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On Decolonization and its Correlates[1]

Sobre a descolonização e seus correlatos

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This essay offers a critical analysis of the literature on decolonization (and its correlates), from the studies carried out by colonial agents and administrators to the recent vogue for postcolonial and decolonial studies. It highlights the limitations of the top-down approach of most studies up to the 1970s, the binarism that has characterized contemporary studies, and the conceptual ambivalence as well as marketing perspective that distinguish the decolonial approach. Lastly, it considers the idea of using the conceptual framework of creolization studies and the ideas of Oswald de Andrade on anthropophagy to get a better understanding of decolonization.

Creolization, decolonization, colonialism.

Este ensaio faz uma análise crítica da literatura sobre descolonização (e seus correlatos), desde os estudos realizados por agentes e administradores coloniais até a recente moda dos estudos pós-coloniais e decoloniais. Ele destaca as limitações da abordagem *top-down* da maioria dos estudos até a década de 1970, o binarismo que tem caracterizado os estudos contemporâneos e a ambivalência conceitual, bem como a lógica de marketing que distinguem a abordagem decolonial. Por fim, considera a ideia de usar o quadro conceitual dos estudos de crioulização e as ideias de Oswald de Andrade sobre antropofagia para obter uma melhor compreensão da *descolonização*.

Crioulozação, descolonização, colonialismo.

A potential conclusion arising from the argument that colonialism persists is the omnipresence of decolonization. This inference appears to form the basis of Mignolo's claim (2018, 119) that "the coloniality is not over, it is all over."[2] Although Mignolo's verbal interplay holds significant evocative power in its depiction of being omnipresent or "all over", it lacks precision and clarity. The broad scope of decolonization and coloniality requires a more comprehensive understanding, which stands as one of the aims of this essay.

The concept of decolonization arises as a direct consequence of the preceding notion of colonialism, signifying its reversal. While the notion that decolonization is widespread might resonate intuitively, the assertion that colonialism is everywhere may not seem immediately persuasive. This disparity likely motivated Mignolo to introduce the term "coloniality" and employ the verbal twist of "not over, all over."[3] Therefore, to prevent further misunderstandings and unintended imprecision in the discourse, we should carry out a thorough examination of the intended meaning behind the initial proposition. The notion that something exists everywhere implies a sense of universality and generality. These are topics of interest in scientific contemplation, which tends to favor what is general, common, standardized, and recurrent while disregarding idiosyncrasies. Given its omnipresence, does decolonization provoke scientific speculation by resembling institutional regularities, by sharing the universality of matrimonial arrangements or the near-universal nature of incest prohibition? The answer to this question is likely negative. Despite its vague boundaries and the ambiguity surrounding its interpretation, it seems undeniable that decolonization is a historical process identifiable in time and space. It might manifest in disjointed places and time periods, making it nearly ubiquitous, yet its generality remains confined within historical frameworks. I must now seek an alternative perspective to comprehend the alleged universality of decolonization. This pursuit directs attention toward disciplinary domains where the term originated and gained prominence. In the subsequent section, I will briefly outline the genealogy of this concept. For now, it is sufficient to identify two lines of evolution: one emerging from the reflective engagement of individuals immersed in the realities of colonial societies – whether indigenous or from the metropolitan sphere – and the other originating within academic discourse in the humanities, often seemingly disconnected from *praxis*. In the former scenario, decolonization emerges concurrently with the critique of colonialism and anti-colonial resistance. In the latter, it surfaces as a retroactive notion, a consequence of purely theoretical discussion on colonialism and the dissolution of colonial empires. Ultimately, it is a teleological notion. Subsequently, it becomes evident that as a concept, "decolonization" initially solidified within government studies, a specific domain of political science, and within the political history of empires. It became a widespread descriptive term commonly used in governmental institutions and academia after the 1939-1945 European war. Only in subsequent periods did this descriptive term evolve into a concept, gradually appropriated by sociologists and anthropologists. It was not until the 1990s that diverse interdisciplinary approaches began embracing it, notably those popping

1 This text owes a lot to my colleague Jacqueline Knörr. In 2022, she proposed that we jointly write a text on the subject of decolonization, which, in her opinion, was too marked by a top-down approach and which would benefit greatly from the contributions of social scientists studying cultural creolization. Having accepted the invitation, I spent three months at the Max Planck Institute for Anthropology immersed in the literature on the subject. We even wrote a structure of what the joint text would be and, back in Brazil, I drew up a draft with a critical review of the literature. Our joint text has not yet been completed and will explore in more detail the contribution of cultural creolization studies to a better framing of the theme of decolonization.

2 Mignolo (2018, 119). See also Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018, 43).

3 It is noted that linguistically, the movement between colonialism and coloniality is equivalent to the movement, in gender studies, between "homosexualism" and "homosexuality." The equivalence of the semantic load and the relationship between model and copy between the two movements remains open. For the reasons and meanings behind this movement, see Castorino and Xavier (2021). In any case, the shift from colonialism to coloniality crystallizes historical events, renders colonial life one-dimensional, and homogenizes domination. See further ahead.

up in universities of the Global North. These approaches emerged in Area Studies centers focused on African, Asian, Latin American studies, and within departments dedicated to ethnic, gender, literary, cultural studies, among others.

Thus, decolonization initially began as a descriptive term denoting a process of political change, but has since transcended its original domain and pervaded diverse spheres, becoming ubiquitous. Presently, one talks about decolonization of bodies (Blackwell 2023), zombies (Saldarriaga and Manini 2022), gastronomy (Janer 2022), metal music (Varas-Diaz 2021), health (Nunes and Louvison 2020), hair (Norwood 2018), design (Tlostanova 2017), cinema (Piçarro, Cabecinhas, and Castro 2016), work, time, and leisure (Shippen 2014) as naturally as colonial agents in the 1940s and 1950s spoke of decolonizing French West Africa. This prevalence signifies that decolonization has become a prominent topic in academia, approached diversely from distinct and, at times, conflicting theoretical, ideological, and practical perspectives. Decolonization is a fashionable subject, and this suggests a relatively unprecedented connection between academic discourse and the broader cultural landscape (see later).[4]

Due to its alleged universality, the term "decolonization" has undergone a process I have called semantic inflation or conceptual obesity, akin to other concepts in the social sciences such as culture, identity, resistance, populism, and gender. This phenomenon represents a specific challenge within the realm of humanities. Comparable to economic inflation, conceptual obesity operates by gradually eroding the fundamental references of value and meaning within the discourse. It is a gradual process wherein a concept becomes burdened over time by an excessive load of meanings. The environment fostering this conceptual development is just a secondary niche of academia's political economy, a realm where the conceptual marketplace of the humanities thrives. This arena is marked by intense, sometimes chaotic dynamics that unfortunately I cannot delve into within the confines of this text.

A cursory examination of appropriate literature shows that the meanings given to the term "decolonization" are highly varied, often contradictory to each other. In the following sections, I will briefly reflect on the way the idea of decolonization has been used in academic circles, pointing out the incoherencies, inconsistencies, contradictions, and imprecisions that characterize its history. Subsequently, I will propose what I believe to be an approach to decolonization based on creolization, which I think is more productive than post-colonial and decolonial theories.

Decolonization: A Review

Despite its widespread popularity within the Social Sciences, the study of decolonization is relatively recent.[5] Evidence of this comes from English historian D.K. Hargreaves' (1988, 1) assertion that until the late 1980s there was not even a consensual definition for this term. As noted by several scholars, the contemporary fervor for this subject surpasses the interest seen in the three decades that

4 The term has become so popular that its fate seems to be like that of all fads in the universe of popular culture: to be shattered through self-denial and rapid oblivion. An example of denial can be found in the title of the article by E. Bua and S. L. Sahi (2022): *Decolonizing the Decolonization Movement in Global Health: A perspective from global surgery.*

5 A query on the *libgen.is* website, widely accessed by researchers in the Global South, reveals an interesting fact. Within its database were 267 books having the word "decolonization" in their titles. Out of this total, only 10 were published before 1985, with the vast majority being published in the 21st century.

followed the 1939-1945 European war (Chabal 1996; Cooper 2005). Interestingly, when colonial societies in Asia and Africa were gaining political independence, neither colonialism nor decolonization held significant attention among social scientists or historians. They were primarily topics for high-ranking officials within colonial administration and individuals engaged in government studies.

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the topics of colonialism and decolonization primarily mobilized a segment of the colonial population – particularly nationalist elites advocating for self-governance – and few scholars in Western universities, who criticized the overarching regime of colonialism itself. In other words, they were then signs better suited for action than for thinking; they were tailored to fight rather than to contemplate. Apart from a few exceptions like Balandier (1951), the academic sphere showed more interest in comprehending social change associated with modernization and development of territories impeded by colonialism.[6] Modernization, development, urbanization, and industrialization were pivotal categories used by social scientists and historians to grasp the profound transformations that were occurring in colonial settings. The past and present of these societies were then generically analyzed using teleological and Eurocentric notions of modernity. Cooper (2005, 33) argues that academic interest in colonial studies only surged when colonial empires lost institutional legitimacy, and colonialism, as a regime of domination, was no longer a form of political organization. Consequently, the surge in colonial studies during the 1980s and 1990s occurred roughly 30 to 40 years after the collapse of colonial empires. The significance of colonialism and decolonization in academic discourse became apparent only when social theory was heralding the onset of a new trend or phase: that of post-colonialism. Thus, if a similar time interval persists between societal developments and theoretical constructions, an intriguing symmetry emerges: 30 to 40 years after the consolidation of colonial studies in Western universities, it might indeed be time to critically analyze and elevate decolonization to a subject worthy of rigorous examination.

The word “decolonization” has a history of nearly 200 years. Its inception dates to 1836 when the French writer Henry Fonfrède first employed it in a text titled *Décolonisation d’Algers*, vehemently denouncing the French occupation of Algiers. This initial usage of the term exhibits a continuity with its contemporary meaning, conveying protest, opposition, and intellectual resistance against an empire’s occupation and dominance over an overseas territory and its peoples (Ward 2016, 232; Wood 2020, 9). The term resurfaced in 1853 in a speech by the American abolitionist senator William Henry Steward, where he referenced “general decolonization” to denote the steady rollback of Spanish and subsequently Mexican occupation in the American West (Ward 2016, 232). However, there is a nuanced difference in meaning in the abolitionist’s use of the term. In Steward’s context, decolonization signifies an ongoing process leading to the transfer of power from one country to another (both belonging to the same civilizational configuration) concerning a specific territory.

It appears that the term “decolonization” did not resonate with the academic

6 Deserves mention the fact that a bunch of English anthropologists associated with the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute after the 1939-1945 European war and to what became known as the Manchester School of Anthropology, were also interested in understanding what Balandier referred to as the colonial situation. The pioneering work of Gluckman (1940) on the social situation in Zululand, as well as that of Mitchel (1956) and Epstein (1958), are examples of the emerging interest of anthropologists in the subject.

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and political spheres as it does in the early 21st century, fading into obscurity for roughly 70 years. Following sporadic appearances in various contexts in the 1920s, the term started to gain systematic usage as an emerging concept thanks to the German social scientist Moritz J. Bonn.[7] In a series of essays published from 1926 onward, Bonn utilized the German term *Gegenkolonisation* as a synonym for decolonization. For Bonn, this transformative process was attributable to shifts in the global political, economic, and cultural order during the early 20th century, alongside the increasing assertiveness of colonized populations. Its primary consequence, he posited, would be the end of the era of imperial dominance over vast territories.[8]

Shortly before Bonn lent conceptual depth to the term, in the tumultuous years following the 1914-1918 European war, American President Woodrow Wilson issued a proclamation in January 1918 advocating national self-determination. Wilson's proclamation explicitly rejected the right of colonial empires to assert sovereignty over territories without the consent of the inhabitants, challenging the notion of imperial possession.[9] Although Wilson did not employ the word "decolonization," his defense of self-determination appeared directed towards countries like Poland and others in Central and Eastern Europe.[10] Interestingly, despite Wilson's focus on these European regions, his proclamation resonated strongly with anti-colonial leaders in Africa and Asia. It is often cited in decolonization studies that the Vietnamese leader Nguyen Tat Thanh, later known as Ho Chi Minh, sought an audience with the American president in an unsuccessful attempt to secure an ally for his nationalist cause (Kohn and McBride 2011, 22).

The term "decolonization" first appeared as a book title in 1952, authored by a colonial administrator and scholar who extensively studied the lives of various peoples in the French African colonies (Labouret 1952). Having a direct knowledge of colonial life in French West Africa, coupled with ethnographic experience among various peoples of the region and fluency in numerous African languages, Labouret perceived decolonization as the culmination of the colonial regime. In his viewpoint, this process was prematurely and, in his opinion, recklessly achieved due to the pressures exerted during the Cold War era. Much like subsequent uses of the term in France, Labouret regarded decolonization as an objective and form of historical and political change, notwithstanding the agency of colonial governments and their institutions or the burgeoning nationalist movements within colonial territories.

In the interpretations offered by the previously mentioned authors and Woodrow Wilson's proclamation of self-determination and self-government of peoples, we witness the foundational contours of the concept's evolution in subsequent years, encapsulating its primary tensions, inaccuracies, and inconsistencies. The differences between their perspectives are related to who were the major actors driving decolonization, the nature of the implied change, and the dynamics within the relationship between the dominating and subaltern groups.

The primary tension revolves around the actors responsible for driving decolonization. Fonfrède's perspective implies that the subject seeking decolonization

7 In English language, see his entry on "Imperialism" in the *Encyclopedia of Social Sciences* (1932) and his book (1938).

8 See Ward (2016) for a detailed analysis of Bonn's perspective.

9 This fact seems to be one of the milestones in the studies of decolonization, as referenced by several scholars. See Füredi (1994, 10), Rothermund (2006, 48-51), Shipway (2008, 11), Kohn and McBride (2011, 21-22), Jansen and Osterhammel (2013, 39-40), Kennedy (2016, 19, 82), Jansen and Osterhammel (2013, 39-40), Gerwarth (2018, 27).

10 Regarding the appeal and influence of President Wilson's declaration, see Manela 2007.

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is the population subjugated by an external power – such as the Algerians aiming to end the nascent French occupation. His focus on the decolonization of Algiers suggests that the resisting force against the French were urban Algerians with a historical background of interaction with external powers. Bonn, while acknowledging the growing assertiveness of the colonized, supplements the agency of the colonized with a diffuse global force that contributed to the collapse of colonial empires. The texts of the American senator and the French administrator-ethnologist imply that decolonization may be propelled by an impersonal historical force. However, Labouret offers a more specific perspective, adopting a teleological stance that perceives decolonization as the culmination of the colonial regime – a predestined endpoint in the colonial narrative and in imperial political structures.

Regarding the nature of the transformation that decolonization activates, Fonfrède, Steward and Labouret share the same views. Their focus on territorial occupation and on colonial form of government suggests that decolonization is a form of political change.[11] In contrast, Bonn argues that decolonization extends beyond mere politics and economics, encompassing the social and cultural dimensions of life – an idea echoed by many contemporary scholars studying the phenomenon.[12] When it comes to the nature of the social relationship that leads both to colonial domination and decolonization, Fonfrède and Labouret's views are clear: it involves peoples belonging to distinct civilizations. On the other hand, Wilson and Bonn seem to be thinking of relations of domination between peoples with similar cultural and linguistic roots, a position that is shared even more explicitly by Steward. In short, according to the French authors, colonialism (as well as decolonization) has to do with asymmetrical forms of domination, between radically different social units, whereas the other authors think of symmetrical forms, between comparatively similar entities.

