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Provincializing STS Scholarship Landscape: Interview with ESTS Editorial Collective

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Interview by Aybike Alkan

Our blog editor Aybike Alkan interviewed the new Editorial Collective of the Engaging Science, Technology and Society *(ESTS) which started its tenure in early 2021. ESTS has been around since 2015 and quickly joined the band of major STS journals. In this interview, we learn about its aims for transforming the currently existing STS scholarship landscape by encouraging previously invisible authors, forms, and discourses of publication in the field.*

The Euro-American centeredness of STS is still a contested issue in various platforms and the ESTS *editors offer a series of concrete, constructive and generative solutions to this issue in their collectively conceived answers to Alkan's questions. Furthermore, the* ESTS *editors critically reflect on their vision for a given journal, data infrastructure, or a knowledge production process to be open access while being situated in a regime of academic capitalism that has been consolidating itself more and more in the last few decades via extensive financialization and monopolization.*

We hope that this text will be circulated and read not only as an in-depth conversation concerning contemporary STS publications but also a manifesto-like statement that could impact currently existing authorship, citation, and publishing practices in academic fields of study beyond STS.

I would like to start the interview with a question about your understanding of STS and your vision regarding the future of *Engaging Science, Technology, and Society*. What is "engaged STS" for you and how does it speak to the work you will engage in as part of your editorial practices?

We think of being "engaged" in a few different ways. First, having a sense of the ecologies and politics we're working in, and figuring out which issues we want to engage in. As an Editorial Collective, there are several topics that we're working on: transnationalism in scholarship and publishing practices; the development of open access and open data infrastructure; pedagogy and public-facing STS as forms of scholarship, and expanded forms of publication, including multimedia publication. Having identified these three areas, which is its own form of engagement with STS and its intersections with other fields and technologies of practice, we must now do the work of shifting the cultures of STS through outreach, platform development, and policymaking. For example, in our first six months we've had to figure out how to address the Euro-American centeredness of STS, as we elaborate further below, at different stages and specific forms of publishing (i.e. reviewing, the editorial board, the content of articles, thematic collections). Another example comes from how we are thinking about opening up scholarship, for example in the review process, by publishing "supplemental" data, and through forms of representation beyond the standard journal article. We are also "engaging" various models for collective work and

In your **editorial note** published on the official website of *Society for Social Studies of Science* (4S), you mention four commitments which are: diversifying the geographical base of the journal and promoting transnational STS, strengthening open access infrastructure, innovating genre forms and content, and cultivating sustained attention to pedagogy in STS scholarship. So, let's start with the first one: I notice a deliberate shift away from defining STS as an interdisciplinary field. Instead, STS scholars emphasize the transdisciplinary character of the field. How does your emphasis on transnational STS relate to this shift? What is the politics of using the prefix trans-? Which kind of sensitivities does it attach to?

If we think of the promise of transdisciplinarity in terms of putting STS into the practice of worlding, transnational STS may also be considered as opening STS to multiple, diverse places and spaces. The prefix trans- can be read in multiple senses, as you mention, politically but also methodologically, and both are connected in many ways. Each member of the editorial collective attaches different sensibilities to transnational STS and/or transnationalism, centered on different political and intellectual concerns. Although it may not be possible to communicate all these sensibilities, which we also continue articulating in the process as we discuss and work together, the starting point is the critique of Euro-American centeredness of STS alongside postcolonial and decolonial sensibilities. In this regard, the journal's emphasis on transnational STS first and foremost draws attention to the need for pluralizing STS places/spaces across borders without becoming trapped in any form of cultural relativism, and learning newly about ways to study and make sense of technoscientific worlds across multiple places by putting their epistemic and ontic realities into conversation. We want to underline here that STS has always been transnational in one sense. Multiple stories we hear and read from STS scholars located outside of the centers of the field are telling us that critical social studies of knowledges, sciences, techniques, and technologies exist in the intellectual genealogies of these places, in ways that do not lead to their strong institutionalization as fields of study in the way that they have in "Western" countries. We aim to render these intellectual genealogies visible while at the same time engaging them as potential contributions to our field.

