



North perspectives for a better South? Big Data and the Global South in Big Data & Society

GUILHERME CAVALCANTE SILVA¹

Abstract

Over the last few years the Data Studies within Social Sciences watched a growth in the number of researches highlighting the need of a more proficuous participation from demands from the Global South in the debates of the field (ARORA, 2016; MILAN & TRERÉ, 2019; MANN, DEVITT & DALY, 2019; GANTER & ORTEGA, 2019). The lack of Southern voices in the academic scholarship on one hand, and of recognition of the importance and autonomy of its local data practices, such as those from indigenous data movements (KUKUTAI & TAYLOR, 2016), had been decisive in establishing a Big Data from the South agenda. Having as one of its goals the nurture of the Southern contributions to Big Data, this paper draws on an analytical mapping of a total of 131 articles published from 2014-2016 in Big Data & Society, a leading journal known for its pioneering promotion of Big Data research among social scientists, in order to do an overview on the way Data practices are approached in relation to its geopolitical instance. It will be argued that due to an almost exclusive presence of Euroamerican perspectives in the contributions throughout the issues, there is a constant generalization of the Data practices and conceptualizations overlooking the specific consequences of Big Data in the many South contexts. The conclusion is that a richer path for the Big Data Studies in Social Sciences goes necessarily through greater recognition of the academic researches being conducted by Southern scholars, institutions and organizations and a more attentive look at the specificity of the many Big Data implications in the Global South.

Keywords: Global South; Big Data; Big Data & Society; Social Sciences.

Resumo

No decorrer dos últimos anos, os estudos sobre dados no interior das Ciências Sociais testemunharam um aumento no número de pesquisas que ressaltam a necessidade de uma maior representatividade de demandas do Sul Global em debates do campo (ARORA, 2016; MILAN & TRERÉ, 2019; MANN, DEVITT & DALY, 2019; GANTER & ORTEGA, 2019). A falta de vozes das periferias globais na produção acadêmica, por um lado, e o reconhecimento da importância e autonomia de práticas e epistemologias de dados locais, como as de movimentos indígenas (e.g KUKUTAI & TAYLOR, 2016), por outro, têm sido decisivas no estabelecimento de uma agenda de estudos do Big Data a partir do Sul Global. Tendo como uma de suas propostas o fomento de contribuições periféricas sobre o Big Data, este artigo lança mão de um mapeamento analítico de um total de 131 artigos publicados entre os anos de 2014 e 2016 na publicação científica Big Data & Society, referência na promoção da pesquisa em Big Data entre cientistas sociais, a fim de situar as abordagens ali contidas sobre o Big Data em relação a suas instâncias geopolíticas. O argumento é de que, devido a uma presença praticamente exclusiva de perspectivas de autoras(es) e instituições euroamericanas(os) nas edições da revista, há uma constante generalização das práticas e conceitualizações de dados, negligenciando-se assim desdobramentos específicos do Big Data em contextos latino-americanos, africanos e asiáticos. Este artigo acaba por concluir que um caminho mais construtivo para o estudo do Big Data nas Ciências Sociais passa por um maior reconhecimento das contribuições acadêmicas de teóricas(os) de instituições e organizações civis do Sul Global, bem como por um olhar mais atento para as especificidades dos funcionamentos do Big Data no Sul Global.

Palavras-chave: Sul Global; Big Data; Big Data & Society; Ciências Sociais.

¹ Mestrando em Divulgação Científica e Cultural no Laboratório de Estudos Avançados em Jornalismo (Labjor), Universidade Estadual de Campinas (Unicamp). Bolsista CAPES (Processo nº 1766616/2018), e-mail: guilhermecavalcantesilva@outlook.com.

Resumen

En los últimos años, los estudios acerca de Big Data en el interior de las Ciencias Sociales testimoniaron un aumento en el número de investigaciones que resaltan la necesidad de una mayor representatividad de demandas del Sur Global en debates del campo (ARORA, 2016, MILAN & TRERÉ, 2019; MANN, DEVITT & DALY, 2019; GANTER & ORTEGA, 2019). La falta de voces de las periferias globales en la producción académica, por un lado, y el reconocimiento de la importancia y autonomía de prácticas y epistemologías de datos locales, como las de movimientos indígenas (e.g KUKUTAI & TAYLOR, 2016), por otro, han sido decisivas en el establecimiento de un programa de estudios del Big Data desde el Sur Global. Teniendo como una de sus propuestas el fomento de contribuciones periféricas acerca del Big Data, este artículo hace uso de un mapeo analítico de un total de 131 artículos publicados entre los años 2014 y 2016 en la publicación científica Big Data & Society, referencia en la promoción de la investigación en Big Data entre científicos sociales, a fin de situar los enfoques allí contenidos sobre el Big Data en relación con sus instancias geopolíticas. El argumento es que, debido a una presencia prácticamente exclusiva de perspectivas de autoras(es) e instituciones euroamericanas(os) en las ediciones de la revista, hay una constante generalización de las prácticas y conceptualizaciones de datos, descuidando así desdoblamientos específicos del Big Data en contextos latinoamericanos, africanos y asiáticos. Este artículo concluye que un camino más constructivo para el estudio del Big Data en las Ciencias Sociales pasa por un mayor reconocimiento de las contribuciones académicas de teóricas de instituciones y organizaciones civiles del Sur Global, así como por una mirada más atenta a las especificidades de los funcionamientos del Big Data en América Latina, África y Asia.