It interesting that these early authors (with the likely exception of Labouret) did not thoroughly explore the possibility of colonial empires being the main agents of decolonization. Jansen and Osterhammel (2017, 3-4) argue that after Bonn, the term gained regular usage from the mid-1950s onward, becoming an important item in the vocabulary of administrators and policy makers in European colonial empires. They suggest that since the 1930s these political actors have been trying to outline projects for transferring political and administrative power to reliable indigenous leaders in colonial territories. However, the pace and the scale of this transference should be defined according to the ideological framework of the European ruling elites in each colonial empire.

The political elite in colonial empires understood decolonization as a driving force centered on European motivation, thereby implying a relative lack of agency among the colonized peoples. This perception persisted in the works of historians in the 1970s, despite variations in their evaluations of colonial regimes and the decolonization process itself. Some attributed decolonization to failures and shortcomings of colonial powers, citing reasons like competition among empires, lack of coordinated planning between competing colonial empires during the decolonization process, the political and psychological weaknesses of colo-

11 President Wilson's call for national self-determination and self-government also appears to have a political nature.

12 It is worth noting that an African author involved in the praxis of decolonization called attention *avant la lettre* to its extra-political nature. This is Leopold Senghor, who in 1957 gave a psychologizing definition to decolonization: "the abolition of all prejudice, of all superiority complex, in the mind of the colonizer, and also of all inferiority complex in the mind of the colonized." See Hargreaves (1988, 2).

nizers, and the declining support for the colonial cause in the metropoles (Gann and Duignan 1967). Other historians were sympathetic to nationalists and critical of specific colonial empires' decolonization processes (Grimal 1978). There were also comparative studies of different colonial administrations, notably French and English, analyzing their decolonization plans and their successes and flaws (Albertini 1971). Holland (1985) advocated a metropolitan approach to decolonization, asserting that it primarily resulted from changes within the imperial metropoles. However, a distinctive perspective emerged from a Nigerian sociologist named Peter Ekeh (1975). He understood decolonization as a product of contention between two competing elites for state power: the colonial administrative elite (in both colonies and metropoles) and the emerging urban-based African or Asian bourgeois elite. Despite their differences, these approaches shared some commonalities. Firstly, the authors have the same social background: the metropolitan intellectual elite, excepting for Peter Ekeh, whose work departs from the conventional notion of a metropolitan-led process. Secondly, while implicitly suggesting a metropolitan-driven impetus, the main analytical focus is on political and economic changes taking place in colonial territories that were evolving into nation-states. At last, there is an implicit acknowledgement that decolonization also brought about the demise of colonial empires, which, in turn, were transformed into nation-states.

The View from the Other Side

The primacy of the indigenous peoples' agency (the urban mass, the peasantry, the political leadership, and the intelligentsia) in the process of decolonization remained a consistent theme in the reflections of activists and theorists from the colonial world. This perspective portrayed the will, resistance, and aspiration for change among the dominated as instrumental in challenging the status quo that had marginalized them as colonial subjects. The agency of the subaltern groups triggering decolonization was nevertheless complemented by a tendency among the European ruling group to disavow responsibility while championing decolonization. This reluctance within the fraction of the ruling group that supported decolonization to accept accountability for their acts is evident in arguments such as (a) the cost of developing the colonies outweighs the economic returns provided by such development; (b) the potential shortcomings of self-governing policies are never the fault of the imperial administrators but of the indigenous leadership overseeing them; and (c) the flaws detected in the decolonization process are invariably attributed to inadequate planning, the blame of which should be placed on vague international pressures and poor indigenous leadership" (Cooper 2004, 22-23).

The process of change that colonial officers as well as western historians and political scientists have come to call decolonization was viewed differently by the nationalist activists in Asia and Africa and by some committed leftist scholars in Europe. For them, the process was understood with the use of different categories: those of anti-colonialism, national liberation, class struggle, development, Afri-

can unity, and Pan-Africanism. Indigenous leaders aimed to transform colonial subjects into citizens by grounding the change and the future of their independent countries in traditions and institutions of their pre-colonial societies. They used these foundations to mobilize resistance among the masses and legitimize new political and economic structures, even if some aspects of these structures were derived from colonial systems. Figures like Gandhi and Afghani embody this perspective. On the other hand, there were thinkers and activists who perceived the transformations associated with decolonization as a radical departure from the colonial and imperial past. They emphasized the liberating essence of the anti-colonial struggle and its comprehensive dimension, extending far beyond mere political self-determination and economic independence. For them, this holistic dimension encompassed affective and cognitive aspects of social life. Figures like Ho Chi Minh, Cabral, Nkrumah, and Fanon epitomize theorists and nationalist leaders who embraced this radical perspective.

The ways the nationalist leadership engaged in anti-colonial struggles deal with decolonization reveal a general lack of unanimity. For example, in his ponderings about colonial life and anti-colonial struggle, Fanon (2004) accorded a central place to decolonization, emphasizing its violent and revolutionary nature alongside its holistic scope. Others, such as Nkrumah (1964) and Cabral (1973), ascribed a secondary role to decolonization, either placing the term within more confined contexts in their conceptual frameworks or deliberately downplaying its importance. Cabral's mentions to decolonization are largely restricted to his discussion of United Nations resolutions and the UN decolonization committee. His analysis focuses more extensively on terms such as "national liberation struggle," "anti-colonial movement," "return to the source," "unity of African peoples," and "class struggle." Influenced by North American pan-Africanists such as Dub Bois and Garvey and the European Marxist thought, Nkrumah (1970) subordinates decolonization to *Consciencism* and Pan-Africanism. *Consciencism* is the term he devised to refer to an ideology or strategy rooted in an Afrocentric materialist ontology, but also drawing from the African experience with Islam and Christianity. Such a notion allows him to figure out a way to overcome the challenges of colonialism and neocolonialism, striving for African development. In Nkrumah's thought, decolonization is linked to development, anti-colonial solidarity, and African unity. Yet, his conceptual edifice underrates the notion of decolonization by assigning more weight to the notion of neocolonialism. He contends that colonialism has not truly ended; rather, the new institutions arising from decolonization serve to perpetuate colonial domination under a more palatable guise.[13] The nationalist struggle would be an endless battle against this new form of resurgent colonialism, now existing not in traditional colonial empires but as a non-territorialized commercial-military entity (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018, 56).

The connection between the concept of neocolonialism and the ideas developed shortly afterwards by dependency theorists in South America is indeed striking. Subsequently, the cross-fertilization of ideas and the travelling terms that these theories developed and set in motion proved highly influential in the

13 Regarding the central place of the idea of neocolonialism, see Nkrumah (1965).

emergence of post-colonial and decolonial thought in the 2000s, infusing decolonization with renewed and unparalleled vigor. At the core of these ideological currents – impacting anti-colonial scholars and activists in the 1960s, dependency theorists in the 1970s, and post-colonial and decolonial scholars in the 2000s – lies the intricate and multifaceted realm of Marxist thought.[14]

14 See Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Ndlovu (2022) for an assessment of Marxist theories in contemporary decolonial studies.

The Antechamber of Popularity: Colonial Studies

It is intriguing that the Social Sciences took approximately three to four decades after the initial independence movements of former European colonies to engage analytically with colonialism. Nonetheless, from this belated confrontation, several partial consensuses arose, warranting attention and recognition.

Colonization versus Colonialism

The first broad agreement is born out of the idea that colonialism results from specific forms of colonization that was driven by some European empires in the late 19th and early 20th-century (Cooper 2005, 38). The word "colonization" has been used to refer to a wide range of historical cases of domination and conquest characterized by the transfer of people, resources, knowledge, values, and symbols from the conquering political unit to the conquered ones. This broad definition includes various cases such as the Greek city-states that established colonies in the Mediterranean, the expansive Roman Empire across Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East, the Mongols' vast Central Asian Empire, the Omani Empire with trade outposts in the Indian Ocean, the 16th century European kingdoms (especially the kingdoms of the Iberian Peninsula, France and England) on the American continent, and the 19th European colonial empires across Africa and Asia. Historically and structurally, these instances have little to do with each other beyond the fundamental facts of domination and conquest. If we carry out our original hypotheses that colonialism contains the seeds of decolonization, without distinguishing between colonization and colonialism, we would be left with a generic concept of decolonization, which has limited analytical value as it relies on two broad and abstract ideas: asymmetrical relations between societies and sporadic disruptions of this *status quo*.

Fortunately, the practice of social scientists and historians goes in another direction. When studying colonization, colonialism, and decolonization, it is noticed that, despite the initial reference to cases like those mentioned above, the real interest of scholars lies in the conquest of peoples and territories overseas by European kingdoms/empires. And these cases boil down to two distinct historical processes: (a) the colonization resulting from the European expansion of the 16th century, which took a formal turn with the independence of the American countries between the last quarter of the 18th century and the first of the 19th century; and (b) the establishment of colonialism in Africa and Asia in the late 19th century, which collapsed between 1947 and 1974. As these are two different historical

processes, separated in time, with clearly distinct agents,[15] occurring in disparate macrostructural contexts, I propose to make a distinction between colonization and colonialism, with the former designating the generic process of domination and conquest involving the transfer of people, resources, values, and symbols between the societies involved. The second term would then be restricted to the historical case of imperialist domination by European empires in Africa and Asia during the 19th and 20th centuries with comparatively little transfer of people.

According to our terminology, to maintain a historical causality between colonialism and decolonization, the second term would apply only to the process of change that occurred with the formal undoing of colonialism the 1939-1945 European war. However, I note that this is not a consensus in recent studies of decolonization, with many researchers not only linking decolonization to the colonization of the American continent but also conceiving it as having continuity in present-day contexts (more on this later).

Encompassing the Contraries

Another point of convergence suggests that colonialism as well as decolonization were processes that involved and transformed both the metropolitan societies in Europe and those who were colonized by to them. This perspective, already present in the works of a few imperial historians, became a somewhat broadly accepted consensus among historians and social scientists studying colonialism in the 1980s and 1990s. As Cooper (2004, 22) pointed out, decolonization, for the first time in history, produced the formal equivalence of political units on a global scale, creating the world of nation-states. Similarly, Goody (1991, 46) observed that the end of the British Empire was an integral part of the rebuilding Britain as a nation-state after the second European war. Despite the relative indifference of the general populace regarding the colonial question in the major European cities following the war,[16] metropolitan societies were profoundly affected by colonialism and decolonization in the 1950s and 1960s. As illustrated by Indian psychologist Ashis Nandy (1983), metropolitan societies were also deeply unsettled by colonialism, and this disturbance reached the dimension of self and personal identities. In complement to Nandy's general proposition, Jewsiewicki (2007, 131) argues that not only does decolonization exemplify the affirmation of the United States as a moral force of the twentieth century history, but it has also been a therapy for healing America of its most disturbing affliction, that of racial discrimination.

Final evidence of the encompassing nature of colonialism (and consequently, decolonization) can be grasped in the emergence of a new concept for analyzing global-scale human flows. In the creolized, hybrid, or mestizo world of globalization, international migration has given way to transnationalism, transmigrants, and diaspora communities. Unlike the immigrants portrayed in the classical literature on international migration, transnational studies show that new immigrants construct their social relationships within a network that extends across the borders of nation-states. In the world of diasporas and transmigrants, people develop

15 If it is true that the same European kingdoms were nominally the active agents in both historical processes, sociologically they were completely distinct entities. The political structure of the 16th-century kingdoms was traditional and hierarchical, based on what Weber (1978) referred to as patrimonialism; that of the 19th-century empires was liberal and bureaucratic. The European economy of the 16th-century kingdoms was based on mercantilism centered around a few royal houses; that of the 19th century empires was fully based on the capitalist mode of production. The structure of knowledge during the century of European expansion had religious roots, and the technologies of material production were artisanal in kind; those of the 19th century were firmly based on the scientific method, and production was industrial and in large scale. The technologies of violence and conquest in the earlier kingdoms had somewhat primitive forms of firearms at their disposal; those of the 19th and 20th centuries were based on repeating firearms, engines powered by fossil fuels, and mastery of the skies. In short, Spain, Portugal, France, and England in the two periods had little more in common than their names, being completely different political entities along the temporal axis (and among themselves). The same applies to the peoples who were subjugated in both periods.

16 This indifference was not a characteristic of all colonial empires. In the case of Portugal, with a late decolonization, the colonial question did not generate indifference. On the contrary, it was a burning issue in metropolitan society, leading to mass emigration of young men fleeing military service and war in the colonies. This movement also sparked the military coup that ended the dictatorship and the Portuguese colonial empire. It's worth noting that decolonization was (and still is) a topic that mobilizes part of society.

forms of belonging that allow them to be bound to more than one nation-state (Basch *et al.* 1994, 8). It is true that nation-states still anchor social identities, feelings of belonging, and networks of solidarity and reciprocity, but they do so within the competitive environment of the free zones of interpenetration generated by the actions of transmigrants.[17]

Hegemony Guiding Experience and Perception

The renewed enthusiasm that swept through colonial studies from the mid-1980s onwards assigned legitimacy to new themes in the analysis of colonialism, hitherto narrowly defined as a regime of political domination and economic exploitation.[18] Like in many other places, the inhabitants of the colonies were not individuals solely fixated upon politics. They engaged daily in numerous activities related to other spheres of social life, such as religion and the local and hybrid forms of sociability that fostered intense and sometimes contradictory feelings of belonging to a myriad of associations that popped up in colonial cities.[19] In the realm of politics, the daily life was predominantly characterized by disputes and mobilizations aimed at constructing and maintaining networks of local power and prestige, seldom directly linked to anti-colonial politics and nationalist ideology. Regarding the economic dimension, many phenomena of non-utilitarian nature inhabited the daily life of colonial societies. For instance, examining the rumors that infest African cities, one finds that there were (and still are) frequent sardonic comments about the extravagant consumption patterns, the exaggerated sexual appetites, and the greed of influential and highly prestigious figures. The proximity and implicit intimacy between those who tell such stories and the powerful figures they refer to suggest that public life has been characterized by webs of solidarity that paid little heed to rational economic calculations (Murphy 2010, Trajano Filho 2010a).

Still with reference to economy, this time from a macro perspective, I find a seed of the consensus that enlarges the idea of colonialism in Hammond's contentious work (1966) on Portuguese colonialism. According to him, the effort to legislate and formulate policies for colonial possessions implied expenses that Lisbon could not afford. And yet, the Portuguese managed to consolidate their authority and even expand their overseas territories in Africa, despite (and in response to) the grip of its rival European colonial empires and the resistance of traditional African societies. For him, this was only possible because a portion of the metropolitan elite developed, over the second half of the 19th century, an attitude towards overseas possessions that constituted a kind of non-economic imperialism. From the viewpoint of this elite, the possession of overseas territories was not justified by the extraction of economic benefits. On the contrary, overseas possessions were good for contemplation, to reaffirm to themselves that they, the Portuguese, were a seafaring people, a colonizing nation (Hammond 1966, 139, 199).