There surely exist subtle lines on which we need to dance carefully that speak to well-known discussions in STS around "anything goes" or "demarcationism." We acknowledge our field's particular achievements, methodologically and theoretically speaking. At the same time, with an emphasis on transnationalism, we also invite our colleagues to reflect on the travel and translation of STS concepts, theories, methodologies across borders not in a unidirectional way (e.g., from the "West" to the rest of the world) but more within the terms of worlding. As such, we may also think of the critique of methodological nationalism embedded in transnational studies. As STS scholars studying the flows of knowledges and technologies, it is obvious to us that the scale of the nation-state limits how we can make sense of and intervene in technoscientific practices. However, many analyses still reproduce methodological nationalism, whether explicitly or implicitly. Therefore, transnational STS stands as a question of the appropriate scales to think about technoscience, if not the nation-state.

Authorship is related to authority and we can easily see the manifestation of this relation in the publishing industry. As editors committed to transnationalizing STS, what kind of strategies do you intend to adopt against the asymmetries in knowledge production? Also, how can remedying these asymmetries transform the field; in which respects?

Since the constitution of modern science, publishing a manuscript has been a fundamental part of the process of construction of scientific knowledge. When peers review and authorize a publication, they are not only assessing quality but also defining how a particular knowledge area develops. In other words, publishing is instrumental for defining the limits of a scientific field. Even in a field with frontiers as flexible STS, less than ten journals (all published in English

during the 1990s and early 2000s, we have seen a strong Euro-American theoretical influence on the STS communities in many different locations, however, as the field gains momentum in those places, and connects with their often forgotten rich, local discussions on the relations on science, technology and society, original knowledge and theorization arises.

Yet, we still do not see much of what is produced in these other regions in "mainstream" STS journals. 95 percent of the articles these journals publish are authored by North Americans and Western Europeans, with only 10 percent of the space for the rest of the world. Even this 10 percent is often constituted by Euro-American theory illuminating other regions' case studies. Why is that? There are demand and supply aspects of the problem. On the one hand, the strong Euro-American tradition of STS journals constantly reinforces itself, through the appointment of Euro-American editors, editorial boards, and very likely (however this data is hard to obtain) reviewers. This state of affairs has resulted in little openness, or scarce interest, towards outsiders. On the other hand, for many countries on the periphery of the field, English constitutes a barrier, or their STS problems and concepts are not attractive to these journals' debates or even how they define the parameters of the STS field. It is quite interesting to note that science policy, scientometrics, and innovation studies journals have been much more open to the rest of the world than have the journals on social studies of S&T.

Given this context, we want *Engaging Science, Technology and Society* to become a transnational journal, one in which different STS traditions, theories and contexts are relevant, and able to refresh and challenge the field with new issues and new perspectives. Thus, we are proactively engaging STS scholars from all over the world. To start with, we are a transnational Editorial Collective with members in Australia, Ecuador, India, New Zealand, Turkey, the United Kingdom, and the United States. We are in the process of appointing an equally diverse Editorial Board, and we take a lot of care in finding reviewers from different regions for each article. We should hasten here to note that our understanding of diversity is intersectional and very broad, not limited to just national representation or other traditional categorizations.

Still, publishing in English constitutes a barrier for scholars in many regions. We do not have enough funding for translating articles, and translation on its own is a narrow technical fix anyway. We are aware that English as the dominant scientific language is a political issue that relates to colonialism, neo-imperialism, and several world inequalities, and as such, the matter deserves continuous discussion. We are already planning a workshop on the issue. We are also planning some kind of activity to cultivate authors and articles, and we want our review process to be stimulating and constructive. We also have a strong pedagogical commitment, so we want to enrich STS teaching with more diverse perspectives and practices discussed in our journal. We are also part of co-convenors of the Transnational Publishing Working Group during 2020-21, in which we are discussing these issues with other STS journal editors, from the center and from other regions, in a productive way.

Within STS scholarship, infrastructure is not only a technical artifact but also a social being connecting practices, form, and content. Building on this, I would like to ask how do your practices of transforming the infrastructure of the journal relate to the STS ethos? In other words, how does the infrastructure of *ESTS* fit its content-based policies?

We think of infrastructure as how we work, but also what we want our work to do. In our infrastructural choices, we've tried to be extremely mindful of what kinds of political, economic, ethical, and working relations are built into the systems that we use. We're committed to an open source, open access, open data ethos. This is why, for example, we've chosen to continue with Open Journal Systems (OJS) for our renewed website. Using OJS is one way that we enter and support the existing ecosystems of open academic publishing. In addition, thanks to Amanda

about where we might be able to take *ESTS* next, which might include open peer review, alternative forms of publication, data sharing, and collaboration.