Palabras clave: Sur Global; Big Data; Big Data & Society; Ciencias Sociales.

Introduction

The term Big Data has become increasingly popular in academic researches in multiple fields, as well as in news reports and business reports. Although it has been circulating in informational environments since the end of the 20th century, it is only in the decade of 2010 that Big Data gains popularity in scientific productions² and becomes a catchphrase (TOMAZ & SILVA, 2018). Within Social Sciences, the same phenomenon is seen. An example of that is the creation of the journal Big Data & Society (BD&S) in 2014, focused specifically in analyzing *“Big Data practices [...] while also reflecting on the consequences for how societies are represented (epistemologies), realised (ontologies) and governed (politics)”*³ in dialogue with multiple concerns of the Social Sciences.

Considering the infancy of Big Data research in general, and in Social Sciences in particular, this work carried out an analytical mapping on Big Data research, taking special attention to the perspectives of researchers from the many different Social Sciences. This study takes as its study object the articles published in BD&S between 2014 and 2016, totaling 131 articles. The goal was

² Between 2012 and 2017, for example, the publication rate for “Big Data” was quintupled, according to data from the Web of Science. Available at <https://wcs.webofknowledge.com/RA/analyze.do?product=WOS&SID=8E7jMfgE17MhNfzZc9B&field=PY_PublicationYear_PublicationYear_en&yearSort=true>

³ About the Journal, Big Data & Society. Available at: <<http://bigdatasoc.blogspot.com.br/p/big-data-and-society.html>>

to understand what the trends are, where they circulate, and how they are grounded in Big Data approaches within this specific area of knowledge.

This paper presents a partial view of such mapping which constitutes the Master's research of the author, paying special attention to the question of the ethnical and geographical distribution of voices that circulate in the discussion about Big Data in Social Sciences. This concern arises in a context of growing concern over the participation of scholarly production of institutions from the Global South in formulating the directions of areas related to the Social Sciences, resulting in a practice of generalizing about contexts of such regions *"rather than including voices from within the continent[s]"* (GANTER & ORTEGA: 68). In the context of Big Data studies, this usually leads to *"hyperbolic narratives of the 'big data revolution'"* (MILAN & TRERÉ, 2019: 320) which, however, does not present itself as a revolutionary and 'effective' process in the experience of marginalized groups from the Global South⁴, as it is attested for example in the state surveillance practices against indigenous peoples around the Globe (KUKUTAI & TAYLOR, 2016, MANN & DALY, 2018).

The purpose of this work is to identify from the analysis of the articles of BD&S, the distribution of voices within the Big Data-Social Sciences research interface and evaluate the ways in that such distribution affects the scenario of this research field, as well as the manner in which such theorists approach the impact of Big Data in the Global South. The argument to be presented is that due to such a virtually exclusive influence of perspectives from Euroamerican authors and institutions in the issues of the journal, there is a constant generalization of data practices and conceptualizations, especially when it comes to Big Data developments in Global South contexts. That is true since *"the majority of the world's population today resides outside the West"*, even if the debate is still framed *"by means of 'Western' concerns, contexts, user behaviour patterns, and conceptual frameworks"* (MILAN & TRERÉ, 2019: 320). The conclusion is that a more constructive and pluralistic path for future Big Data studies in Social Sciences necessarily involves a (de)opacification of the scholarly contributions of theories, activist movements, and research institutions in the Global South, as well as the elimination of generalist approaches to Big Data and its lack of inclusion of Global South voices.

Firstly, the paper introduces the researches on Big Data especially those from the Social Sciences, in order to situate the most influential views on the subject currently circulating. The paper then introduces the issues of the Global North-South relationship in Big Data studies and makes its case for a de-westernization of Social Sciences researches in general – and in Big Data in particular. After

⁴ This paper follows the definition gave by Stefania Milan and Emiliano Treré (2019: 321) regarding what is the Global South. Beyond the obvious geographical connotation, naming where the marginalized are to be generally found, such a concept is used to identify *"a plural entity subsuming also the different, the underprivileged, the alternative, the resistant, the invisible, and the subversive"*.

that, it will present a summary of the mapping on BD&S with a focus on the geopolitical issues surrounding the research production at the Big Data-Social Sciences interface, with further discussion on the research implications and closing remarks. This effort intends to contribute to the newly formed "Big Data from the South" agenda, led by theoreticians like Stefania Milan, Emiliano Treré, Payal Arora, among others.

Big data research: an overview from Social Sciences

Big Data research has witnessed an increasing rate of transdisciplinary approaches that encompass areas as diverse as Computing, Economics, Public Health, Education and Communication in association with issues related to data. This can also be seen in the increase in the number of academic events⁵, research groups, and formation trainings⁶ around the topic.

Despite the great commotion around Big Data, there are few initiatives to this day devoted to mapping the main approaches in these researches. Some of these surveys encompass questions such as the state of the empirical research on Big Data (WIENHOFEN, ROMAN & MATHISEN, 2015), Big Data's definitions within Management (YLIJOKI & PORRAS, 2016) and Digital Humanities (KAPLAN, 2015). As far as Big Data studies in the Social Sciences are concerned, two papers are especially useful for understanding the paths walked so far. The first is an analytical mapping carried out by Jan Youtie, Alan L. Porter and Ying Huang (2016) to evaluate the distribution of research interests and subliterations within Big Data research in Social Sciences from a sample of 488 articles retrieved from the Web of Science (WoS) database.