Elsewhere, I (Trajano Filho 2004) expand on the perspective articulated by

Firstly, it produced a mass of returnees whom the metropolis had difficulties absorbing. Forty years after the end of the Colonial Empire, decolonization remains one of the favorite subjects among former military who served during the war and a portion of the country's political elite. Invariably, this discussion aims to point out potential flaws during the process of decolonization: its accelerated pace and lack of control by metropolitan authorities regarding its scope and dynamics. The mismanagement of decolonization is considered by many as one of the causes of the extreme political violence that, to some extent, still persists in Angola and Mozambique. See Guerra (1996), MacQueen (1997), and the compilations edited by Morier-Genoud (2012) and Peralta (2021).

17 I do not have enough space to do more than point to the possible connections between decolonization and globalization, a subject of debates and controversies. See Quijano (2020).

18 When one examines the four volumes of the collection *Colonialism in Africa 1870-1960* (Gann and Duignan 1969, 1970, 1975; Turner 1971), it is evident that the majority of the works presented therein deal with the political-administrative and economic aspects of colonial life.

19 For example, see the mystique of exclusiveness stemming from participation in urban mutual aid associations like the Masonic lodges in Freetown (Cohen 1981) and the *manjuandadis* in the Creole milieu of Guinea-Bissau (Trajano Filho 2010b).

Hammond, highlighting the perception held by the Portuguese and Luso-Africans of their social experience, which was often characterized by a sense of pessimism and weakness. This enduring self-image marked by humility and a feeling of smallness suggests that despite its alleged weaknesses, Portugal was successful in establishing in its overseas possessions a hegemony that guided perceptions and shaped social experiences. Too weak to impose itself militarily on the rival colonial empires, too dependent to refuse "cooperation" with them, Portugal lacked the means to fully realize its envisioned centuries-old civilizing mission globally. However, paradoxically, this seemingly weak colonial empire proved strong enough to construct and maintain an image for its colonial subjects that mirrored its own self-perception.[20]

Implicit in these judgements is the idea that colonialism is a totalizing historical process, instituting a hegemony guiding perception and social experience that goes beyond the pure and violent exercise of political subjugation and economic exploitation (Fabian 1986, 1998; Comaroff and Comaroff 1991). On one hand, it is a phenomenon that reaches the most unusual domains of daily life and belongs to the realm of perception and experience. As aptly summarized by Conklin (1997, 248), colonialism is "as much a state of mind as it was a set of coercive practices and a system of resource extraction." On the other hand, it is typically a total social fact that embraces all dimensions of the social.

The emergence of new research topics in the newly revitalized field of colonial studies is also an indication of the relative consensus about the totalizing nature of colonialism. Since the mid-1980s, historians and anthropologists studying colonial societies have been asking how colonial regimes impacted and were impacted by disparate things such as local forms of sociability and leisure (Martin 1997; Trajano Filho 2009, 2011), sports practices (Fair 1997, Domingos 2012), forms of dressing (Hendrickson 1996, Gondola 1999, Hansen 2004, Rathbone 2013), performing arts (Fabian 1990, Barber *et al*. 1997, Kringelbach 2013), hygiene and consumption patterns associated with body care (Burke 1996), popular painting (Fabian 1996), the relationship between alcohol production and consumption and nationalist politics (Akyempong 1996), and the unofficial communication system, formed by a myriad of rumors, gossip and intrigues that chronicle social life and act out political criticism (Trajano Filho 2002, Bonhomme 2009), among other topics that were not previously objects of the attention of these disciplines.

Beyond Dichotomies

The final point of consensus I want to address concerns the critical view of dichotomous thinking that characterized the works of historians (imperial as well as the nationalist scholars) and social scientists in the years following the Asian and African independences. To a large extent, this critique stems from a deeper understanding of the issue of resistance.

Until very recently, colonial studies (in Africa and Asia) were prisoners of a binary view of the colonial experience. Past imperial narratives reduced the histori-

20 The notion of the power of the weak was consolidated in colonial and post-colonial studies in the form of the concept 'weapons of the weak' formulated by Scott (1985, 1990). In anthropology, precursors to this approach can be found in Lewis (1963) and Turner (1969, 1974)

cal encounter between Europeans and non-Europeans to an effort to fulfil ambivalent teleologies, aimed at identifying and dissolving identities, at distinguishing and simultaneously erasing differences. This can be grasped in the imperial idea of a civilizing mission that would assimilate differences in a distant future while maintaining them within the binary framework implied by oppositions such as colonized/colonizer, savage/civilized, and traditional/modern.[21] Contrarily to imperial narratives, the nationalist historiography of the 1960s and 1970s accorded a new status to dynamics of local societies, bestowing them with a history of its own their members with the basic attribute of humanity, which is the capacity to act, make decisions, and choose. The key expression of this entire effort boils down to "resistance to conquest and domination." This generation of social scientists and nationalist historians established a continuity between the past of their societies, idealized as organically integrated, and the present in which they were writing. By considering resistance as a key element in understanding the continuous history of post-colonial societies, nationalist narratives postulated that the reconstruction of institutions and structural forms inspired in pre-colonial past should be the model for social integration in independent states (cf. Cooper 1994, 1520-1522).[22]

By conceiving the history of colonial societies as the history of resistance movements, nationalist social scientists and historians showed that resistance took on various forms, far beyond armed national liberation struggles.[23] The merits of this approach were numerous. Apart from showing that the colonial world had a history preceding the arrival of Europeans, it unveiled the distortion in the preferred image of imperial narratives about colonies: a void space, an institutional vacuum, a malleable substance that could be shaped by the colonizer and whose finished form would be a darkened and scaled-down version of Europe. In the case of African studies, this approach indicated historical continuities between the pre-colonial past and the post-colonial moment, historically and structurally contextualizing certain facets of contemporary reality, such as the endurance of economic subordination, extreme social inequalities, patrimonialism and other clientelist practices in what Bayart (1993) termed the "politics of the belly."

However, there are some elements of continuity between nationalist and the imperial historiographies. I highlight that which, to my view, most obfuscates the understanding of how social life looked like during the colonial era as well as the way we interpret contemporary reality in African countries. Despite countering the ingrained Manichaeism of imperial narratives, the African historiography of the 1960s and 1970s remained prisoner of the same dichotomic vision that characterized the colonial episteme. It simply replaced the totalizing "civilized colonizer versus primitive colonized" opposition of imperial narratives by new polar dichotomies such as "modern versus traditional" and "domination versus resistance". As Cooper has already remarked (1994, 1518), this type of historiography is also prisoner of a teleology that precludes consideration of the presumption that subaltern subjects could alter the lines of subordination within the colonial regime. Ultimately, the embedded teleology signals an understanding of colonialism as a suffocating historical process in which things are bipolar and bicolored, where all

21 To effectively carry out this task, colonial regimes set in motion a monumental classificatory effort (Stoler and Cooper 1997, 11-18). On one hand, they sought to understand indigenous life through censuses, ethnographic inquiries, surveys, spatial mapping, and territorial concession treaties. On the other hand, they aimed to regulate the urban space where colonial agents were installed, as well as to create and maintain a totalizing order by establishing and imposing administrative routines, patterns of conduct they considered appropriate, municipal guidelines and legal codes (Martin 1997, Goerg 1998).

22 The "return to the source" proposed by Cabral (1973) would be an example of this nationalist thought. The study by Terence Ranger (1968), which demonstrates the connection between early primary resistance movements in the colonial period and modern mass nationalism in East and Central Africa, is the classic example of this type of endeavor.

23 Among many examples, it is worth mentioning the scathing caricature of European officers in dances and rituals (Ranger 1968, Vail and White 1983, Olivier de Sardan 1993), movements of religious revitalization (Fabian 1971, Fernandez 1982), as well as the forms that, according to Scott (1985, 1990), would constitute the "weapons of the weak."

mediation is impossible, and life boils down to a violent question of all or nothing.

A commonly repeated theme in these studies is that colonial regimes were not monolithic and omnipresent.[24] The colonizers never brought to the colonies a unified agenda for the appropriation and use of power and never shared a common ideal on how to deal with the indigenous population. In reality, they were far from being a homogeneous group. Distinctions along nationality, class, and gender lines regulated the persistent competition and conflicts within European group living in the colonies.[25] These tensions originated in the way differences were structured the metropoles, insofar as colonial projects echoed the existing class politics in Europe (Stoler and Cooper 1997, 9). The same goes for the colonized. They too did not constitute a homogeneous group, and the networks of relationships that connected them were as complex, if not more, than those of the Europeans occupying their lands. In Africa, there were peasants more or less engaged with the export sector of the colonial economy, people migrating from their villages to the multi-ethnic urban settlements that arose from colonial intervention, and young people prevented from reaching full social maturity due to the excessive patrimonial power of "traditional" chiefs imposed or supported by the colonial government. There were chiefs and commoners, men and women, elders and youth. Finally, there was a whole murky area inhabited by cultural and racial mestizos. All of them had different agendas and strategies, each appropriating the technologies and knowledge brought by the Europeans according to their different cultural languages and interests, without the colonial agents fully comprehending what was really going on. Located in various positions in the structure of their original communities and with differentiated insertions and articulations in the colonial system, colonial subjects operated within competing social universes and developed the capacity to offer a plurality of responses to the demands of the colonial situation without being confined to the binary alternative of collaboration or resistance.

The structure of domination itself proved fragile. Since the distinction between Africans or Asians and Europeans was not radical and permanent (Stoler and Cooper 1997, 7), every hard-won difference they managed to establish had to be painstakingly maintained according to circumstances. Indeed, the ways colonial regimes formulated their policies on difference are characterized by a profound inconstancy. This brings us to the heart of the contradiction of colonialism, which can be grasped in the effort to satisfy a double need: to civilize the other, thus erasing differences, and to maintain them to ensure domination and the development of the colonies, but only up to a certain limit, so that colonial territories did not achieve enough autonomy to dispense with the owners of power. It is for this reason that the colonial state had the back-and-forth move as its ideal model of operation (Stoler and Cooper 1997, 26). This model has been characterized by odd features such as an endless process of reassessment in which one gives in today in order to enforce tomorrow, an excessively superfluous legislation of doubtful effectiveness that aimed to cover everything (from macroeconomics to the minutest urban guidelines, from heavy taxation to body hygiene), alarming

24 See Mbembe (1991, 95), Cooper (1994, 2005), Stoler and Cooper (1997, 6), Comaroff (1997).

25 Martin (1997, 190) shows a curious form of social stratification in Brazzaville, in which Portuguese merchants who interacted (married, traded, and resided) with Africans occupied the lowest positions, and were considered by many Europeans as non-white. Apparently, the social rank of a Swedish missionary was also low, as she was neither French nor Catholic. On the role of gender in colonial relations, see Stoler (1997).

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levels of colonial violence that intervened in the intimacy of social life, and a normative discourse that claimed to be hermetic and immune to contradictions. Having based its functioning along these lines, the colonial state always proved incapable to operate solely through coercion (Cooper 1994, 1529). To keep social life running, it needed to forge alliances, yield some room for action to local elites (indigenous and creole), turn a blind eye to certain types of insubordination and indiscipline, keep open unofficial communication channels like the rumor and gossip system, and partially incorporate values, norms, and practices of subordinate groups. There were vast areas of social life in which the state was unable to get its hand on, which functioned quite well in the absence of colonial power. Likewise, the subaltern sections of the society were not interested in participating in all dimensions of colonial life, but only in those that offered them symbolic and material advantages. All this makes colonialism a regime in which participation was contextual and mobile, hegemony was precarious, submission was differentiated, and conflicts were localized (Mbembe 1991, 95-96).

The corollary of these analyses is already announced. The new colonial studies of the mid-1980s and1990s show that despite all the violence and the objective power asymmetry characterizing colonial encounters, the agency of the colonized played an important role in shaping and reproducing social and political life in the colonies (Mbembe 1991, 91-92; Cooper 1994, 1529; Stoler and Cooper 1997). The very symbolic structure of colonial power was built with elements originating also from the African and Asian agencies, which carried out a transformative incorporation of part of Western symbolism to return it transfigured in the construction of the colonial culture edifice.[26] Therefore, since colonial regimes were not solely the product of the pure will of empires to produce insurmountable differences, the polar opposition between colonized and colonizers loses much of its capacity to structure knowledge about what was actually going on in the colonies.

Before proceeding with an examination of the propositions and limitations of recent literature on decolonization, it is prudent to take stock of what has been advanced so far. An undisputed point is that one of the meanings attached to decolonization has to do with specific changes of political and economic nature by which a colonial power withdraws from its conquered territories, which in turn gain political independence and economic autonomy. This stems from the existence of an intrinsic link connecting colonialism and decolonization. The latter would be the undoing of the former. It is also uncontroversial that this process of change affected both sides of the relationship that constituted colonialism. Empires and colonies transformed into nation-states. What is not consensual is the extent to which colonialism is an extinct form of political organization and decolonization is a fully completed process.

The colonialism-decolonization pair has a holistic nature. Its existence differentially affects all the elements involved in its constitution: those who dominate and those who are dominated. Furthermore, regarding its holistic nature, it is worth noting that colonial studies of the 1980s and 1990s carried out an important critique of how the pair was conceived in both imperial narratives and nationalist

26 There is a vast literature with examples of how the agency of Africans has been engaged in the resignification of symbols dear to the European culture. Ritual celebrations such as the *Hauka* cult Stoller (1995) and the *tabanca* pageants (Trajano Filho 2011) add new layers of meaning to the European ideas of order and discipline. The consumption of body-care products such as soap, shampoos, and lotions do the same to the European ideas of hygiene and health (Burke 1996).

historiography. Instead of treating decolonization as an exclusively political phenomenon that promotes the transformation of colonies into nation-states, colonial studies showed that the colonialism-decolonization pair touches the domains of perception and experience and creates a hegemony whose reach goes far beyond politics and economy. Thus, this pair alludes to a total social fact that encompasses all dimensions of social life. Colonial studies broadened the scope of this conceptual pair and referred to several layers of meaning that escaped the institutional politics and the macroeconomy of the colonies. However, analyses of particular cases of decolonization still have the same top-down nature as imperial and nationalist approaches. They look at things like the way people dress, the music, people hear, the forms of sociability and religious practices, among others, but almost always having as backdrop the process of nation-building through which political units become "cultured states".[27] In this sense, they maintain with the previous analyses the same institutional and normative bias that seeks to understand the world as it should be.

27 I borrowed this expression from the title of Andrew Ivaska's book (2011), which offers us a comprehensive portrait of decolonization in Tanzania as a total social fact.

The Arrival of Decoloniality

Interestingly, about 50 years after India's independence, which marked the beginning of the general wave of decolonization that swept Africa and Asia, and 25 years after the collapse of the last and weakest colonial empire in 1974, the humanities entered the 21st century invigorated by a new and surprising fashion, that of decolonial studies. It is important to underscore, even without delving deeply into the subject, the curious relationship between theory and the empirical world established by the social sciences at the dawn of the new century and the striking gap between the two.

Decolonization returned with full force in the 21st century, and this resurgence is attributable to two previously existing lines of approach. It is tempting to trace the genealogy that links 21st-century decolonial studies to these approaches, as I believe it would reveal the intricate network of inspirations that feeds the furnace of contemporary thought on society and culture, as well as a series of unforeseen paradoxes and cross-fertilizations. However, due to the lack of space for this task, I will be satisfied with presenting the general lines of this genealogy.[28] I do not want to discuss in detail the specifics of the genealogical ties linking the various approaches to decolonization, nor their controversial sources of inspiration, but only the change of direction triggered by these approaches regarding the meanings attributed to the word "decolonization".