At the same time, we're extremely conscious of how people, including ourselves, already use a lot of other apps, platforms, and public channels to do academic work; everyone has some kind of software toolkit that they rely on, which might include Word, Twitter, Zotero, Facebook, Slack, or various Google Apps. We ourselves rely a lot on Google Apps and Slack to do our daily editorial work. Ideally, we'd like to commit to working on fully open platforms, but the reality is that the ecosystem that *ESTS* exists in is made up of many parts. Some are open and others are closed. Some have politics, ethics, and business models we can support, and others are more dubious. Whatever people use to do their work, people tend to be committed to what they know, and it takes a lot of work for a person to switch to something new, even if a new way of doing things might be better in any number of ways. So one of the challenges that we'll have to face is how to draw people in a direction that we think will lead to healthier publishing and infrastructural practices, without discounting the knowledge, experience, and work practices they rely on. This includes, but is also far more than putting up a new website. To this end, we're thinking a lot about how we can build connections and share know-how with other publications, how to build a community around *ESTS*, and the best ways to construct an ecology of platforms that can evolve in the right direction.

When Open Access publishing first emerged, it was mostly framed within the context of research commons, but in time it turned out to be yet another business model, the one described as "pay-to-publish". What do you think about the existing forms of publishing and the limitations of OA that is used by *ESTS* as well, and do you foresee any actions to overcome these limitations?

As we mentioned earlier, academic journal publishing has served an important role in scholarly communications or over three-hundred years. Unfortunately, ownership of academic publishing infrastructures is becoming increasingly consolidated within a small group dominated by five Western corporate academic publishers: Reed-Elsevier, Taylor & Francis, Wiley-Blackwell, Springer, and Sage. Even as the notion of open access has gained popularity, a growing body of scholarship shows that the concept is in fact entrenching the power of existing academic publishers, albeit under a revised business model. That is not to say that we should give up on open access, but we need to recognize the risk (and high likelihood) of co-optation of radical scholarly projects for neoliberal agendas and profit-making goals. For those working on infrastructure studies, there is much we can learn from established literature on activism. STS scholars should recognize that the mundane and everyday work of building and maintaining scholarly publishing socio-technical infrastructure is imbued with ethical choices and that scholarly ethics is not (only) reflected in Institutional Ethics Committees and fieldwork interpersonal relationships, but also in decisions across the rest of a respective research project including questions such as determining where and under what accessibility terms we publish.

We are interested in, as Eve Gray and her colleagues mention in this piece published in *Development and Change*, experimenting with what it might look like to validate other genres and forms of publications. In this vein, experiments in "credentializing" new genres of writing, spaces, and forms are needed. We also need more robust policies, norms and processes for reviewing and accrediting them. This will enable the Open Access discourse to stop circling around discussing open access business models and move on to conversations concerning what is required to enable and encourage more diversity in what counts as scholarly knowledge.

You mention encouraging creative forms of publishing like the use of multimedia content. Can you elaborate on this for your prospective authors? What kind of a review process would you

Yes, absolutely! *ESTS*, being a "born digital" journal doesn't have some of the constraints that print publications do. Most notably, we are not limited by the number of pages we can print. We also have capacities to support in a timely manner various interesting initiatives that creatively push the boundaries of STS scholarship both in form and substance. A question that we continously return to within the collective is, how can *ESTS* become a space to anticipate next-generation STS scholarship? We are inviting non-conventional submissions to the journal, including multimedia submissions, for example. Often, neither the infrastructure nor mechanisms for reviewing such content exist at hand, especially given how much the scholarly article has dominated the form that our research outputs take. We maintain an open call for alternative publication genres, and are committed to working with authors to figure out how to make new genres work at *ESTS*. Prospective authors should review our website and contact us (estsjournal@gmail.com) for further guidance.

Building up on the previous question, what kind of materials/resources can be used for teaching STS? What is the specificity of STS when it comes to STS pedagogy?

