” (Aalbers and Rossi, 2006:138). Aalbers and Rossi suggest that these scholars should mobilise under the roof of the Eugeo initiative of European geography associations.

Aalbers and Rossi’s paper presents a further perspective on power relations in geography: they take the role of speaking for an emerging centre – “European geography” – and formulate the demands this centre will make of its (partly unwilling) subjects. From this point of view, they translate the demands of the “European integrated research area” for geographers. Since they so closely ally themselves with the political project of the EU, in the end they cease positioning themselves in the periphery, when they write that eventually that there will only be a “unified European” geography.

“Taking account of this historical development of the discipline, then, demonstrates how the now customary divide between an ‘Anglo-American geography’ and a ‘continental European geography’ is in many respects not very significant over the long run. On the contrary, there are many arguments that can be made about the existence of a unified geographical discipline in Europe: or of a ‘European geography’, to put it more simply.” (Aalbers and Rossi, 2006:140).

In my interpretation, this unified European geography would then represent the knowledge aspect of the European agenda of global “leadership”, competing with the USA and dominating the rest of the world.

6 Conclusion: the strategies of an emerging elite

The Anglo hegemony debate which has been going on for more than ten years has become an important point of reference for many geographers. In this paper, I have tried to apply a theoretical framework to the debate itself. My particular interest has been in interrogating the idea of Europe that underlies many of the contributions. I have tried to show the emerging outlines of an elite formation⁷ – an elite that makes specific reference to international inequalities in academia and builds its claims on its position towards these inequalities, that is, towards the relation between international, Anglo-American, European and national. As the whole debate revolves around centre and periphery and every position in the debate is formulated in relation to centre or periphery, it has been unavoidable to use these terms here. However, as pointed out above, depending on the respective framework, centre and periphery mean different things. In one framework, the centre is simply the seat of power and the periphery the Other. In a modernisation framework, the centre is better at being the centre, and the periphery should better imitate the centre to become more like it and catch up. From a third perspective, the periphery is often defined as in the first model, but at the same time valued more highly than the centre – as representing heterogeneity and difference.

Different strategies for positions from the periphery emerge. The first strategy is that of an ascension to the centre and an imitation of the discourse of the centre – a strategy aiming at the establishment of elite positions within the periphery of people acting as gateways from the periphery to centre and vice versa. A second strategy takes its departure from an embrace of the qualities of the perceived periphery. Here, I have discussed a number of different elements of this strategy. First of all, Europe is constructed as the site of difference, transnationalism, multiplicity and heterogeneity. Second, and connected with this, EU academia (minus the UK) is considered a peripheral counter-position to Anglo hegemony. Third, European geographers are constructed as a community on behalf of which demands to the centre may be formulated. Fourth, EU-programmes are celebrated as helping this community come into being and thus disrupting Anglo hegemony. Travelling across Europe, participating in EU programmes and forming EU-European associations is portrayed as an anti-hegemonic practice.

I like to travel across Europe and meet other people. Nevertheless, I see some problems with presenting this as a political strategy. First of all, the EU is not a utopian place of difference but an entity very much resembling an imperialist association of states. EU programmes furthering international exchange aim at the creation of a European elite,

⁷Although I have used specific texts by specific authors, this does not necessarily mean that the authors themselves consciously aspire to be an EU elite or strategically employ this specific discourse – indeed, in other texts, the same authors can take different positions.

supplementing the existing national elites. A reference to an idealised “Europe” – however anti-essentialist this conception might be – must always exclude everything that is “not European” and often stands in crass contradiction with real politics.

The structures of academia are currently changing in many countries. One element of this change is the formation of a transnational elite and the accompanying conflicts. There are struggles about what exactly the rules of this elite and its formation are to be. Examples of some of these struggles are – depending on the country – the privatisation of elements of higher education and the increasing role of private businesses (as opposed to old elite structures within universities), the further precarisation of university staff, the introduction of more and more “competitive” elements aiming at a differentiation of “excellent” and average universities, the abolition of critical schools of thought from entire university systems. There are struggles between those aspiring to be part of this elite, those constituting it who are trying to defend its boundaries and their positions, and those trying to abolish the structures that make this elite formation possible. “Europe”, in this struggle, is not part of the solution, but part of the problem. As the EU, it is a political body that requires its own scientific elite to compete with other economic groupings. It portrays itself as a global player in the struggle for “brains”, challenging the US dominance in the global brain drain, and striving for dominance itself. This European academic elite considers itself as transnational, multilingual, hybrid and anti-hegemonic through its association with the EU project. It is, however, a product of the attempts of the second strongest economic and political (and scientific) bloc of the world, and can be defined as anti-hegemonic only in its criticism of the currently strongest such entity. Critical scholarship, in particular in geography with its history in imperialism, cannot derive its identity (if it needs one at all) from this Europe. Nor should it invent a Europe that appears as something different from what it is. It is in the practice of scholarship that it becomes critical, not in its location. Walter Mignolo wrote that imperialism is “above all, epistemic”, and called for a new social agent in this epistemic struggle:

“A new social agent has been emerging that can be described as a ‘philosophical-epistemic activist’ working toward the decolonization of knowledge and of being, contributing to decolonial subjects that are redoing political economy and political theory based on noncapitalist social practices.” (Mignolo, 2006:485)

While this may be hard to achieve (and EU-funding might be hard to find for this practice) it sounds like a great way to challenge existing hegemonies in academia. This does not mean that on the European half-continent there are no practices that can challenge academic hegemonies and wider social hegemonic relations – but the EU does not emerge from them. The critique of Europe and the EU – and not their affirmation – are elements in this struggle.

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