Apparently, the claim that decolonial studies have their origins in non-Western thought would be the key element that supposedly gave them the legitimacy they achieved in the academic sphere from the 1990s onwards. They have succeeded in making a relentless critique of the asymmetries of power between nation-states and the supremacy of European thought which, in close relation to colonialism and imperialism, claims to apply to all things, at all times and places. For this, they adopted a radically anti-Eurocentric perspective, seeking to develop categories,

28 There are numerous attempts to frame contemporary decolonial studies within the dominant currents of social theory. I highlight the work of Amselle (2010), which looks at the phenomenon from an unusual perspective, that of the French-speaking world. Like any genealogical classification, our effort is also biased by the choices we make and the interests we have. For example, many authors argue that post-colonial theories originated in the field of literary criticism, which is not our view. See Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (1989) and Gupta (2007) in this regard. Concerning the manipulations of genealogies, and the construction of mythologies, also see the classic text by Leach (1954) on the manipulation of Kachin lineage mythology.

frameworks, theories, and forms of thought originally associated with other cultural strands. If there is a general propensity shared by their various approaches, it could be put as an effort, sometimes reactive, sometimes proactive, to detach and distance themselves, or counterpose to the West, its institutions, and its knowledge.[29]

The roots of these intellectual currents are deeply entrenched in two primary intellectual arenas. The first is found in efforts of Indian scholars to build a historiography of India that diverges from the top-down approach of European and Marxist-inspired nationalist historiographies, which tended to view history through the lens of the State elites. The *Subaltern Studies* group, consisting of Indian historians, philosophers, and anthropologists such as Guha (1982), Chatterjee (1993), Spivak (1988), Prakash (1995), and Chakrabarty (2000), embarked on a mission to reconstruct the lives of those forgotten due to their subaltern status, unveiling the agency of the disempowered and the consciousness of the marginalized. These were the peasants, the people of the lower castes or outside the caste system, women, youth, and other groups who were oppressed and subjugated in the colonial past and remained unheard in nationalist historiography. Beyond focusing on subaltern subjects, these scholars introduced methodological innovations, challenging the fundamental framework of nationalist historiography, which predominantly centered on elites and the State while obscuring class antagonisms in favor of national unity. They looked critically at the Eurocentric idea of universality of historical process and state-building, advocated the idea of writing histories (note the plural) from below and the creation of an indigenous perspective on history that diverged from the universalizing Western perspective.[30] One of the resonating slogans of this intellectual movement is Chakrabarty's (2000) epistemological call to "provincialize Europe," advocating for a multipolarization of thought, the decentering of Europe or, as Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018, 4) puts it, the de-Europeanization of the world.

This school of thought found a warm reception in the North American academic world and from there spread throughout the Global South, conforming what has been called the post-colonial studies or theory since the beginning of the 21st century. On this point, I have to add an important caveat: what has been celebrated as an example of South-South cooperation – which would be the appropriation of the *Subaltern Studies'* banners by African, Asian, Caribbean scholars and by writers from the European periphery, which would finally yield an alternative to Eurocentric thinking – actually is the reproduction of a hegemonic situation, affirming the American university's way of doing history and social sciences. What is disseminated to universities in the Global South and eventually consolidated as post-colonial theory is not the thought of Indian historians, but a version filtered by the capitalist logic of the thought of a carefully selected set of ethnic-chic scholars who are deemed indispensable for creating distinction and a shallow sense of cosmopolitanism in North American elite universities.

Nevertheless, with this qualification made, the call to decentralize the West, either by countering or detaching from it, and the emphasis on local forms of

29 This effort becomes visible when one notices the centrality of terms like "delinking" (Mignolo 2007, 2018), "*décrocher*" (Amselle 2010), "dewesternization" (Mignolo 2007), and "provincializing" (Chakrabarty 2000).

30 Let it not be implied that this is a cohesive and monolithic group. On the contrary, the affiliations of its main proponents to the group have not always been stable over time. For an assessment of this historiographical trend, see Mallon (1994) and Amselle (2010).

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viewing society and history was embraced by scholars in Africa and the Caribbean, who also critically examined the post-colonial societies that had just emerged from decolonization, and the Eurocentric hegemony that has organized knowledge and the sciences. African scholars, including historians, philosophers, anthropologists, and political scientists like Mudimbe (1988), Diagne (1989), Diouf (1990), Mamdani (1996), Mbembe (2001), and Zeleza (2003), embarked on a journey to establish an authentic African paradigm within the humanities. Engaging in a rich dialogue with the *Subaltern Studies*' perspectives coming from Indian and American social scientists and historians, they actively rejected the overarching systems of understanding the world and the underlying idea of universality. Instead, they promoted particularistic and fragmented interpretations of historical events grounded in the multipolarization of thought and generated a view of contemporaneity characterized by hybridity across all aspects of existence.[31]

Intriguingly, a close examination of the much coveted and extolled local paradigms of the social sciences reveals that the alleged foreign origin of post-colonial theory is a misleading inference and that it is actually deep-rooted in the Western philosophical tradition. Post-colonial theory is deeply indebted to the works of the French deconstructionist philosophers – Foucault, Derrida, and Deleuze. They form a kind of Holy Trinity that long before the call for the provincialization of Europe had culturalized thought, turning the old continent into a kind of culture area, one among many, which is not the model toward which other people converges (Amselle 2010, 11). Contesting European logocentrism and its claim to universality, seen as a manifestation of cultural imperialism, these philosophers were the source of inspiration for most post-colonial studies since Said's *Orientalism* (1979), which is considered by many the founder of this school of thought. Foucault, Derrida, and Deleuze come from the heart of Western philosophy. Their works engage exclusively with European philosophers. And if that were not enough, they are, each in his own way, indebted to Heideggerian philosophy, which represent the most finished form of European philosophy as well as the most radical critique of the Enlightenment, the logocentrism of Western metaphysics, technique, and modernity. Interestingly, as I had already pointed out regarding the diffusion of *Subaltern Studies*, the influence of French philosophers on post-colonial studies was also indirect, mediated by a specific North American reading that ended up creating a category of affiliation never used in its original imaginary soil – the *French Theory*.[32]

The other line of decolonization studies has been known as the theory of decoloniality. Originally, this theory was formulated by South American social scientists in the mid-1990s, and since the 2000s it has become a fashionable idea in the academic debate. Decoloniality made its debut in the writings of historians, social scientists and other scholars within the Humanities about a decade after the idea of post-colonialism was already well entrenched the in academic discourse. It is younger than the post-colonial theory derived from the *Subaltern Studies* and perhaps that is why it is more in vogue currently. Its renown is not due to a direct appropriation of the original South American texts, most of them written in in

31 It is important to note that this list is incomplete, even when restricted to the African intellectual sphere. When expanding the view to include contributions from the Caribbean and other parts of the world to post-colonial theory, the list would be greatly extended. However, I argue that the significant number of important contributions to post-colonial thought from across the Global South and the complex network of dialogue established through these efforts are primarily anchored in the Anglo-Saxon universities. As an example of the dialogue or influence of subalternists on African scholars associated with post-colonialism, see Diouf (1999).

32 I emphasize again that this genealogy is partial and biased. It leaves no room to the works of post-colonialists *avant la lettre* such as Fanon and Du Bois, as well as the pervasive influence of an Italian highly original Marxist intellectual, Gramsci.

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Spanish. Once again, its widespread recognition owes much to the mediation of North American universities and its selective importation of another group of ethnic-chics, this time from Spanish America.[33]

The foundations of decoloniality are deeply rooted in Aníbal Quijano's concept of coloniality of power (1992). Quijano's notion revolves around the idea that the contemporary global power structures originate in the 16th-century conquest of the Americas. This pivotal event inaugurated a violent process of concentration of power, channeling the world's material and symbolic resources for the benefit of European elites and perpetuating a heterogeneous mass of victims across Africa, Asia, and the Americas (1992, 11). Quijano underscores the totalizing nature of this five centuries process of domination and makes an important distinction between coloniality of power (general and encompassing) and political colonialism (specific and encompassed). Colonialism would be the formal and direct dimension of domination that since the 1960s has faded into the past, succeeded by a more expansive Western imperialism on a global scale (1992, 11).[34] Contrastively, coloniality of power is a pervasive, overarching force that engendered a hierarchical structure of social discriminations rooted in notions of race, ethnicity, and nation which have become ingrained in hegemonic ideology as objective categories that organize differences underlying domination, rather than being recognized as constructs of thought itself.[35] Within the coloniality of power, what was initially a mere perception of the superiority of the dominant in the face of the inferiority of the dominated lost its bounded and contextual nature and acquired the fixed character of an absolute hierarchy such as depicted in the relation between superior and inferior in the biological and structural domains. Local knowledge deemed irrelevant by the dominating group was suppressed, while the useful ones were wholly appropriated by the colonizers. They propagated a mythologized view of their knowledge (as well as the patterns of its production) as a kind of knowledge that was abysmally different from the knowledge of the colonized: it is an inherently distinct and superior kind of knowledge that grants direct access to power. Consequently, European culture became alluring to the eyes of the colonized. Similarly to the subalternists' perspectives, Quijano (1992, 13) argues that as the colonized aspired to Europeanize themselves, European culture became the model of universal culture. The endurance of the Eurocentric coloniality of power surpasses direct political colonialism due to its historical alignment with the epistemological paradigm of modernity/rationality, which purports to be both an exclusively European product and the universal paradigm of knowledge that perpetuate Western dominance.

Originally, Quijano's thought was indebted to the theoretical paradigm of CEPAL (*Comissão Econômica para a América Latina e Caribe*), which had the economists Raul Prebish and Celso Furtado as its key authors in the 1950s. The main goal of the scholars working in this institution was to understand the nature of Latin American underdevelopment. Clearly inspired by the European Marxist tradition, sociologists associated with the CEPAL, such as Ruy Maurini, Theotonio dos Santos, and others from different schools of thought like Gunder Frank and

33 This becomes transparent in the list that Walsh and Mignolo (2018, 8) compile of the main members of the decoloniality group and their institutional affiliations. Very few do not have an institutional base in the United States.

34 A similar stance, though more radical, is that of Mignolo (2018, 116), who insists that coloniality should not be confused with colonialism.

35 Other scholars within the same line of thought also add the notion of gender to the constitutive set of discriminatory structures. See Lugones (2008).

Samir Amin, developed an approach that in the 1970s became widely known first as dependency theory and later as world-system theory. For much of his career, Quijano's work aligned with this line of thought that sought to understand the uneven development and the dependent capitalism in the peripheries of the capitalist world, at that time also called the Third World.[36] However, with the coloniality of power, the Peruvian author made a radical course correction in his critique of imperialist domination and inaugurated a new perspective – decoloniality – for the understanding and transformative engagement with inequality in which the material conditions of existence give way to the symbolic conditions of existence.

Decoloniality is fundamentally a radical critique of the paradigm of modernity/rationality. It demands the negation of all its constitutive categories, including that of totality in cognition and the Eurocentric paradigm of the universality of knowledge. According to Quijano (1992, 19-20), it is necessary to disentangle the ties that bind this paradigm with coloniality, and this implies an epistemological decolonization in the form of decoloniality. Following another exponent of this line of thought (Mignolo 2018, 106), decoloniality is more than a critique, more than an academic discipline focused on the coloniality of power. Understanding it as a variation of "decolonial studies" would be the same as holding it hostage to the paradigm of rationality/modernity or, Mignolo's terms, to the conceptual triad of modernity/coloniality/decoloniality. Decoloniality would be a bottom-up version of decolonization that, as previously seen, is markedly top-down, but also encompasses a praxistic dimension insofar as it is a contestation and a struggle against the colonial yoke. Hence the decolonialist's refusal to treat it as pure theory (Walsh 2018).

The two currents of thought dealing with decolonization have differences which lie either in the emphasis given to certain arguments or concerns or in substantive interpretation of the facts, although they share some principles and goals and have several interconnections in their past as well as in their present. Concerning the past, the figure of Samir Amin, a prominent scholar of dependency theory, represents an important interconnection between South American theorists of decoloniality and African scholars of post-colonialism attached to the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA).[37] Presently, interconnections can be firstly found in the acknowledgment of the existence of various decolonial projects, each with its own specific assumptions and needs. Secondly, in the certainty that none of them holds the keys that open the door to decoloniality (Mignolo 2018, 108) or claims a privileged role in the construction of a counter-hegemony. As Walsh (2018, 100) emphasized in this regard, it is not a struggle for ownership of concepts.[38]

Despite the strategic interconnections and temporary alliances between the scholars of the two trends, the differences in emphasis and substance are many and sometimes reveal deep disagreements that incite terminological and conceptual inaccuracies. Among others, I highlight those related to the focus of empirical analysis, to temporality and its implications (colonialism, the ideas of Europe, Latin America, Indigenous America, etc.), and to the influences or sources of

36 As pointed out earlier, efforts in creating genealogies are always biased. Our view of Quijano's intellectual connections is relatively conformist and does not stray far from the ordinary established by mainstream thought. Others, however, while not disinterested, are more extravagant, bold, and passionate. See, for example, Grosfoguel's reading (2022, xiv-xvii), which alludes to the existence of an epistemic extractivism that hides the Black origins of critical theories, attributing them to white scholars. According to him, social scientists from Black Marxist tradition would have formulated the idea of coloniality before Quijano, using different terms. The fact of not citing or acknowledging these authors as sources of inspiration would, according to him, exemplify nothing less than Quijano's epistemic racism.

37 Amin is not the only example of interconnection. Frantz Fanon, Glissant, and Du Bois would be other nodes of past interconnections.

38 See Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018, 43-69) for an overview of the various facets of 21st-century decolonization, its main concepts, and the cross-fertilization between them.

inspiration.

The social background of the authors seems to be quite a relevant factor in determining the focus of empirical analysis. The post-colonial approach to decolonization, evolving from the writings of the *Subaltern Studies* group, and influenced by Edward Said's *Orientalism*, developed a preference for focusing on decolonization in regions like India, Southeast Asia, and the Middle East. It favors the perspectives of the major marginalized groups within these territories (lower castes, women, peasants, Muslims in Hindu-majority regions, and non-Muslims in Islamic countries). Over time, this approach expanded its scope to include the African continent, adding new nuances to the analysis, and introducing new themes for investigation. The gender issue remains central, but novel subjects such as the youth issue and related intergenerational conflicts, the economy of the occult, the problem of autochthony, the racial issue and slavery have entered the stage.

Conversely, decoloniality emerged within the context of Latin American countries and, to a lesser extent, the Caribbean. Initially formulated to account for coloniality in Latin America, this approach has widened its temporal scope to encompass studies on contemporary social movements like the Zapatistas in Chiapas, the first nations in Canada, and indigenous movements in the Andean nations-states, reflecting the geographical and social background of the activists and theorists associated with this trend.

The preferred territories of both trends od decolonial studies experienced a different temporality concerning the period in which the encounters between indigenous societies and the colonizing powers took place. The temporal depth of colonialism in the Indian subcontinent, Southeast Asia, and the Middle East, as claimed by post-colonialism scholars, is approximately 200 years, while in Africa, it is even shorter.[39] What needs to be decolonized are institutions, an ethos, a worldview, and a 200 years history of unequal power relations, in places where the Europeans, despite maintaining a tough political ruling over native populations until the mid-20th century, were a demographic minority. In the African case, during the 100 years of colonialism and nearly 60 years of independence, the decolonization of colonial societies successfully built territorial States that have not yet achieved the status of nation-states.