One of the researchers' first findings is that Big Data research in the sciences had a boom from the beginning of the 2010s. The year 2012, more specifically, marks the beginning of an exponential growth of interest in Big Data among social scientists, which has continued to grow to this day. Youtie et al (2016) identify that this year marks the publication of the most cited work covering Big Data in the field of Social Sciences until the publication of their paper: the article "Critical Questions for Big Data", authored by danah boyd and Kate Crawford (2012) and published in *Information, Communication & Society*.

⁵ At websites dedicated to the report of CfP for scientific events, Big Data is among the most common conference themes. See for example: <<https://www.papercrowd.com/conferences/search>>

⁶ Examples such as the one from *Data Diplomacy*, that involves academic institutions from New Zealand, Australia and England, investigating the role of democracy in what concerns data sharing; and the Data Institute, based in the University of San Francisco (US) and devoted to the formation of data scientists from all over the world and from multiple disciplines, demonstrate the transdisciplinary character of these efforts.

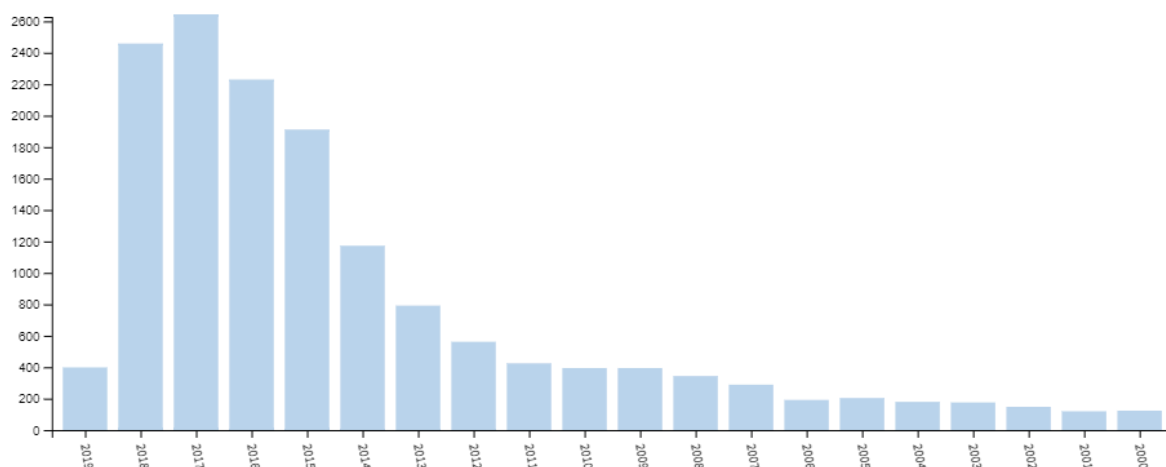


FIGURE 1: Number of published papers about “Big Data” in the fields of “Communication”, “Arts”, and “Humanities and Social Sciences” included in Web of Science’s database between 2000 and 2019. From 2012 to 2017, the rate of publications on “Big Data” is quintupled. Data updated until 07/04/2019.

Youtie et al (2016) also identified as central articulators of research interests in the Big Data-Social Sciences interface topics such as Internet and Society, Privacy Studies, Sociology of Science, Big Data and Medicine, Geolocalization, Decision Making, Business Impacts, and Analytics/Software. However, recalling the scope of this paper, it calls the attention the fact that 81% of the 488 papers were authored by researchers affiliated to US or British educational institutions.

Another mapping that approached the question of how Big Data was addressed in Social Sciences was the one realized by Jacky Akoka, Isabelle Comyn-Wattiau and Nabil Laoufi (2017) in a total of 1843 articles recorded in the ScienceDirect database between 2013 and 2016. Despite being a broad mapping on Big Data research, encompassing 24 different disciplines, Akoka et al (2017) help us locate Big Data research in Social Sciences in relation to those from other fields. The material on Big Data in Social Sciences appear to be insipid in relation to those from fields such as Computer Science and Engineering, both of which represent more than half of the total of publications in the period in comparison to all the other 22 fields, despite being the fourth discipline with most publications in the list (AKOKA ET AL, 2017).

Like Youtie et al (2016), Akoka et al (2017) point to a hegemonic presence of North American and European research institutions in Big Data research⁷. Such a discrepancy between Euroamerican

⁷ Exception must be made here to the important participation of Chinese universities in the promotion of discussions on Big Data at a global level. This is noticeable, for example, in the number of international transdisciplinary journals under the leadership of Chinese researchers and institutions, such as the *International Journal of Big Data Intelligence* (National Chung Cheng University), *Big Data and Cognitive Computing* (Huazhong University of Science and Technology), *Big Data Research* (Zhejiang University) and the *Open Journal of Big Data* (Xi'an Jiaotong Liverpool University).

participation and that of institutions, authors and movements of the Global South is illustrated in FIGURE 2 below; an attempt to express the balance of power in the geopolitics of scientific, technological and symbolic production on Big Data.