STS pedagogies are developed and practiced in a variety of formal and informal contexts, geographic and institutional settings, disciplines, and levels of education. In engaging STS pedagogies, *ESTS* is committed to exploring and supporting this variety, while challenging the STS community to ask: What makes this an STS pedagogy? This question is an invitation to reflect on how STS specifically contributes to teaching and learning, whether that is content, theoretically-informed methods, or STS-specific applications. We expect that the richness of STS pedagogies arises precisely because STS is an interdisciplinary lens that is frequently adapted to different contexts and objectives. Additionally, in approaching STS pedagogies from both practical and theoretical perspectives, *ESTS* is interested in contributions that consider how STS pedagogies might inform research and theory, and more generally, how practices of teaching and learning might blur boundaries between pedagogy, engagement, and research.

The materials and resources that might support this broad approach to STS pedagogies are manifold. Content that could be readily assigned to undergraduates, for example, might include short form writing, interviews with authors, podcasts, and graphic novel adaptations or annotated versions of journal articles. Content that might be readily paired with research articles for application might additionally include lesson plans; "in the news" segments that illustrate how an article connects to or might help make sense of current events; and "back to the field" segments that elaborate on key terms, theories, and STS scholars referenced in an article to provide students with more resources for understanding the field of STS. In the context of graduate education, supplementals that elaborate on research methodology or that provide behind-the-scenes insights related to research, publication, or doing STS in different contexts may prove useful. Content that might help STS scholars re-examine pedagogy through a theoretical lens might include research articles that focus on sites of pedagogy to examine questions of expertise, knowledge production, critical participation, identity, the politics of syllabi, the politics of language, the cultural production of 'critical thinking', transnational considerations in what constitutes 'STS pedagogy', and the political economy of higher education, just to name a few.

I would like to ask a COVID-related question. This pandemic urges us to innovate new ways of researching and teaching that are compatible with the restrictions it posed. Is it possible to mention any COVID-effect in the future trajectory of *ESTS*, do you think the innovations in research and teaching will lead to those in publishing as well?

When we think of some of the projects the Editorial Collective has started to take up around pedagogy, transnationalism, and open data, we hope people see that they are very much about
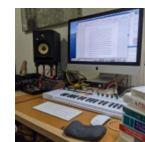
It's hard to know what the COVID effect on us may be since we entered into our tenure operating in the pandemic time and space. Although there are many innovations happening in publishing already, especially related to open data and multimedia publications, we can easily imagine how innovations in teaching and research will impact publishing as well. There is great work happening around research ethics during COVID-19 (with renewed focus on transparency, shared governance, and communication cultures) that we think lends itself to publishing as well.

Regarding one key commitment of *ESTS*, namely,transnationalization, the pandemic may have created interesting opportunities. The forced virtualization of many activities, including research groups meetings, talks, and whole conferences, opens doors to further transnational interactions and collaborations among STS researchers. Many virtual activities around the world are announced every day, allowing more diverse participation than face-to-face, budget-taxing meetings.

The last and probably the most difficult question: what aspects of a respective study makes it an "STS study"? Given that you are the editors of an STS journal, what would be your focus when assessing a study in terms of its relevance to *ESTS*?

This question is very important for us! As we mention above, STS continues to be centered in and through Euro-American contexts: dominant STS journals, the handbooks, and other means of institutionalization of the field serve as key gatekeepers. However, the field is differently addressed in different places. For instance, science policy is a minor matter in most mainstream STS journals, but is a very important part of the field in Latin America. Interestingly, the importance of policy became more prominent once Latin American scholars started to recover their own STS roots from the 60s and 70s, mostly regarding S&T dependency and autonomy issues. Similarly, in other contexts, innovation studies are closer to STS than they tend to be in the Euro-American mainstream.

So, then, how are we going to act regarding STS frontiers? This is going to be a process instead of a set of *a priori* rules. Defining what constitutes an "STS study" is a non-starter, but asking instead what "STS studies" in various contexts locate and make visible is likely a better question to pursue. What has the transnational movement of STS scholars and scholarship enabled and produced? What infrastructures have supported this? And what challenges do our colleagues globally face in doing STS work? We need to be flexible in our own understanding of what constitutes STS in different spaces, and continually evaluate journal practices and publications against this question. We rely on our diversely experienced Editorial Collective and Editorial Board in order to stay with this question, and on the STS community writ large to animate these efforts.

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