Conversely, the Latin American perspective on decoloniality stretches the temporal depth of coloniality. Since Quijano, they talk about the existence of a "colonial matrix of power" which is five centuries old. This difference in time depth has important consequences. First, the Latin American countries that have experienced the coloniality of power have been independent since the beginning of the 19th century, although they continue to grapple with enduring colonial power structures. In some of them, the population of European descent often rival or surpass indigenous and forcibly transplanted slave populations. This context illuminates internal inequalities that mirror the global framework of capitalist disparities. The distinction between political independence and decolonization becomes crucial in these cases. Independence in these regions, led by the European colonizers that settled in new territories, involved the entire colonial society,

39 It is worth remembering that the political decolonization of American countries is contemporary or even slightly older than the onset of colonialism in Asia and much older than the colonial scramble for Africa. This should give food for thought.

perpetuating a self-governed colony led by nativized colonizers (*los criollos*). As noted by Cahen (2012, 5), my source of inspiration in this regard, the Brazilian case is emblematic. The country's independence was spearheaded by a segment of the ruling elite of the metropolitan State who chose to remain in Brazil, creating a State that did not intend stop being "Portuguese". This ruling portion of the Portuguese empire only wanted to build an empire centered in Rio de Janeiro rather than Lisbon. After about 70 years (1822-1889), the empire of Brazil, which was a self-governing Portuguese colony in Brazilian lands, became a Brazilian colony disguised as a Republic. We observe during this period the main of the process that built a nation for the Brazilian State, without a genuine process of decolonization.

The temporal framing adopted by decolonialists, pinpoints the origins of coloniality in European modernity, which they locate in the 16th century. According to them, the word "modern" in the 16th century meant "the present time", and this could not be other than the European present. However, this perspective is historically misleading. Certainly, in the 16th century the idea of Europe was, if anything rudimentary and embryonic (McGrane 1989). The category of thought that best encompassed the unit we call Europe today was then that of Christendom. Constructing an entire framework of thought based on a category lacking sociological existence during its inception amounts to positing a hypothesis without empirical grounding and establishing a doctrine reliant on the proponents' convictions and the justness of their cause, rather than on historical accuracy. Conversely, the temporality of decolonization (or the decolonization of history) in post-colonial theory is shallower and more focused. This perhaps explains the preference for the retrieval of particular histories and certain wariness towards macronarratives, which curiously does not happen amongst the adherents of decoloniality.

Behind these differences in temporal dimension, post-colonialists and decolonialists share common attitudes and objectives, among which I underline a certain disinterest in decolonization as a case of institutional changes of macro political and economic character and in the top-down approach focusing on the construction of new nation-states. More importantly, they highly favor subjects such as the decolonization of minds, feelings, tastes, general modes of organization of experiences, knowledge, and being, which they refer to as examples of an epistemological decolonization.

Quijano's call for epistemological decolonization, in the form of decoloniality, fell deep into the hearts of the theorists who formed the decoloniality group.[40] Since then, the idea of political and economic decolonization, which has slowly fallen out of favor in post-colonial theory, seems to have completely lost any explanatory value. Now, all necessary decolonization operates at the epistemological level. Hence the preference for appealing to decolonization in the realms of knowledge and university institutions. One hears, no matter whether seriously or ironically, calls for decolonizing the university (Bhambra, Gebrial, and Nisancioĝlu 2018), decolonizing the Westernized University (2016), decolonizing Cambridge University (Hart 2018), as well as ecolonizing Academia in general (Rodriguez 2018), and museums (Lee 2022). Scientific disciplines are also objects of a similar

40 Note that the idea of decolonizing knowledge and minds is not exclusive to decolonialists. Anti-colonial activists like Fanon, Cabral, and Nkrumah already discussed the construction of a new person. Ngũgi wa Thiong'o (1981) also called for the decolonization of minds in African literature. Regarding Quijano's proposition, it is noticeable that there are many titles of works on decolonization containing the word "epistemology" or a derivative. See, among others, Wood (2020), Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018), Mbembe (2015), Grossfoguel (2007), Maldonado-Torres (2007).

call. For example, there is a demand for decolonizing Ecology (Ferdinand, Smith, and Shepherd 2021), International Relations (Jones 2006), Psychology (Bhatia 2017), Education (Abdi 2011), Sociology (Meghji 2021), European Sociology (Rodriguez, Bocha, and Costa 2010), Social Sciences and Humanities (Reiter 2021), African Studies (Falola 2022, 2023), and Indian Studies (Sharma 2015). I leave our discipline to the end because with respect to anthropology, the clamor reaches its smaller subfields. In addition to the call for the decolonization of anthropology in general (Harrison 2010, Mogstad and Tse 2018), there are also cries for the decolonization of Ethnography (Bejarano, Juarez, Garcia, and Goldstein 2019), Visual Anthropology (Gill 2021), American Anthropology (Gupta 2022), among others.[41] The list of things that should be subject to decolonization grows infinitely and includes concrete items and abstract topics (development, heritage, health, time, leisure, sexuality, body, landscape, madness, childhood, god, hair, gaze, transgenders...) as well as physical or conceptual places/regions (Pacific, India, Haiti, Latin America, Brazil...). Given this frame of reference, a pause to think about on the naïve times when the object of decolonization was the African and Asian colonies might teach us something.

41 The calls for decolonizing Physics (quantum, particle, solid-state...), Biology (vegetal, molecular, cellular), Geology, Chemistry, Mathematics, as well as Engineering, have not reached me. Perhaps due to not conducting an exhaustive search. But it is worth to mull over it.

Let there be no illusions. The keyword here is epistemology, and it is on this issue that attention must be focused. Epistemology is a big and heavy word and as such it should not be employed to talk about light things such as the knowledge conveyed in children's tales, lullabies, popular beliefs about the world of politics, the "techniques" that preside over the choices of *Euroloto* numbers, or about beautiful and ethereal things such as the harmony of sounds and shapes, the beliefs in gods and supernatural beings, and the mythologies of world creation. Epistemology, dictionaries tell us, is the branch of philosophy that deals with scientific knowledge, determining the grounds, the value and the scope of scientific hypotheses. Therefore, we must ask what people like Grossfoguel, Ndlovu-Gatsheni, Quijano, Mignolo, and others mean when they use this term. An examination of their propositions leaves one wondering if they are challenging the assumptions and premises of the scientific paradigm. Often, when they discuss epistemology, they are referring to practical wisdom, beliefs, artisanal technologies, the cultural worldviews of traditional communities, or to things much smaller than this big and fat word.[42] For example, the epistemic nature of the often-demagogic clamor for the decolonization of the university (be it Cambridge, Cape Town or Pindamonhagaba) boils down to something trivial (but no less unimportant), done from time to time, such as curricular reforms and administrative or bureaucratic reorganizations that lead to the creation of new academic units and the merger or extinction of others. Their usage of "epistemology" might sometimes appear to trivialize the term. The decolonization of universities might encompass broader changes aiming to diversify the sources of knowledge and challenge dominant theories, yet the practical actions taken in these efforts might seem disconnected from a fundamental overhaul of epistemological frameworks. Therefore, in this kind of controversy, epistemology paradoxically has little to do with epistemic revolution as conventionally understood.

42 For the sake of accuracy, philosophers still use the term "gnoseology" to refer to the premises and foundations of knowledge in general. However, this is entangled with the way decolonial, and post-colonial scholars think about epistemology.

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On other occasions, epistemic decolonization aims to introduce new codified traditional knowledges into university curricula.[43] For example, I witnessed the creation of classes on traditional-artisanal techniques of fishing, metallurgy or mining, and disciplines focused on the study of spiritualistic-mystical knowledge linked to the diagnosis and cure of physical and psychological misfortunes as if they were scientific disciplines, on equal footing or of the same nature as molecular physics, geological stratigraphy, peptide chemistry, the mathematics of nonlinear equations, or the astrophysics of the Big Bang. It is an attempt to broaden the scope of what is considered scientific knowledge within academic settings, acknowledging the value of diverse epistemologies. Additionally, the epistemology that must be decolonized is also related to a supposedly unfair division of labor in which scientists from the former colonies (also known as the Global South) are viewed as the manual laborers of science, painstakingly producing raw data that would be dressed up by scientists from the former empires with something called theory, which adds value to the final product and prestige exclusively to the latter. This critique challenges this unequal hierarchy and seeks to promote a more equitable recognition of knowledge creation across diverse backgrounds and contexts.

The unequivocal existence of inequities founded on historical processes of political, economic, and symbolic domination across the academic world should not lead us to be content with cathartic yet problematic interpretations of facts. Catharsis may ease the liver but never clears the mind. Let me start with the Social Sciences. In anthropology, the distinction between ethnography and theory is incoherent. With very few exceptions, all contributions that represented a major advance in anthropological theory were produced by skillful fieldworkers who rigorously and exhaustively collected ethnographic data with which they built their theoretical framework.[44] Thus, the argument about a supposedly global division of labor that privileges theory often has the adverse effect of leading young researchers from the Global South to underestimate or side line the ordinary and often tedious activities of exhaustive data collection and to overvalue the often empty exercise of theoretical construction. This becomes even more dramatic when this misconception is embedded in the much-vaunted call for epistemic decolonization, which would mysteriously subvert the order of theoretical production in the Social Sciences and the way prestige and distinction are attributed in this field of study.[45].

I believe it is part of the university's mission to register, document, and protect popular and traditional forms of knowledge that, even running no risk of oblivion, do not belong to the established framework of sciences. Teaching medical doctors and health professionals that in other times and places other people used different procedures to deal with illness and human suffering, and that often these knowledge systems proved effective for their purpose, only broadens the horizon of future health professionals. However as effective as they may be and as anchored as they are in the group's worldview, such knowledge is not science; it was not developed according to the scientific method, nor has it undergone the test of anonymously reproduced falsifiability. Let me not be misunderstood. Such

43 Apologies for the paradox, but the phrase "new codified traditional knowledges" is as pop as the statement of the Nigerian *jùjú* musician who once said that the Yoruba tradition is very modern.

44 Evans-Pritchard, Meyer Fortes, Victor Turner, Jack Goody, Clifford Geertz, Marshal Sahlins, Georges Balandier, Maurice Godelier, and Julio Cezar Melatti were accomplished fieldworkers in their youth, and their contributions to anthropological theory owe much to the quality of their ethnographic data. Obviously, this list can be significantly extended.

45 In my experience, teaching in more than one university in the Global South, I often hear *ad nauseam* this argument among my students when, with an attitude of rebellion, laziness, genuine interest, or a mixture of it all, they contacted me with theoretical formulations that are empty in nature without any grounding in ethnographic data.

knowledge systems may have high legitimacy within their originating communities and are not inherently inferior to scientific knowledge. However, they are not science. Proposing an epistemological decolonization that sacrifices the scientific paradigm is a bold move that, to be carried out without harm and serious losses, needs to carefully consider what will replace science once it is decolonized. We should, at the very least, be cautious and give a narrower focus to this claim. After all, if religious ideas such as karma and destiny are as existentially and morally significant as the philosophical concept of free will or rational choice theories, this should not make us blind to the huge power asymmetry between belief in miasmas or ether and the pathogenic theory, between the mystical force of the Azande's or Avalon's witches and the strong force in the atomic nucleus.

There is something dramatic about this call to decolonize epistemology, which in my view contributes to the reproduction of the domination that post-colonialists, decolonialists, and other social theorists seek to mitigate. In the mid-1990s, African philosopher Paulin Hountondji, who was not originally part of the post-colonialist or decolonialist team, though highly esteemed by them, claimed the existence of uniquely local knowledges that would constitute an African science. This was Hountondi's way to react against the situation of extraversion and dependence experienced by the continent. He proposed that Africans should rehabilitate these knowledge systems that had been downgraded during years of colonial domination and endow them with an alternative epistemology that would counter the universal claims of Western science (Amselle 2010, 78). Hountondji's position on this matter is very close to post-colonial theorists', with their emphasis on indigenous knowledge systems, and to decolonialists', with their call for epistemological decolonization. Interestingly, this position faced criticism within the CODESRIA group to which Hountondji was affiliated. Philosopher Souleymane B. Diagne (1994, 10-11) raised two reservations about the idea of African science. The first, epistemological in nature, pointed to the religious background of the African version of scientific knowledge, arguing that such an encompassing background cannot be distinguished from elements that would then become products of science. I will not delve into the implications of this reservation, apart from noting that Hountondji (2013, 226) responded to Diagne's objection asserting that the difficulty he raised does not eliminate the obligation to integrate the competing or juxtaposed paradigms that govern scientific and religious practices. This presupposes a previous deconstruction and reconstitution of the two paradigms (that of science and that of religion) that free researchers and practitioners from the all-or-nothing logic they originally impose.[46]

I will stick now to Diagne's second objection, as it has implications directly linked to the practices of engagement of decolonial studies in general. He wonders whether rehabilitating traditional knowledge to revitalize African research would be the best way to break with the continent's underdevelopment. The case of the Asian tigers immediately came to his mind, as it did to Hountondji's. These are countries that have gone through rapid economic growth in the second half of the 20th century and an impressive rate of scientific and technological develop-

46 A somewhat obscure response, which in my view somehow aligns with the ideas of Horton (1993) about the cognitive continuities between African religious thought and European scientific thought.

ment, which is manifested in the creation and consolidation of excellent research institutions as well as advanced training centers.[47] In none of these countries there happened widespread calls against scientific paradigms during the period in which their research and training institutions were consolidating. Hountondji acknowledges the success of these countries and proposes to examine carefully how they managed to integrate themselves into the international research system. He adds, however, that this is not all; one should also look at the cultural destiny and the degree of autonomy of these countries and check how actively and responsibly they participate in building a common future (2013, 226-227). This kind of response refers us back to the aforementioned non-economic imperialism of the poor Portuguese colonial empire, where nobility of soul and purity of spirit would replace the cold strength of technique and reason. Setting aside the substantive merit involved in this controversy, it seems that the refusal to swiftly and effectively incorporate the established scientific paradigm and the practices well established in sciences has at first the effect of reproducing the structure of domination and the system of inequalities that post-colonial and decolonial thought seek to deconstruct and dissolve.

The call for decolonizing epistemology also takes the form of decolonization of mind and aims at replacing the languages used in teaching and research at universities in the Global South. Often, the decolonizing good-doers propose, as an example of decolonization practice, the introduction of local languages (many of them with a history of little more than 50 years of written systematization, if at all) and the marginalization of "European languages," also referred to as colonial languages. From this perspective, decolonization seems synonymous with "Africanization," "Asianization," "Latin Americanization," or "Caribbeanization," but the call is so general that it would be better to understand it as a demand to "de-Europeanization" or "de-Westernization". As far as I know, the original source of this proposition does not directly come from post-colonial or decolonial studies. It comes from the Kenyan writer and professor Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, who in 1981 published an influential volume with four essays on language in African literatures. This book also marked his farewell to written English. From then on, his fictional texts (novels, short stories, and plays) as well as his essayist writings were written in Gĩkũyũ and Kiswahili. His decision was due to the recognition that imperialism continues to control life in Africa, despite all African resistance. In his struggle to reclaim creative initiative, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o argues that the choice of language and its use is a central element in defining the individual person, its relationship with the world, as well as in creating a liberating perspective (1981, 4, 87).