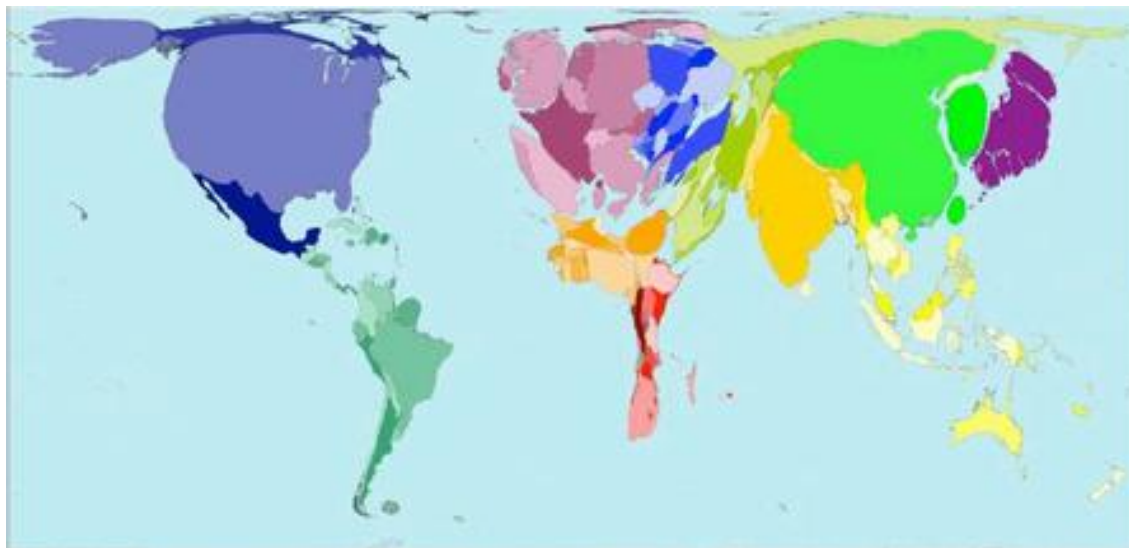


FIGURE 2: Geopolitical map of Big Data's global balance. Produced by computational scientist Stéphane Grumbach, from the Institut National de Recherche en Informatique et en Automatique (Inria / France)⁸

In short, although recent Big Data studies within Social Sciences are on a steady rise, to the point where some works may already be classified as foundational or classical (Iliadis & Russo, 2016), as well as the consolidation of several lines of research, methodologies and different study objects. However, this increasing volume of publications occurs at the expense of greater participation of scholars, ideas, and institutions from the Global South, exposing the way Big Data affects the margins. A practice that, as we have seen, has led to the habit of talking about these contexts rather than including voices of those who live them (GANTER & ORTEGA, 2019).

Despite providing an outlook on the Big Data research in Social Sciences and identifying this Global North/South divide in their surveys, Akoka et al (2017) and Youtie et al (2016) perform only a descriptive task in their papers, without showing, for example, the ways in which those papers analysed in their mapping use the references they use, or the reasons and consequences of the Euroamerican hegemony in Big Data research in Social Sciences. This question, however, should not be treated as being irrelevant, since it impacts the formulation of concepts, theories, and methods for studying Big Data in contemporaneity (MILAN & TRERÉ, 2019).

⁸ "Big Data? The Global Imbalance". Available at: <<http://www.in2p3.fr/actions/formation/Info13/lift-27sept-121001065613-phpapp01.pdf>>

Big data and the global north/south divide

Brazilian sociologist Francisco de Oliveira, discussing the specificity of the capitalist development in Brazil in his classic "Critique to a Dualistic Reason", sought to counter what he saw as a major flaw in Latin American socioeconomic thought in, on the one hand, reading the Brazilian reality in terms of social precariousness, but on the one hand, maintaining unquestioned the structure of a traditional western capitalist thought that made them appeal to dualities such as 'progress' and 'underdevelopment', 'modernity' and 'traditionalism', when pointing to the country context.

while they denounced the miserable life conditions inflicted upon a large portion of the Latin American population, their theoretical and analytical schemes tied themselves to discussions around the relation between product-capital, propensity to save or invest, the marginal efficiency of capital, economies of scale, and size of the market, leading them, unwittingly, to construct a strange world of duality and unwillingly lead to the ideology of the vicious cycle of poverty (OLIVEIRA, 2003: 31).

Such reproduction of "*schemes learned in the Anglo-Saxon universities*" (OLIVEIRA, 2003: 32) would affect the whole way in which the Brazilian reality was to be apprehended, popularizing the conception of the country as being an 'underdeveloped' nation (on similar critiques in other Latin American contexts see Sábato, 1975). Oliveira's criticism⁹ is an example of the implications of the mere application of Eurocentric perspectives to realities alien to the West. Within the scope of Social Sciences and Humanities a movement toward decentring the Western epistemological prevalence in its debates and toward a geopolitical pluralization of theoretical bases contemplating voices from the oppressed reached pre-eminence in the last half of the 20th century, involving contributions from different parts of the globe and different fields (E.G. FREIRE, 1974; HALL, 1992; HERRERA, 1971). The critique revolves around a certain vice of addressing social issues and marginalized groups from the lens of the canon of liberal democracies from the West (SANTOS & MENESES, 2010), which generally brings to the universalization of such questions under a global 'neoliberal factory' (REXHEPI, 2016).

