

IPA2026BRP06 / Critical interpretive epistemologies for the study of inequalities

Topic : IPA2026BR / Panels

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Third Chair : Alice Carolline Costa Hassan Querino (Itaipu ParqueTec)

Fourth Chair : Gustavo Costa de Souza (Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro)

GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

“The authoritative word belongs to those at the top; those at the bottom just provide the input. It’s the same for any knowledge system: we produce the raw material and they give it back to us as a finished product.” - **Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui**

We exist in an era of overlapping, deepening crises. From escalating socio-ecological emergencies to widening structural inequalities, the fundamental question of “what is the true narrative?” is deeply contested. This panel engages with the argument that our source of knowledge must be people living the experience when we do critical interpretive analysis. We follow a longstanding tradition, including the work of Rivera Cusicanqui (2020) and Darder (2015) arguing that critical interpretation must include the empirical knowledge of those disproportionately impacted by a specific struggle. This has important implications for critical interpretive epistemologies, as it requires us to centre subaltern sensibilities (Darder, 2015). Historically, academic institutions have been complicit in extracting knowledge from marginalised communities, establishing dominant epistemologies that dictate how inequality is defined and analysed (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999). True democratisation cannot be achieved by merely observing or redistributing oppression; it requires actively dismantling it. This demands a radical shift in how we understand, validate, and produce knowledge. It requires critical interpretive epistemologies. It requires dismantling epistemic supremacy.

This panel seeks to explore how we can use critical interpretative epistemologies and methods in our work towards epistemic justice and equity. This is particularly important in realities with deepening inequalities where questions around what observations means, how to frame findings and what counts as valid are increasingly questioned and criticised. In line with work by Darder (2015), we are interested in how critical interpretative methodologies can be used to achieve epistemic equity. Drawing on Carneiro's (2005) central argument that the hegemonic "being" constructs the marginalised "other" as a "non-being" in order to affirm its own superiority and rationality. This panel's shared meaning-making methodology is a deliberate act of resistance against the historical treatment of marginalised people as mere "coisas que falamos" who lack the capacity to produce culture, development, and valid knowledge. The panel forms part of the work towards epistemic equity by exploring shared struggles and building collective efforts to reclaim resources and narratives.

To do so, we welcome contributions that discuss how policy analyses can transform, to actively prevent epistemicide, forge epistemic equity and center marginalised knowledges without appropriating or extracting from them. Contributions might include practical examples from activism and/or community work or academic research. Contributions might also include examples of how critical interpretative methodologies might play a role in creating conditions for shared learning and solidarity building that includes marginalised knowledge. Here, we position ourselves in line with Fischer and Boullosa (2025) who argue that interpretive inquiry requires shared meaning-making, and seek to create a commoning space that shares practices and creates solidarity across communities, fields and boundaries.

We see our role as academics in this space is not to speak for these struggles, but to step back, defer to epistemic authorities, facilitate, and help link these lived experiences to broader dimensions of critical interpretive epistemologies. By doing so, we aim to ensure marginalised voices are authentically represented to address the pervasive inequalities inherent in knowledge production itself.

Our panel, "Critical Interpretive Epistemologies for the Study of Inequalities" seeks to

1. Challenge the traditional boundaries of academic knowledge production.
2. Expand work on decolonising epistemology and whose voices are included in critical interpretive epistemologies for the study of inequalities.
3. Encourage critical understanding of what inequality is, and how to analyse it from a critical interpretive and epistemically just approach.
4. Forge transnational solidarity amongst scholars working on epistemic justice.
5. Add to efforts to work towards epistemic equity.

References:

- Carneiro, S. (2005) 'A Construção do Outro como Não-Ser como fundamento do Ser.' PhD Thesis. Universidade de São Paulo.
- Cusicanqui, S.R. (2022) 'Ch'ixinakax utxiwa: A Reflection on the Practices and Discourses of Decolonization.' *Native American and Indigenous Studies*, 9(2), pp.135-136.
- Darder, A. (2018) 'Decolonizing interpretive research: Subaltern sensibilities and the politics of voice' . *Qualitative Research Journal*, 18(2), pp.94-104.
- Fischer, F. and Boullosa, R. de F. (2025) 'Participatory action research: Collaborative practices in interpretive inquiry' , in Fischer, F., Münch, S. and Torgerson, D. (eds) *Interpretive Policy Analysis* . *Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing* , p p . 221– 238. doi : 10.4337/9781802202472.00021.
- Piacentini, T. (2025) 'Teaching Sociology in Turbulent Times: Ethical Pedagogy and the Politics of the Classroom.' *Sociology*, p.00380385261417961.
- Tuhiwai Smith, L. (1999) *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. London: Zed Books.

CALL FOR PAPERS

Set against the backdrop of Brasilia - a city that itself stands as a powerful spatial representation of both utopian democratic aspirations and profound, deeply entrenched inequalities - we invite contributions that critically examine patterns of inequality both within and outside of Brazil.

Within the conditions for unhurried conversations, attentive listening, and genuine community building, we take inspiration from Piacentini (2026). We aim to unsettle familiar perspectives, creating space for questioning hegemonic narratives and engaging with alternative viewpoints that may otherwise be overlooked. As such, the organisation of the panel will be deeply informed by the counter-hegemonic structures we wish to see in the world. To achieve this we are designing an interactive, embodied format. We will do this by inviting participants to bring objects into the conversation - physical items, photographs, or artifacts that represent their common struggles or lived experiences. We will use these objects as starting

points for our introductions and discussions, as a way to bring in different types of knowledge and to observe the differences and similarities in diverse narratives.

Carneiro (2005) emphasises that Black resistance and social movements function fundamentally as educators to the scientific and academic spheres. Our proposal elevates primary epistemic authorities who introduce vital research agendas. We are intentionally aiming for a panel composed of community organisers and academics, with priority given to those with lived experience. We strongly encourage submissions from individuals and groups disproportionately impacted by different intersecting inequalities and struggles including displacement, environmental struggles and socio-economic inequalities but understand that this language may not be used by those within these struggles and is open to interpretation. We are particularly interested in hearing from organisers, activists, and marginalised communities. Our priority will be privileging people from areas that are not normally represented in these spaces and those who have been historically excluded from institutional knowledge production. We welcome proposals in the form of field notes, descriptions of an activist project, or a narrative explaining the “object” you wish to bring to the discussion and the struggle it represents.

We invite you to join us in rethinking how knowledge is built, whose voice matters, and how we can collaboratively dismantle the structures of inequality.