

The geopolitics of academic plagiarism

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This paper uses Tönnies' notions of *Gemeinschaft* ('community') and *Gesellschaft* ('society') to problematize the issue of plagiarism from a culturalist perspective. According to this, plagiarism is understood not as a universal or unequivocal evil, but as one component of a particular ethical system that took hold within a specific historical and social context, roughly contemporary with the European Enlightenment. Today, that ethical framework is so deeply entrenched in the power structures of the modern world that its values go largely unquestioned in countries at the centre of the world economic system. However, as we move away from the centre towards the periphery, we find that those values become weaker, and may enter into conflict with another moral code, which is usually more traditional in nature, though no less coherent. Indeed, in some parts of the world, it is those traditional values that actually hold sway in local universities, raising serious problems for academic mobility and the internationalization of knowledge. The very concept of plagiarism is also full of inherent contradictions, caused, at least in part, by historical tensions generated by the passage from one kind of society to the other. Vestiges of the *Gemeinschaft* continue to penetrate all aspects of modern university culture, ranging from teaching practices (the persistence of *imitatio* in academic writing courses) and hierarchical relations (the power balance inherent in the tutor/student dynamic) to the very philosophy of knowledge underlying modern science (where the rhetorical implications of the citation procedure sit uncomfortably alongside a metadiscourse of transcendental truth). Hence, this paper argues that, in a context of increased globalization, there is a need for a deeper understanding of the various dynamics at work in this complex concept.

Reference

Tönnies, F. (2002/1887) *Community and Society*, transl. C. Loomis, New York: Dover Publications.

Biodata

Karen Bennett has a PhD and MA in Translation Studies, as well as professional diplomas in the areas of translation (IoLDip) and English language teaching (RSADip). After many years working as a teacher and translator of academic writing in Portugal, she now teaches

Translation at the New University of Lisbon (UNL) and researches in the area of Translation Studies with the University of Lisbon Centre for English Studies (ULICES). Her research has focused in recent years upon the problems of transferring knowledge across linguistic and cultural boundaries. She has published over 35 articles, 2 monographs and an edited volume.