More recently, and in the early years of Big Data research, different groups of researchers alerted to the need for greater participation of the Global South in this new area of research, but most of all they claimed for theories of Big Data from the Global South. One of the first attempts in trying to build such an agenda was made with the one-day conference Big Data from the South, held in Colombia in 2017. Its program brought several questions to light:

How would datafication look like seen... 'upside down'? What questions would we ask? What concepts, theories, methods would we embrace or have to devise? What do we miss if we stick to the mainstream, Western perspective(s)? (MILAN & TRERÉ, 2017: 1).

9 Summarised briefly here under the risk of incurring in reductionism.

Another major propeller of the initiative toward a Big Data from the South came more recently, in 2019, with the publication of a special issue on the theme in the journal *Television & New Media*. One of the first discussion topics in the "Big Data from the South" agenda revolved around what would be such things as North and South. In this sense, the initiative sought to follow the theoretical foundations of decolonial studies (MIGNOLO & ESCOBAR, 2010) by rethinking the North/South divide by marking an attempt to seek "*the absolute emancipation of all kinds of oppression and domination*" involving power relations that privilege "*legacies imposed by the colonial situation*" and global capitalism, one could say, to the detriment of "*a totally innovative field of thought that privileges local epistemic elements*" (REIS & ANDRADE, 2018: 3).

Despite recognizing the importance of the geographical positioning of such situations of oppression, that is, of the geographic space generally neglected or commonly seen as a source of resources such space occupying most and the central part of the globe as shown in FIGURE 3 and FIGURE 4, it is in the question of the many places of "*otherness, resistance, subversion and creativity*" (MILAN & TRERÉ, 2019: 325) under marginalization that the "Big Data from the South" agenda focuses.

Firstly, there is the geographical South, i.e. the people, activities, politics and technologies arising literally at the margins of the world as captured in the Mercator map. Secondly, and most importantly, our South is a place of (and a proxy for) resistance, subversion and creativity. We can find countless Souths also in the Global North, as long as people resist injustice and fight for better life conditions against the impending 'data capitalism'. Our reflections on 'big data from the South' fit within—and hope to feed—the broader process of epistemological re-positioning of the Social Sciences (MILAN & TRERÉ, 2017: 2).

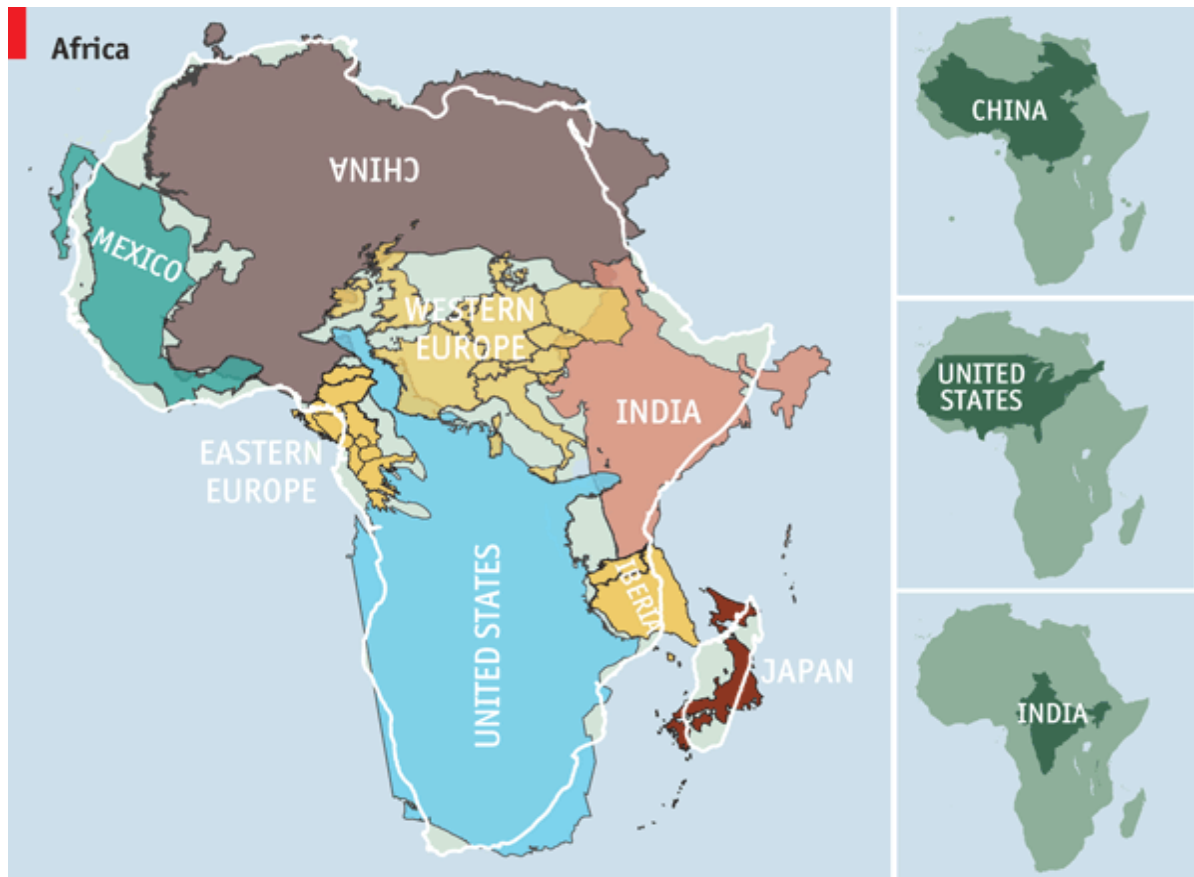


FIGURE 3: Map that criticizes the exaggeration given in influential maps like the one of Gerardus Mercator, created in the context of the maritime explorations of European colonizers. Here, for example, the real proportion of the African continent compared to other parts of the globe.