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o acknowledges that European languages play the important role of mediation between Africans living in the same country as well as between African countries and elsewhere. They are a centripetal force working against the divisive tendencies inherent in situations of plurilingualism such as those existing in most African countries (1981, 6-7). However, they are also a means of spiritual subjugation because they were the instrument with which colonial powers held captive the African souls who had access to formal education. Punishing those

47 Aware that global university rankings have an extreme Anglophone bias and are more marketing tools than indicators of quality, I note that the 2023 *QS World University Rankings* records 12% of the world's top 100 universities as being from the Asian tiger economies. This is a much higher percentage than the 5% achieved collectively by Germany and France, countries with a long history of scientific production.

who spoke the local languages and rewarding those who spoke and wrote in the language of the colonizer, the colonial schooling system reinforced cultural domination, created obstacles to the development of an orature in native languages, and made the sensibility of those speaking European languages to move away from their native environment This estrangement is a form of colonial alienation that causes educated Africans to see the world as it is depicted by the culture of the colonizer's language, and this worsens as the same educational system associates native languages with low status, humiliation, and cognitive deficit (1981, 18). Faced with this scenario, the anti-imperialist and anti-colonial struggle must include a language policy that engenders both the decolonization of minds and the end of the neocolonial servitude characterizing contemporary Africa. This policy should move African literature writers away from European languages and prompt them to do for their mother tongues "what Spencer, Milton and Shakespeare did for English, what Pushkin and Tolstoy did for Russian; indeed what all writers in world history have done for their languages by meeting the challenge of creating a literature in them, which process later opens the languages for philosophy, science, technology and all other areas of human creative endeavours" (1981, 29).[48]

It is worth noting that Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's call is not for the abandonment of European languages in general, but for the use of African languages in literary texts. Therefore, it is a specific call made with a strong ideological footprint. It is clearly an anti-imperialist argument. Made over 40 years ago, it still resonates loudly to the hearts of many African nationalists. Partly due to its strong emotional appeal, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's argument overflowed from the literary universe into the domain of universities in general. Thus, scholars like Mbembe (2015) borrowed his argument about the decolonization of mind and language to build a project of a future university in South Africa. According to Mbembe, this decolonized university would place African languages at the center of its pedagogical project. Multilingual, it would use various native African languages as vehicles for transmitting knowledge. Moreover, the African decolonized university should also make room for non-native African languages (French, Portuguese, English, Arabic...) and for non-African vernacular forms such as Chinese and Hindi. Thus, the decolonized African university will make these languages a colossal repository of concepts from all corners of the world.

The linguistic decolonization of the university seems to be a virtuous objective, in line with promoting diversity and valuing plurality. The practical obstacles that could pose a challenge to its success, mostly related to constraints of the publishing system (translations, size of the printed runs), will largely be overcome soon with the development of technologies related to translation, digital formats of texts, and their reproduction, among other innovations. However, while Mbembe and many other champions of plurality in Kenya and the USA, in Bolivia and Canada, cry for the use of local languages, the peripheries of the center (Portuguese, Belgian, Dutch universities, and even French and German universities) and the centers of the periphery (Brazilian, Indonesian, Indian institutions of superior education) propose curricular changes aimed at offering courses and accepting

48 Before Ngũgi wa Thiong'o, but in a similar vein, Amílcar Cabral also proposed decolonizing the African minds when he argued that in order not to betray the objectives of national liberation, the Guinean petty bourgeoisie should "be capable of committing suicide as a class, to be restored to life in the condition of a revolutionary worker completely identified with the deepest aspirations of the people to which he belongs' (1979, 136). It is not unreasonable to compare this passage in Cabral with Ngũgi wa Thiong'o's assertion that the educated African petty bourgeoisie has developed a wavering psychological make-up, oscillating between the neo-colonial comprador bourgeoisie and the peasant, and working masses, experiencing an identity crisis as a class (1981, 22). In another text, still in the same vein as Thiong'o's position on the mediating role of European languages, Cabral (1974, 214) stated that the Portuguese language, as an instrument for people to relate to one another and as a means to express the reality of the world, had been one of the few good things left by Portuguese colonialism.

theses and dissertations in English, the language of what until recently was the center of global power and is now becoming a somewhat ownerless *lingua franca*. This is just a new version of the so-called paradox of globalization with its diametrically opposed tendencies towards homogenization and differentiation.

By emphasizing the epistemological, cultural, cognitive, and spiritual dimensions of decolonization, the two currents of decolonial studies take an engaged and committed stance toward changes in the overall balance of power and develop a militant viewpoint, as has been suggested in the way Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018, 43) defines decoloniality: "as the collective name for all anti-slavery, anti-racism, anti-colonialism, anti-capitalism, against Eurocentric hegemonic epistemology, as well as struggles emerging in different geopolitical sites haunted by coloniality in its physical, institutional, ideational, and metaphysical forms." With the exception of the reference to anti-capitalism, with the usual political and economic implications, all other hostile and oppositional stances refer to an imaginary venue where all evils reside – Europe. Interestingly, despite a certain disregard for political and economic dimensions, and despite the engaged stance, decolonial studies ultimately find at least two affinities with the perspective of imperial historians and colonial administrators. Firstly, the agency of decolonization is predominantly European, now centered in North American and Anglo-Saxon universities.[49] Most of those who make the loudest calls for the decolonization of the university are researchers who have Anglo-Saxon universities as their institutional base. And it is only after these original calls are made that they can be reverberated by scholars from other corners. Secondly, decolonization's basic nature is ideational. Despite all the engagement, what is at stake are ideas, narratives, and ways of framing the world.

I could not help but feel that there is something juvenile implicit in the militant posture characterizing these studies. Firstly, because it is diffuse; one only needs to look at the list of anti-things that are objects of decoloniality. In its generality, it holds an elective affinity, to use an expression dear to Max Weber, with the witty stereotype of the Latin American rebellious youth of the 1960s, whose cartoonish slogan was: ¿Hay un *gobierno? Estoy en contra* (Is there a government? I'm against it).[50] Another index of this juvenile stance comes from references coming from the universe of popular culture, a dimension of social life closely associated with youth. One of the masterpieces of decolonial thought emphasizes that decoloniality is interested in "relationality", which, in turn, has much to do with the idea of *vincularidad* formulated by Andean indigenous activists-theorists. *Vincularidad*, according to Walsh and Mignolo (2018, 1), relates to the awareness of the interdependence of all living beings with the territory and the cosmos; it is a relationship that seeks harmony and balance. In all this we have a kind of a New Age allusion to the idea of a mystical and poetic unity of life on planetary scale. The word that best summarizes what decoloniality evokes about *vincularidad* would be *Gaia* – the mother-earth of Greek mythology, the primordial element that gave birth to all Greek gods, and the "scientific theory" that view planet earth is a vast living organism capable of self-regulation. However, it remains unclear

49 In the same vein, Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018, 44) notes how the first imperative of 21st-century decolonization is the recognition that the most important site of the decolonial struggle is the university.

50 In the times we live in, observing the rise of the far right, it is common to hear and to read on social media platforms that convey an anti-political discourse the following expression "I am against all of this", which also has an elective affinity with the caricatured stereotype. The difference is that participants in fascist networks in Brazil are not young people, quite the contrary. Perhaps, in this case, it is a matter of senile rebellion which, according to the functionalist principle of the unity of alternating generations, is close to youthful rebellion.

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whether the *Gaia* of decolonial thought is inspired by Greek mythology, James E. Lovelock's hypothesis, Isaac Asimov's imagination, or perhaps a creative mix of these, which is also very characteristic of science literature in popular culture.

A second index of the importance of juvenile popular culture in decolonial thinking lies can be found in the concept of "Colonial Matrix of Power" (CMP), formulated by Mignolo (2011, 2018). CMP is Mignolo's translation of the concept of "coloniality of power" or "colonial pattern of power" originally formulated by Quijano. The introduction of the term "matrix" might suggest a connection to the mathematical concept of linear algebra commonly used by structuralist anthropologists to analyze social and symbolic structures. But nothing could be more deceptive than that. Mignolo tells us that his matrix owes more to popular culture, referencing the 1999 movie of the same name that became a cult movie everywhere. Here, coloniality or colonialism truly turns into a journey into the world of science fiction of fantasy.[51]

The last hint of the juvenile attitude coming from the realm of popular culture can be found in Mignolo's ideas (2018, 105-107) about what decolonizing means. On this subject, he revisits the paradoxically individualistic theme of "free choices by free people", as discussed by Quijano, to argue that Bob Marley would be a decolonial theorist-activist who believes that each of us is responsible for our decolonial liberation. According to him, the ideas of the Jamaican musician are close to those of the philosopher of science Humberto Maturana, and both inspire him to position himself, adopting an explicitly nonconformist and rebel stance in the fields of humanities, social sciences, arts, and philosophy, which proposes a "delinking" with Western epistemological assumptions. The major consequence of this would be a reorientation of the human praxis of living, which he calls "re-existence" (2018, 106). Let me be clear on this. I am not raising any objection to the highly creative cross-fertilization illustrated here by the simultaneous reference to the universes of popular music and philosophy. I am only pointing out that one of Mignolo's sources of inspiration lies in the heart of popular culture.[52]

I also suspect that we are paradoxically dealing with a conservative form of rebellion. As seems to happen with social life-cycles in general, being juvenile now means that its future trajectory tends towards order. It is a bit like the French *plus* ça *change, plus c'est la même chose,* which informs us indirectly about the difficulties of triggering breaches. Thus, despite the ubiquitous engaged stance and its moral commitment, decolonization is an important subject for the academic world or, to be more precise, for the humanities in universities. It refers to changes in what is currently hot in the most top universities, and points to the tendencies towards anti-determinism and interpretative particularism, which has essayism as its preferred form of expression.

This conservative touch is not only evident in decolonial or post-colonial thought but paradoxically in the practice of key actors of the anti-colonial movement during the early days of decolonization, before and after the former colonies gained independence. Nationalist leadership had as its central goal the independence of the countries in which they lived. The political entity they unanimously

51 See Mignolo (2018, 114-115) on the comparison made between the film *Matrix* and the concept related to coloniality. The similarity in the mindsets of the authors and consumers of movies like *Interstellar* and scholars associated with decoloniality also reveals how much popular culture serves as a major source of inspiration. In this respect, see the key role played in both domains by ideas such as pluriverses or multiverses. Regarding neologisms, I also feel obliged to refer the renaming of a well-known social network to this same mindset. While the former name was related to analogical forms of storing information the new one refers to the digitally-driven concept of the metaverse.

52 The relationship between scientific production in the Social Sciences and the world of popular culture is quite complex and would merit an in-depth reflection, which cannot be done now due to lack of space. My suggestion is that there are many layers of interpenetration between them. So far, I have shown how people from the academic world look to popular culture for inspiration to build analogies of various kinds. The fact that the discussion is restricted to the theme of decoloniality and its correlates is only because this is the subject of my criticism now, but I believe that it can be extended to other themes dear to the Social Sciences. However, I would like to point out the existence of fertilization in the opposite direction, that is, from the academic world to the universe of popular culture. Even without having made systematic research on the subject, it is possible to notice that the conceptual package formed by the terms decolonial, decoloniality and decolonization has entered the vocabulary of popular culture once and for all. I have been able to detect numerous mentions of these terms in the sports and music reviews sections of newspapers and blogs. For example, I read in Milly Lacombe's column on

envisaged coming out of decolonization was the nation-state. The problem is that the "new" political framework they were struggling to create was not truly new but a product of mimetic faculty. A major difficulty the governing nationalist elite encountered in the early years after independence had to do with the fact that the legal, juridical, political, and economic frameworks of the "new states" were largely a copy, an adaptation, in some cases a true parody of the political and legal frameworks of the colonial empires, which at this very moment were going to a profound transformation, becoming nation-states themselves. The former activists, then transformed into a ruling elite in charge of planning the design of the "new" states, and putting into operation the new institutions, were themselves people with strong ideological, educational, sociological, and genealogical ties to the empires. They were, in Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's terms (1981, 20-22), part of a comprador bourgeoisie: a portion of the colonial petty bourgeoisie, with strong ties to the metropoles, which hesitated to follow Cabral's call to commit class suicide. Thus, breaking the vicious circle of creating a political unity without using the mimetic faculty pinpointed and criticized by post-colonial theorists (Bhabha 1994), and without always being one or more steps behind the old empires in the process of becoming nation-states, proved to be an impossible task. Ultimately, the problem here lies in creativity. How to create new forms, new legal, political, and economic institutions if the goal is to mimic and adopt the institutional forms of the "other" against which they, the nationalists, opposed?

Cabral, for example, proposed a return to the source. However, such a return, which was related to the creation of a nation-state with close formal and substantive ties to acephalous political units of pre-colonial societies, created a series of practical problems that were never addressed by the nationalists as they took the state power. The issue of the itinerant capital, whose headquarters alternated between urban centers (*praças*) and rural villages (*tabancas*), between the world of city workers and that of the peasantry, could never be implemented as it required logistic tools that were inaccessible to the young state. The new leaders eventually gave up on implementing this pioneering policy and kept the capital where it had always been. In the case of Guinea-Bissau, as in many others, the language issue (a key feature in the Euro-American nation-state's model) was never properly addressed. Nobody proposed to decolonize this important feature that anchors the production of various legal and ideological documents that confer legitimacy to the nation-state. The farthest they could go was the formal inclusion of local languages in the list of national languages and their occasional use in the educational system, usually in the early years of primary education. I have to remark on this topic that 50 years after independence, the most perfect synthesis of centuries of colonial relations, the country's creole language still does not have a systematized orthography in real situations of use (neither by the state nor by other societal institutions). The same occurs in Cape Verde and Sierra Leone, which only contributes to the still widely shared alienated perception in those corners that creole languages are poor copies, leftovers of the European languages that took part in their genesis.

4/10/2023 in *Universo Online* (UOL) that "(Fernando) Diniz is the face of collective football, the workers' game, the decolonized game. When he wins, we all win. When he enchants, we all feel it." However, what was even more remarkable to me was to have heard on the 01/23/2023 *Galãs Feios* show a comment about the arrest of the "patriot" who broke King João's watch in the *Planalto Palace* on the day of the failed *coup d'état* in Brazil (January 8). One of the anchors, Marco Bezzi, said that he thought the watch was very ugly and suggested that he could break it too if he had the chance. The other anchor, Helder Maldonado, justified his colleague's opinion by saying: "Bezzi would break it for being anti-imperialist, decolonial; he would break it with that justification." It is clear that this topic has legs.

In all these things I see a conservative dissent: whether in the attitude of resigned resistance and in projects associated with social change that are actually a copy, if not a parody, of a model that is itself wavering, or in engaged thoughts that are pleased with a rhetorical radicalism whose audience rarely escapes the confines of the most prestigious universities. Where epistemological decolonization is successful, one rarely detects direct political action aiming at the actual division of wealth or the appropriation in any form of anything that was perceived as belonging to the "other". To carry out a radical decolonization is to take the world into one's own hands and appropriate everything that one needs for one's becoming. If we are all natives now, as proposed by a collateral precursor of post-colonial thought (Geertz 1983), all that remains is to claim that we are also all anthropologists too, without pleading any kind of market reservation by means of controversial claims to a morally authoritative position to utter a viewpoint, and without suggesting the unfeasibility of intercultural communication as the basis for such a monopolistic and defensive aspiration.