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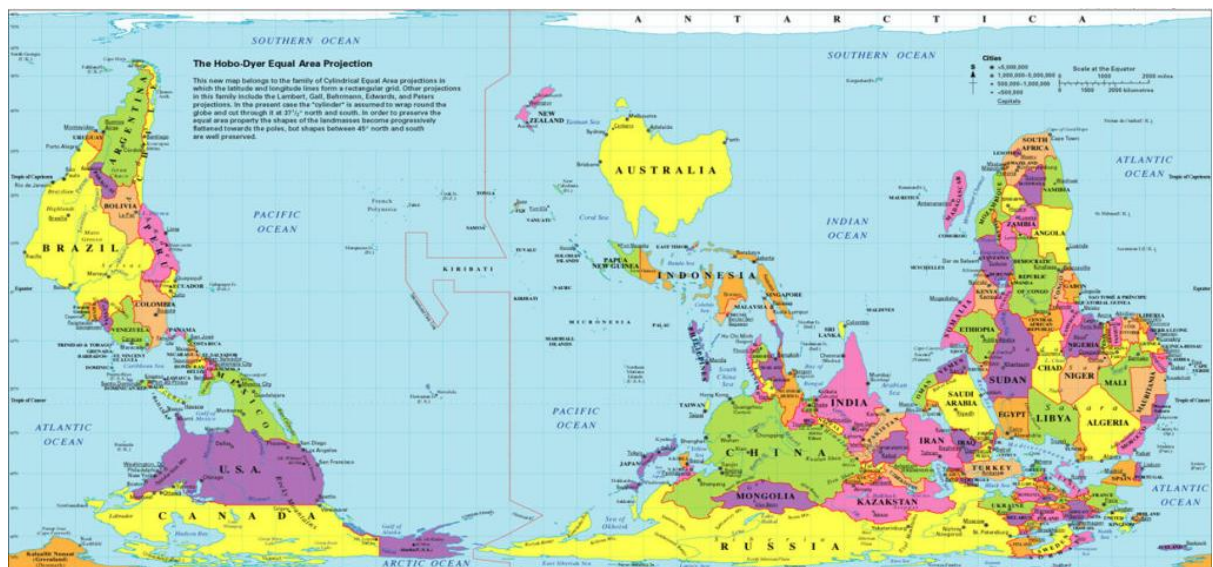


FIGURE 4: Map that criticizes the exaggeration given in influential maps like the one of Gerardus Mercator, created in the context of the maritime explorations of European colonizers. Here a reversed world map, playing with notions of Northcentrism - usually associated with qualities of greatness (Nelson & Simmons, 2009).

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However, more than having a critical instance regarding the current state of Big Data research, the “Big Data from the South” agenda has as its main goal rereading the Big Data phenomena itself from the experiences, places, and theories of the South (SANTOS & MENESES, 2010). Rethinking Big Data from the South is still a recent project, but it already has interesting epistemological perspectives regarding political data movements (CHENOU & CEPEDA-MASMELE, 2019), surveillance capitalism studies (Evangelista, 2017), and public policies in the South toward marginalized groups (DALY & MANN, 2018).

In short, the proposal to conceive a Big Data from the South, although recent, finds echo in a flourishing literature that seeks on the one hand to propose a critique of the Euroamerican epistemological predominance in the Social Sciences and Big Data studies, and on the other hand to construct plural perspectives of Big Data from the realities faced in the margins. Aiming to contribute to the “Big Data from the South” project, this work carried out an analytical mapping in one of the most important spaces for debating Big Data within the Social Sciences currently, the journal *Big Data & Society*.

Big data & society: mapping and discussion

One of the first findings of the study carried out in a scope of 131 articles published in BD&S between 2014 and 2016 was the identification of a meager presence of researchers affiliated to institutions outside North America and Europe among the Editorial Board members as seen in FIGURE 5. A fact that is also seen in other Social Sciences fields (e.g. GANTER & ORTEGA, 2019).