In a recent book by a prominent figure in African decolonial studies, the author (Ndlovu 2018, 44) identifies some imperatives that give decolonization an epistemic nature. Two of them are interconnected. The first is that epistemic decolonization is one of the most misunderstood and caricatured intellectual movements. The second is that genuine decolonial change can only be implemented if its constitutive concepts, theories, and ideas that emerge meet the criteria of clarity and precision. To a large extent, the misunderstanding alluded to by Ndlovu has to do with conceptual imprecisions that characterize both strands of decolonial studies. The penchant for ambiguity owes much to the cultivation of a convoluted language style, loaded with unintelligible jargon that seems to claim analytical depth when in reality only deliver mystifications, impostures, and misunderstandings (Poudepadass 2008, 415). This is evident in the way the students of decoloniality value the use of neologisms and verbal games to refer to things and ideas that are supposedly innovative, but which are rather more or less trivial, and can be expressed in more prosaic and direct ways. Among the theorists of decoloniality, neologisms of obvious derivation such as "herstories" and "transtories" or "pluriverse," "interverse," "multiverse," "transverse," and "metaverse" abound. In the decolonialists' hit parade', the form "'re-existence" figures prominently to refer to a glamorous Sartrean resistance or a supposedly cult form of ontological "delinking" (Mignolo 2018, 112).

On the other hand, in the post-colonial theory, one stumbles in abstruse and unimportant debates about the meaning of the prefix "post," and finds entire texts or sections dedicated to establishing the difference between "postcolonial" and "post-colonial."[53] Never in the history of social sciences has a hyphen received so much attention, and a simple marker of temporal and spatial posteriority has been so subverted in its most trivial meaning. And if this were not enough to introduce imprecision and obscurity into the discussion, the theoretical-analytical differences between the two lines of thought are portrayed as a controversy about the differences between the prefixes "de" and "post" (Mignolo 2014, 21). Reading

53 See Ashcroft (1996) e Gupta (2007).

this important discussion, one learns that the prefix “de” emphasizes multiple temporalities and alone demolishes the imperial and linear conception of time implicit in the prefix “post.” Furthermore, despite the anti-deterministic and anti-scientific bias, students of decoloniality take to extremes the idea of cultivating a counterintuitive language. Thus, to assert multiple and/or circular causalities, they prefer to say bombastically that “A is a consequence of B and that B is a consequence of A” or that “we are the same because we are different”; or that “cause is effect” (Mignolo 2018, 112; Grosfoguel 2007, Maldonado-Torres 2011).

It is difficult to pinpoint the source of this general predilection for far-fetched language and catchphrases. I suspect that the hosting institutions of the leading figures in post-colonial and decolonial thought in American universities are somewhat relevant in this regard. Even before the boom of decolonial studies, the so-called *French Theory* had already taken root in departments of literary studies and interdisciplinary centers at American universities. Having this sophisticated theory as source of inspiration, the early exponents of post-colonial studies also found their main shelter in these centers and departments. Hence, the assumption that the language and creative style of literary works have surreptitiously migrated to the language of those who study them is not odd at all. The problem is that the creativity in the language of fiction writers relies little on the quality of their academic training and most poets and novelists has no training at all in fiction writing. It is rather due to that mysterious thing called talent. Conversely, the quality of the works of philosophers, sociologists, anthropologists, and historians studying decolonization in the 21st century owes much to their disciplinary academic training, and rarely is their talent or vocation for writing as developed as their scientific education.[54]

If the obscurities of language and style were not enough, the inability faced by the 21st century students of decoloniality and post-coloniality in giving up the kind of dualistic thinking obsessed with creating radical differences in relation to Europe or the West explains why decolonization has largely been approached with an essentialist bias that simplifies the diversity and complexity of the world. While they praise the difference that liberates the subaltern, they condemn the non-European to an alternative pigeonhole where one discards eccentric items, to non-creative imitation, to deprivation, and ultimately to maintaining asymmetries.

Cooper was one of the most astute historians to show the essentialist inclination of post-colonial theorists. An ahistorical way of doing history that he calls “story plucking” (2005, 17), in which one takes texts from different periods, about different subjects in the colonial world, and compare with others in a never-ending progression, instigates historians to overemphasizing coloniality, that is, the fact of having been colonized, over everything else in colonial life. When one substitutes “colonialism” for “coloniality” one weakens the dynamism of the historical phenomenon, providing it with an essence that seeks independence from context, conflicts, and the daily life in the colonies. If we retrieve the already discussed idea that colonial power does not control and does not reach every corner of colonial

54 A clarification is necessary regarding the use of the term “talent”. I do not take it as a purely psychological and cognitive inclination of the individual. It certainly involves social and cultural dimensions such as the family in which the writers were raised, the schools they attended, and the friends they had.

life, that its coercive power for using violence varies according to history and circumstances, we are then protected against the homogenization of coloniality that hinders our ability to make distinctions of various kinds when looking at actual histories of colonization (Cooper 2005, 26).

The essentialization of coloniality goes hand in hand with an old-fashioned notion of culture as a discrete and bounded whole composed of a set of traits that provide it with an essence, and with a kind of dichotomic thinking that opposes the colonial world to Europe. Each culture (a tribe, an ethnic group, a set of these, a nation...) would be a constellation of features such as language, religion, systems of knowledge, forms of dress, music, housing, organization of family units, production, power, among others, which constitute a *sui* generis unit distinct from others due to its essence. This monadic, self-sufficient and self-contained notion of culture, with implications of purity and authenticity, has been much criticized in the last 50 years, but it has proven to be a die-hard idea. Even the most fervent anti-essentialists sometimes slip and fall into the arms of the monadic idea of culture, when dealing with empirical cases, as illustrated by Amselle's (2010) discussion of hybridism. Being bounded wholes, with clear boundaries or limits, the relations between cultures are conceived as relations of diacritical opposition. The pairs of opposition that come out of this feed the kind of dichotomic thought to which I have already critically referred. The curious thing is that essentialism and dualism do not find fertile ground anywhere, but only in particular situations.

Decolonization and Creolization

It is part of our received historical knowledge the fact that the adoption by the Europeans of things like the Arabic numerals, some mathematical and geometric knowledge, techniques of spatial orientation (including mapmaking), navigation (including windward sailing), along with certain military technologies and artifacts such as gunpowder and firearms at the beginning of European expansion in the 15th century, was not due to the original ingenuity of the Portuguese, Spaniards, or any other European peoples. Rather, it was the outcome of complex intercultural exchanges and coexistence practices, especially among Christians, Jews, and Muslims of the Iberian Peninsula during the centuries preceding the transoceanic navigations, and among traders from Italian cities with their multiple partners along the trade routes reaching China. These skills and practices were appropriated by the Europeans and duly incorporated into their archive of knowledge. Something similar took place with the adoption of Christianity as a common religious practice in the European continent. It occurred gradually, moving from its original cradle in the Western Asia to Rome, via Greece. And from the center of the Roman Empire, it spread throughout Europe at different paces. In some places and moments, Christianity suppressed local religious practices and beliefs, in others, it assimilated them, and in still others, it merged with them.

Having this comparative framework, the students of colonialism and decolonization must ask why they have hard times accepting English, French, and Por-

tuguese as the languages of Nigeria, Senegal, Guinea-Bissau, respectively. How many centuries need to pass before it is accepted that certain social groups have these languages (or others derived from them such as the creole languages spoken in West Africa) as their mother tongues? Cape Verdean priests, many of them educated in seminaries on the islands, have been converting and catechizing African populations along the Guinea coast since the 16th century, yet it seems difficult to admit that Christianity is one of the local religions (not necessarily the one professed by the majority) in the four French communes in Senegal, the Guinean settlements of Cacheu, Geba, and Bissau, the Cape Verde islands, and in São Tomé and Príncipe. The *Fourah Bay College* has existed in Freetown since 1827, and a branch of the prestigious *Institut Pasteur* has had a base in Dakar since 1896, yet there are still theorists of decolonization claiming that science is exclusively European and that Africans, due to a mysterious essence, have no direct access to it.

Interestingly, things happen slightly differently in the American continent. It is also part of the received knowledge that European colonization destroyed hundreds of languages and Amerindian peoples, yet statements such as "Portuguese and Spanish are the languages spoken in Brazil and Argentina," "the inhabitants of this part of the planet predominantly profess a Christian faith," and "there are many centers producing original scientific knowledge in Latin American countries" do not provoke astonishment or doubt.[55] Nor are there audible calls for the epistemological decolonization of scientific practice in the universities of Korea, China, Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, India, or Iran. In these cases, it seems admissible and reasonable to presume that some time after a society borrows (meaning appropriation and incorporation) a set of knowledge and practices, which in themselves already have a history of complex interconnections, the borrowed items become an authentic part of its repository of knowledge and practices. Ultimately, in these cases, cultural traits such as language religion, and science do not seem to be properties of particular cultures.

In this final section, I propose that to deal with the phenomenon of decolonization in any of its dimensions, without being trapped by essentialism, dichotomic thought, and well-known teleologies, it is necessary to radically renounce the monadic idea of cultures as discrete and bounded units. By doing so, one also avoids the binarism that usually simplifies the histories of societies as a Manichean game in which a conceptual entity named Europe always plays the caricatured role of the bad guy. I find in the sociolinguistic studies of creole and pidgin languages a source of inspiration and a general theoretical model that, adapted to our interests, helps us overcome these obstacles.

The term "creolization" has been used by sociolinguists to designate a type of linguistic change resulting from a compromise reached by groups speaking mutually unintelligible languages that ends up by generating a creole language. This is the native language of a speech community that had previously used a pidgin or a jargon as its language of communication (Rougé 1986, Holm 1988, Couto 1996). The genesis of pidgins and creoles is a fascinating and complex topic, and our understanding of it is still very incomplete. However, for present purposes,

55 Although it is an extremely biased index, I draw attention to the fact that in the history of the 119 Nobel Prizes in Literature awarded up to 2022, 11 were granted to Spanish-language writers, with the majority (6) being Latin American writers. And with a certain indignation, I also recall that Argentinean and Brazilian writers have never been honored with this distinction, despite figures like Borges, Rosa, and Machado de Assis.

I will treat the different processes of linguistic change associated with the birth of pidgins and creoles as a single conceptual package. As proposed elsewhere (Trajano Filho 2018, 348-49), this way of thinking derives from the idea proposed by Hall (1962) and reaffirmed by DeCamp (1971a) of a life cycle of pidgins and creoles that originally foresaw three routes of change: pidginization, creolization, and decreolization.[56]

Creolization is a rare process of linguistic change involving regular contact of groups speaking various languages for a period of time that allows the emergence of a third language, a synthesis formed with elements of the languages that have been in contact. Creolization is something more complex than the usual by products resulting from situations of contact languages, such as borrowings, multilingualism, or the phenomenon of code-switching. It is a radical synthesis that produces a new language.

The fact that the Creoles get stable over time, after becoming the native language of one or more communities, does not mean that the people living there are monolingual and that the process of linguistic change has come to an end. The settlements called *praças* in the territory of present-day Guinea-Bissau and the city of Freetown in Sierra Leone illustrate what happened linguistically after the creole languages spoken in these places emerged. They are all urban settlements where several languages are spoken. Creole is the native language of many, but it is also the second or third language for a large group of people. In these situations, which generally occur in colonial and post-colonial societies, it is not uncommon that the creole language develops in co-presence with the lexifying language, generally the language of the colonizer. When this happens for a long period, the former comes progressively close to the latter. Sociolinguists refer to this process as decreolizaton.

DeCamp's (1971b) concept of the post-creole continuum is quite useful for unveiling the linguistic variations existing in settings in which people speak at least a creole language and the language of the colonizer, as well as for showing that the forces that worked to trigger the process of creolization remain quite alive, especially those that regulate the relationships between the new creole language and the other vernacular forms which took part in its genesis. The study of linguistic variations and the post-creole continuum in process of decreolization poses a challenge to the idea that languages are self-contained and discrete entities, separated from each other by well-defined linguistic boundaries. In contrast to this, creole studies show that sociolinguistic variations have a continuous and implicational nature. The linguistic variations existing in creole-speaking communities undergoing decreolization do not allow for the identification of discrete *lects* that can be distinguished as separate and clearly identified linguistic systems. This may sound very technical, but any native speaker of Portuguese, English, or French can intuitively experience the idea of a continuum when he or she is in an advanced process of learning a creole language based on Portuguese-, English-, or French-based Creoles. In verbal interactions with speakers of Creoles in process of decreolization, this hypothetical speaker never knows for certain which

56 This can be called the standard model of the life cycle of creoles, complemented by other processes of linguistic change such as re-creolization (Romaine 1988), the re-pidginization or pidginization of creoles (Bickerton 1980, Knörr 2010), and hypercreolization (DeCamp 1971a). For a comprehensive overview, see Couto (1996).

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language they are speaking and where Portuguese, English, or French ends and where Creole begins, and vice versa.

The creole languages spoken in cities such as Bissau, Freetown, and Ziguinchor (Senegal) are more or less close to Portuguese, English, and French (which are their lexifying languages), and share phonological, syntactical and lexical features with Pepel, Balanta, Mandinga, Wolof, Temne, and many other West African languages, depending on the contexts they are spoken and the people who participate in concrete linguistic interactions.[57] In these cases, it makes more sense to interpret linguistic variations as relations within a continuum of multiple dimensions than to report them as relations of binary opposition between two discrete linguistic systems.[58] For this purpose, variations would be organized according to implicational scales, which indicate the existence of a hierarchy regulating the distance or proximity between the phonological, lexical and syntactical attributes of the Creole and those of the lexifying language or others that are spoken in the speech community or that enjoy high prestige there.[59]

Following the model outlined here, I argue that linguistic changes associated with the process of creolization are activated as soon as the contact between speakers of various languages becomes regular in specific sites. However, these changes continue to occur long after the emergence of a creole language and even after it undergoes the phenomenon of decreolization. Creoles going through process of decreolization are found in several parts of the world. The Creoles spoken in the Caribbean, the Cape Verdean Creole, the Creole of the Guinean *praças*, the one spoken in Freetown, and two creole languages spoken in São Tomé and Príncipe are examples (to mention only those associated with the European colonization of America and Africa). Decreolization in no way means the end of a creole language or the loss of its vital dynamism. It is simply one of the many possibilities of change with continuity for creole languages when coexisting with lexifying languages.

Concomitant with changes in language, the concept of creolization also designates a process of extralinguistic change that leads to the emergence of a third entity of a sociocultural nature. It emerges from an originally fragile and unstable compromise reached by groups participating in intersocietal encounters that brought different languages and societies into contact. Creole societies (or cultures) have been the name given by anthropologists, historians, and sociologists to these *sui generis* sociocultural entities.

The best-known cases of creole societies are those that arose in the Caribbean islands during the colonization of the region by a minority of European settlers and a bulk of Africans from various social backgrounds brought as slaves during the development of the *plantation* system in the 17th and 18th centuries.[60] The process of creolization in the Caribbean is a peculiar historical phenomenon of cultural construction. The *plantation* context, with its own demographic composition, codes of interaction between various social groups, different forms of servitude and subordination, and mechanisms and technologies for controlling violence, gave birth to a *sui generis* society, neither European nor African, much less or

57 The case of Ziguinchor is peculiar in that the Creole spoken there originally was a Portuguese-based Creole, but its coexistence for about 150 years with the French language has produced significant changes in its vocabulary and syntactic structure, with the introduction of large number of French lexical items and some features of French syntax.

58 The one-dimensionality of the post-creole continuum, as proposed by DeCamp, has been severely criticized. To replace it, Rickford (1987), inspired by Le Page and Tabouret-Keller (1985), introduced the idea of multidimensional continuum.

59 There is no space to elaborate on implicational scaling here. Suffice to note that its original form, proposed by DeCamp (1971b) and further developed by Bickerton (1973), has suffered severe criticism. See Romaine (1988) and Rickford (1987, 2002).

60 Mintz (1985, 1996), Trouillot (1992), and Glissant (1997) are examples of scholars who have studied the sociological, cultural, and historical aspects of Caribbean socio-cultural creolization.

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indigenous, with original structures of social reproduction. This was a historical process that has an extranational and extraimperial nature, cutting across political units that existed in the past (the various colonies) and those that exist today (the Caribbean national states), despite the immense heterogeneity in each of them.

There is also another approach that uses the analogy between language, society, and culture and takes the idea of linguistic creolization as a metaphor to understand processes of extralinguistic change that result in cultural creolization. In this case, the historical particularism of the previous approach gives way to a more generalist stance that has the power to shed light on the most varied cases of intersocietal encounters associated with processes of cultural construction. In this regard, I draw attention to three inspiring examples. The first is Fabian's (1978) pioneering work on African popular culture as a domain of social life in which he discovered the emergence of new forms of expression reflecting the experience of city dwellers in the Shaba province (Congo). He deals with popular songs that merges local musical forms with European and American musical elements, use modern equipment such as the electric guitar and amplifiers, and are conveyed through records and radio. A second topic deserving his attention is the *Jamaa* religious cult, which brings together Catholic couples and addresses the relationship between husbands and wives through very peculiar texts, such as a local version of the story of Adam and Eve. A third form of expression is the popular paintings produced by local artists and exhibited in the rooms of houses, shops, and entertainment venues. They also contain a mixture of exogenous material like paints, brushes, and canvases with local themes such as the mermaids. All these forms reflect the experience of urban life in Shaba, and each in its own way underscores the predicaments associated with the relationship between men and women, focusing on separation, loss, and suffering (1978, 318). The convergence of elements (material and formal) of varied provenance in these expressive forms is understood by Fabian in a way that was unique at that time. Instead of treating them, as was still customary in the 1970s, as the product of uprooting, a break with traditional culture, or as cases of naive and mimetic reactions caused by Westernization, Fabian resorts to an analogy with sociolinguistics to talk about cultural creolization, which is viewed as "the emergence of a creative and fully viable new synthesis" (1978, 317).

Drawing from the same sociolinguistic inspiration, Drummond (1980rescues the notion of post-creole continuum for cultural theory and concludes that there are no distinct and discrete cultures in multiethnic societies like those in Guyana, but rather a continuum or a set of intersystems that form a creolized culture. In the same vein, though having a deeper impact on the anthropological community, there is the work of Hannerz (1987) on the world in creolization. In this article, he depicts contemporary societies and cultures in the so-called Third World as entities in process of creolization. He sees in these societies a regular and intense flow of things, values, symbols, messages, and social practices that render the boundaries separating them more flexible. Adopting this perspective, Hannerz frees anthropological description from the classic assumption that social and cul-

tural systems are necessarily integrated. The picture he unveils creates difficulties in dealing with the world in creolization as if it were a whole composed of discrete entities and favors as more fruitful an interpretation inspired by the idea of a post-creole continuum. According to the viewpoint of another author working in the same direction (Parkin 1993, 83-84), creolization is a powerful metaphor that helps us, on the one hand, revise the assumption implicit in anthropological and sociological descriptions that cultures and societies are mutually incommensurable and self-contained entities. On the other hand, it encourages the vision of a cultural continuum linking different peoples and regions. One of the most relevant consequences of this way of looking at social reality is the weakening of dualistic thinking that frames reality by means of incisive us/them type of distinctions and a whole series of binary oppositions.

Let me return to the theme of incorporation or appropriation of exogenous practices and knowledge discussed at the beginning of this section. Instead of opposing, disconnecting, and denying the West, using the us/them kind of shallow binarism, the analysis of decolonization using the lens of creolization shifts the focus to the creative synthesis, the sometimes chaotic and impulsive incorporation, and the transformative appropriation of a plurality of others. When informed by this perspective, what one observes in colonial and postcolonial realities and what should be the program of action is not so much decolonizing epistemology, science, disciplines, universities, and the world regions, but rather swallowing and digesting what was once seen as belonging to specific others, and making it into something that is truly one's own. It is to do away with the other as an abyssal difference that makes intercultural communication impossible. It is to eat it, as Oswald de Andrade proposed in his 1928 *Manifesto Antropófago,* which began with the proposition/provocation that "only Anthropophagy unites us. Socially. Economically. Philosophically." It would be the "only law in the world" and this idea can also be captured in the starving proposition that "I am only interested in what is not mine". After all, adopting the perspective of creolization or anthropophagy, we are all anthropophagi: we incorporate and appropriate all differences, thus dissolving the binary oppositions that create discrete unities where they do not and should not exist.[61]

Emphasizing the creative and transformative synthesis originating in intersocietal encounters and downplaying the role of absolute and oppressive differences may seem like a move that leads to the sublimation of power, both in terms of its glorification and dissipation. This is definitely not what I intend to propose. To clarify my argument, I must first point out that what I call socio-cultural creolization is a byproduct of an analogy based on the idea of linguistic creolization, keeping in mind also that metaphors and analogies are what they are: they seem to be what they are not, but they seem so completely that we are led to see in them a reality of first order. In other words, metaphors, however productive they may be, have their limitations, and taking them into account is fundamental.

Now, let me examine the limitations of the language-culture analogy. Creolization is the rarest result of contact languages. Its occurrence is severely limited

61 Two observations. On another occasion, I illustrated the willingness of post-colonial societies to borrow cultural items from the outsideworld with some cases from the popular culture of Cape Verde and Guinea-Bissau (Trajano Filho 2018). Obviously, the degree of openness to borrowing and being influenced varies depending on how advanced the processes of national construction in these societies are. I will insist on the term "anthropophagy" and intentionally avoid using "cannibalism" because the latter is closely associated with a type of social theory of Amerindian societies that aligns closely with decolonial theories, which I am critical of.

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by linguistic (phonological and syntactic aspects of languages in contact) and extralinguistic factors. Regarding the latter, I draw attention to the difficulty of the linguistic synthesis that is the creole languages emerging in contexts marked by extreme asymmetries of economic, political, and technological power among the groups involved (Trajano Filho 2015). In the course of time, the rare product of such an encounter can take on a huge variety of forms, from a well-consolidated linguistic structure and a value that is dear to the community that speaks it, to differentiated unstable configurations. In either case, we have a set of *lects* forming an objective language that is the creative synthesis that groups speaking many mutually unintelligible languages reached over the course of regular encounters. When we think with the help of analogies and refer to cultural creolization, the creative synthesis we attain is a construct that is softer than the model based on which it was built. Here, we are using models developed to address the changes and dynamics of contact languages to mull over what happens in the sociocultural domain, knowing in advance that there is not a complete correspondence between the two levels. In the specific case of limiting circumstances for the occurrence of creative syntheses that would be creole/creolized cultures or cultures in creolization, the absence of radical asymmetries of power becomes an extremely complex factor that is adequately understood only by considering the historical particularities of the cases in question and the demography of the creolization contexts.[62]

From this, I contend that my reference to creative synthesis does not understate power relations. It arises in geographic and historic circumstances in which structural constraints are combined with random factors. The typical scenario where incorporations, appropriations, thefts, caricatures, copies, trials, imitations, identifications, and parodies take place to produce what I call creative synthesis is within the cracks and voids beyond the reach of institutionalized forms of power. It was in settings like these that colonial subjects in Zanzibar appropriated boots, balls, rules, and organizational institutions of football as it was practiced in England and combined them with competitions among *ngoma* dance groups, creating their peculiar and local version of football in which the sheer size of the crowd was one of the criteria for determining the competition winner, regardless of the final game score and the presence of referees (Fair 1997, 229). It was in the shadowy areas that escaped colonial power that youths, with a recent history of urbanization, creatively blended the sounds of religious music played in Christian missions (with their organs and choirs) with the sounds of brass instruments and drums from the repertoire of European military bands and North American and Caribbean musical ensembles to create new and genuine musical forms such as *Congo Jazz, Highlife,* and *Jùjú,* whose lyrics reflected the new forms of social experience in African cities (Martin 1995, Gondola 1997, Plageman 2013, Waterman 1990). It was in similar environments that colonial subjects incorporated, through various forms of copying, parodying, identifying, and caricaturing, elements of European clothing (hats, trousers, dresses, shoes, ties, etc.) and items associated with body care (shampoos, soaps, deodorants, toothpaste, etc.) to establish new forms of sociability, new self-images, and new types of social relationships (Mar-

62 I emphasize that I am referring here to only one moment in the cycle of creole languages and cultures: that of the circumstances of their birth. It does not take much thought to imagine that once the process of creolization is well advanced, the power relations between groups change, new social forces enter the stage (for example, the arrival of Indians in the Caribbean, Southern and Eastern Africa, the Lebanese on the West African coast, the French in Casamance and the English presence in Sierra Leone from the 18th century onwards), drastically altering power structures and mechanisms.

tin 1995, Gondola 1999, Allman 2004, Burke 1996). It was in the creolized *praças* of Guinea-Bissau that newcomers to the creole world crafted novel naming practices that creatively combined the paradigmatic series of European and African first and family names (Antonio, Manuel, Duá, Braima, etc.) with a peculiar and original syntax in which the particle "Junior", a syntactic element of the European naming system, refers to the mother's brother's name rather than the father's (Trajano Filho 2005, 123). As mentioned above, it was also in the shadowy neighborhoods of colonial cities that people like Nguyen Tat Thanh and others assimilated, in an anthropophagic concoction, President Wilson's and Black Atlantic theorists' proposals with the various factions of Marxist thought and a wide-ranging set of local ideas and values, to articulate a praxis that, years later, led to the political independence and the emergence of new nation-states where empires once existed.

All these movements imply the existence of processes of decolonization taking place in sociocultural contexts of creolization (complete or incomplete). However, the analyst's gaze can only perceive them as such when focused on small things, adopting a bottom-up approach. When these small occurrences proliferate and prove capable of operating large-scale creative syntheses in domains as distinct and comprehensive as those mentioned above, we gain an understanding of decolonization less connected to delinking, denial, and difference, and less associated with institutionalized forms of power. This, it seems to me, is the best roadmap to guide both analysis and action. Having colonial subjects succeeded in incorporating, copying, parodying, imitating, masking, stealing, and taking possession of disparate elements of exogenous origin in creating unprecedented cultural practices as the ones mentioned above, why not use the same procedures in the fields of science, technology, and macro-institutional forms? Why does one seek to delink and detach when creative appropriation, possession, imitation, and copying are feasible and potentially more promising possibilities?

Decolonization, when viewed through the lens of creolization and anthropophagy, does more than propose a radical critique of binary dichotomies, which unveil dubious social realities. It goes one step further than the definitive rejection of the idea of culture as a set of distinctive traits, which would be exclusive features of cultural systems. This perspective also does more than reveal pathways diametrically opposed to the delinking boasted by decolonial studies. By adopting this perspective, we gain, as a bonus, more precise tools to show that changes of all kinds that we call decolonization are not a singular process that began with the end of political colonialism after the second European war. Decolonization began at the same time as the original intersocietal encounters that prompted the long-term process of social and linguistic change (on islands off the African coast in the late 15th century; in much of Spanish America, Brazil, and trading posts along the West African coast in the 16th century; in the Antilles, the Caribbean, and the northern part of the American continent in the 17th century; in India and parts of South Asia in the 18th century; in the heart of the African continent in the second half of the 19th century). Understanding historical facts in this way also allows us to move beyond the fatalism inherent in many decolonial studies.

Instead of a single track leading to alienation, I claim that creole societies, by virtue of their encounters with different peoples from Europe and elsewhere, have journeyed through many roads, taken different shortcuts at each inflection point in their histories, changed direction many times, and in some cases even found themselves in true dead ends.

I understand that this non-teleological stance is not only the most analytically productive, but also the most interesting as a guide for action. Instead of epistemological delinking, ontological rebellion, and distancing from this ghostly entity called the West, what anthropophagy and creolization do is recall the general dialectical principle, whose scope is yet to be determined, that creation and copy are not opposed. Whether in the guise of a biological meme ("nothing is lost, nothing is created, everything is transformed"), or as a media aphorism ("in television nothing is created, everything is copied"), or even through the slogan of the 1928 *Manifesto* that the only law in the world is that of anthropophagic unity, this principle reminds us that human history is the history of mixtures and appropriations. At certain moments, allowing oneself to mix and take ownership of things that belong to others may be disguised as a plot about lying, cheating and stealing. At other times, it may take the form of an exemplary tale about going quietly about its own business. At other times still, it may be camouflaged in a rational discourse about the dialectical method and its infinite syntheses. However, I believe the most direct and bold way to unveil this guiding principle is to show how it enters our bodies through the anthropophagic metaphor of meal and digestion, which nourishes us and makes us continue.

Seen thus from this angle, intersocietal relationships (excepting those marked by extreme asymmetries) are always governed by cultural anthropophagy. As it is implicitly insinuated by the well-known spy story about lying, cheating and stealing as well as by Quijano's analysis, the ruling groups, through lying, cheating, stealing, and using sheer violence, have always seized the forms of local knowledge that seemed useful to them. So too have done the subalterns with the tools available to them. Going quietly about their own business and imitating as in copies, simulacra, and parodies, have been usually the ways through which the world's underdogs learn and transact with others while creatively transforming themselves.

In the present time, these creative changes associated either with creolization or decolonization are undoing the global knots of subordination in some societies that lived under the yoke of colonial empires less than a century ago. The scripts that guided these moves were not those of delinking and distancing, but those of creolization and anthropophagy with their vast arrays of characteristic actions: copying, incorporating, emulating, imitating, appropriating, taking, stealing, training, disguising, identifying, transacting, masking, caricaturing, parodying, criticizing, venerating, pretending... It was not the efforts to deny the other, but the same moves that led the powerful (before they were so powerful) to incorporate all forms of otherness. There are multiple creole scripts available, and many of them do not involve replicating previous forms of domination and do not mean a new

version of an old plot with minor changes and new actors. Nowadays, we witness the dawn of a multipolar human world in an advanced stage of creolization, as Hannerz envisioned. Embarking on this journey is a real possibility. The caution now is not to be seduced by idealizations. Boarding this ship is not a free choice made by free people, nor does it intend to find a world of perfect symmetries on the other side, where all inequalities have disappeared. The perspective of creolization and anthropophagy as a roadmap for action is realistic; the boat is small, if not leaky, and the crossing is turbulent and full of seasickness. The reward is to disembark on the other bank of the river and encounter a multifaceted landscape, where asymmetries are less suffocating, for life and for the imagination.

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