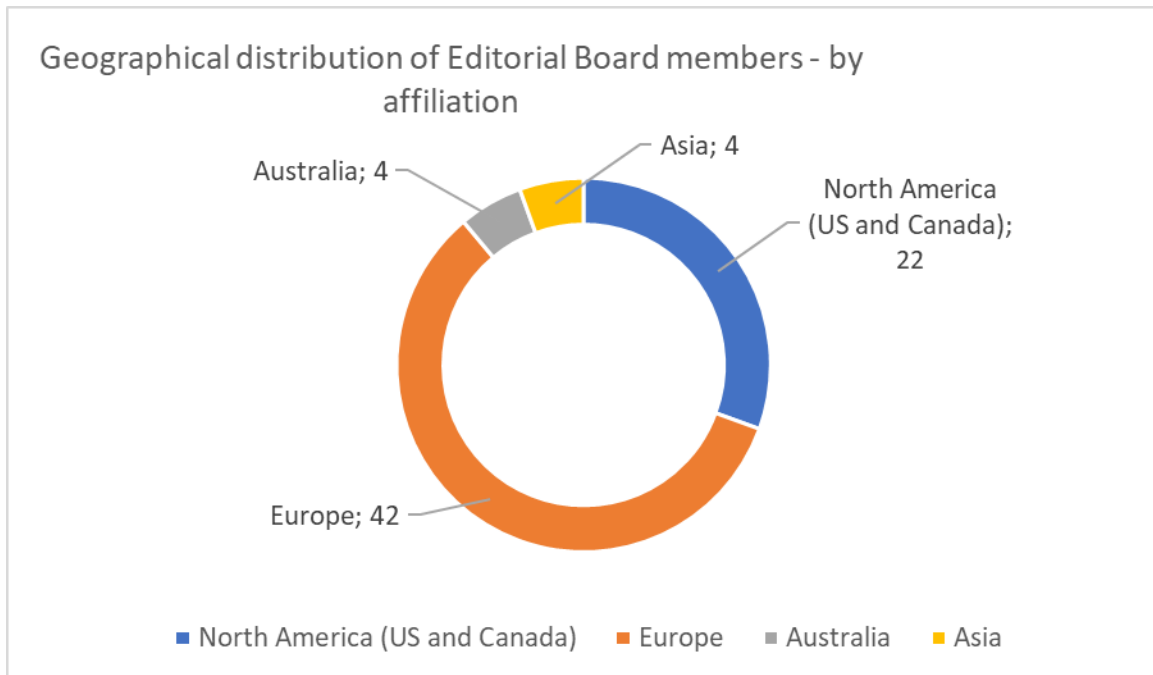


FIGURE 5: Geographical distribution of Editorial Board members by institutional affiliation, among a total of 72 people spread into editorial staff, supervisors and Board members. Of the total, 19 are affiliated to US institutions and 28 to British institutions. Updated information until June 2019.

Available at <https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/sam/journal/big-data-society>

A similar disparity is seen concerning the institutional affiliation of the authors who published in BD&S between 2014 and 2016, as we can see in TABLE 1. US institutions based a total of 45 of the 131 articles published by BD&S in the period, which accounts for more than a third of the total (34.35%). Along with British institutions, which account for a total of 39 articles (29.77%), the British-American slice accounts for just over 64% of the entire corpus, while only four papers come from researchers affiliated to institutions outside North America-Europe and Australia¹⁰.

COUNTRIES	NUMBER OF PAPERS
US	45
United Kingdom	39
Netherlands	16
Canada	12
Germany	8
Ireland	5
Denmark	4
Australia	2
Belgium	2
France	2
Sweden	2

¹⁰ The unique situation of Australia and New Zealand in postcolonial discussions plus their historical position alongside traditional capitalist nations of the North can be seen in Mann & Daly (2018).

Austria	1
Croatia	1
Spain	1
Finland	1
Italy	1
Switzerland	1
United Arab Emirates	1
Singapore	1
Egypt	1
Japan	1

TABLE 1: Geographical distribution by institutional affiliation of the authors of the articles of the first six issues of BD&S.

The analysis also covered the number of articles that took as their study object Latin American or African contexts. As shown in FIGURE 6 only three of the 131 articles published in the period (2.2%) take as their study object movements, situations, and/or contexts based in those places¹¹:

i) The paper from Mulder, Ferguson, Groenewegen, Boersma and Wolbers (2016), that addresses the way digital humanitarian groups used crowdsourcing and open-source software during humanitarian crises in Nepal and Haiti; ii) Rieder, Abdulla, Poell, Woltering and Zack (2015) researching the Facebook page "We are All Khalid", founded by a Google Egyptian executive in Egypt, and one of the main propellers of the political turmoil that led to the resignation of Hosni Mubarak in 2011; iii) And Nir Kshetri's (2014) paper on the benefits of 'successful' Big Data applications, already proof-tested in Western economies, in 'developing' countries such as Kenya and Brazil, and regions such as Latin America and Africa.

¹¹ An exception is made here to the work of Cardullo (2015), which deals with the Twitter blockade made by the Turkish government in the face of demonstrations against Prime Minister Erdogan and the ways in which Twitter users have reacted to it. Cardullo (2015) built his analysis holding interviews with Turkish Twitter users, presenting specific characteristics of the way marginal groups aggrouped themselves in contexts of censorship on Twitter.

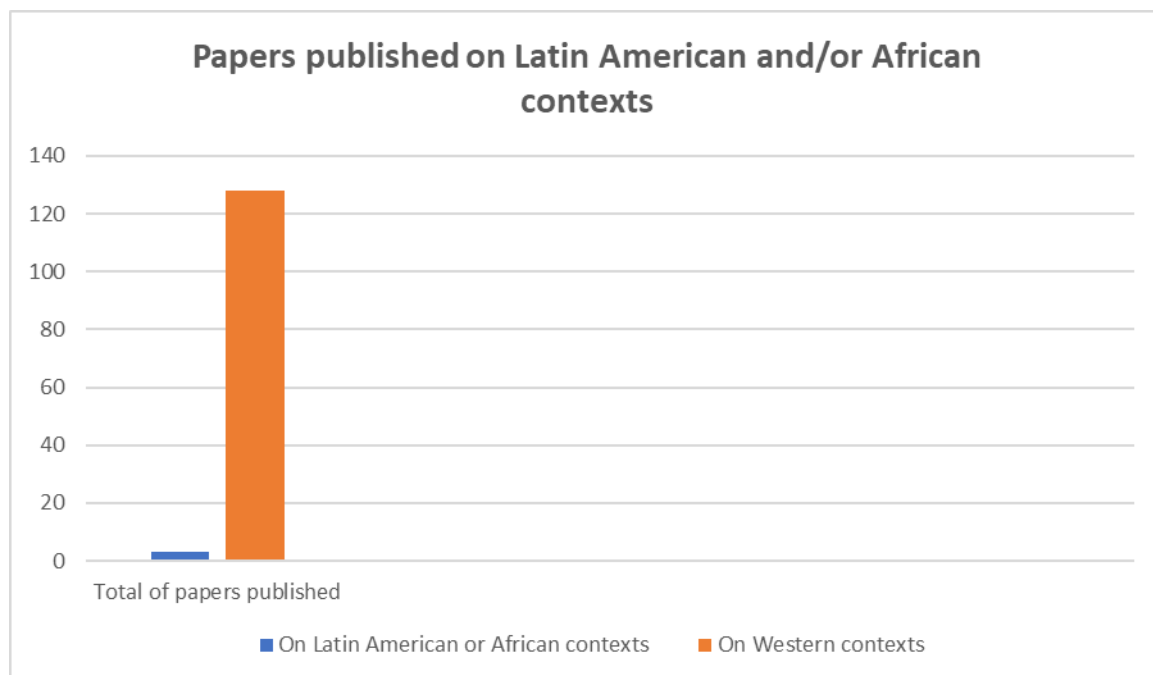


FIGURE 6: Distribution of papers by choice of study object/context in relation to geopolitical concerns.

Out of the three papers, however, only two cite local productions (KSHETRI, 2014; RIEDER ET AL, 2015). Mulder et al (2016) mention Unicef reports, maps produced by US NGOs and even a Wired report, but they did not mention local initiatives or cited reports, initiatives, or papers from local agents. Rieder et al (2015) include among the co-authors an Egyptian researcher who is cited in the material (ABDULLAH, 2014) together with another Egyptian author as well as anthropologists who made fieldworks in Syria. Among the three Kshetri (2014) is the one that most refers to Southern Global actors, mentioning researches produced by people from Indonesia, India, Zimbabwe, and Zambia. His work argues for more extensive uses of Big Data practices, as well as greater access to them, with proven effectiveness in the practices Western multinationals in 'developing' countries.

The mapping identified a scenario of almost total invisibility from discussions about and from the South, which can be seen in the lack of author from the South in the first three years of research on Big Data at BD&S. Such a conclusion is disturbing given the recognition that the period chosen for the analysis refers exactly to the initial discussions in the journal, a period of maturation of ideas and paths to be followed in the future. This indicates that these paths have certainly departed from and directed themselves almost exclusively toward the intellectual islands of North America, Europe, and Australia/New Zealand.

Another disturbing conclusion is the fact that there are a low number of references to local literature and authors when dealing with contexts of the Global South, a reality seen even among

the three articles that address such issues. This is what Ganter & Ortega (2019: 79) refer to when they point to a "*tendency to talk about rather than with*" the South.

The editors of BD&S were contacted in order for them to inform the number of papers submitted by authors from Latin American or African institutions in the journal as well as geographic locations of the number of views and download made in the website, all done in order to assess whether the absence of authors from the Global South in BD&S could also be credited to a disinterest from the part of Southern actors on the discussions or in becoming acquainted with the journal itself. They replied that they did not have an accurate picture on such issues and that this would require a "purely manual" analysis¹². Therefore, it should be noted that several factors need to be considered for understanding the low participation of Southern Global authors, institutions and movements in BD&S publications, such as the language barrier. Despite the need for broader research on this subject, as Ganter & Ortega (2019) have also identified in a similar study in the field of Media and Communication Studies, it is possible to conclude that the [almost] invisibility of the Global South in BD&S is determinant for the low engagement of the Big Data discussions there available with the Global South.

Conclusion

The study, although limited in scope and in presenting broader answers on the reasons for the Global South invisibility in the articles of BD&S, questions that I hope will be further unfolded in future research, pointed to problems in Big Data research in the Social Sciences whose implications compromise the entire epistemic foundations of the field. This paper wanted to point out the importance of decentralizing Big Data studies, currently almost entirely tied to analysis from the Euroamerican canon.

In view of such situation, this research posits itself in the context of the "Big Data from the South" agenda, claiming not only for a broader epistemic participation of the Global South in the discussions circulating around Big Data, but also for other formulations of this phenomenon coming from other lenses, as those from the South with ideas born out of the margin. After all, what is Big Data in face of the Southern contexts? The Big Data experienced in the margins is the same as Laney's 3Vs [volume, speed, and variety] (2001) extended to many other Vs by Uprichard (2013)? I argue here that the answer to such questioning can only be given if, instead of the constant generalizations of Big Data made in disregard of considering other experiences of Big Data, there is an effective effort to deal with and from contexts marginal (MILAN & TRERÉ, 2019). Recognizing the size of the abyss is

¹² Message received by email on June 2, 2019.

the first step in a movement toward a Big Data from the South, after all, to conclude along Mann, Devitt & Daly (2019: 9): *“If digitisation and data are inevitabilities, then we have to (re)imagine the kind of digitised world and data we want to see rather than only offering a naysaying critique of the status quo.”*

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