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Decolonizing European Sociology

Transdisciplinary Approaches

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Chapter 14

From the Postmodern to the Postcolonial – and Beyond Both

Boaventura de Sousa Santos

When, in the mid-1980s, I started using such phrases as “postmodern” and “postmodernity”, my context was the epistemological debate. I had reached the conclusion that science in general, and not just the social sciences, was presided over by an epistemological paradigm and a model of rationality that were all but exhausted. The signs of exhaustion were so clear that we could even speak of a crisis of paradigm.

Although the then emerging cultural and social studies of science loomed large in my mind, my argument against this paradigm resided mainly in the epistemological reflection of the scientists themselves, of physicists in particular, which showed that the dominant paradigm had less and less to do with the scientists’ scientific practice. This discrepancy, while giving credibility to the critique of the negative consequences of modern science, suggested as well a number of epistemological alternatives, pointing to an emergent paradigm that at the time I designated as postmodern science. As its very name indicates, in my conception, postmodern science had to do with privileging scientific knowledge, while arguing for a broader rationality for science. It implied superseding the nature/society dichotomy; taking into account the complexity of the subject/object relation; relying on a constructivist conception of truth; and bringing the natural sciences closer to the social sciences, and the latter closer to the humanities. It called for a new relation between science and ethics, requiring that science be applied not only in a technical, but also in an edifying way. Finally, it was based on a new, more balanced articulation between scientific knowledge and other forms of knowledge, with a view to transforming science into a new common sense. For this new articulation I proposed the concept of *double epistemological break*. In the years that followed, this epistemological proposition evolved and was consolidated with contributions from feminist epistemology and the cultural and social studies of science.

In the early 1990s, the crisis of capitalism, together with the crisis of socialism in the eastern European countries, led me to broaden the concept of postmodern/postmodernity. Rather than a mere epistemological paradigm, it designated as well a new social and political paradigm. The next step was to conceive of social transformation beyond capitalism, as well as beyond the theoretical and practical alternatives to capitalism produced by western modernity. The epistemological

transition and the social and political transition were conceived of as autonomous and subject to different logics, dynamics and rhythms, but as complementary, as well.

I advised from the start that the designation “postmodern” was inadequate, not only because it defined the new paradigm in the negative, but also because it presupposed a temporal sequence – the idea that the new paradigm could only emerge after the paradigm of modern science had completed its course. Now, if, on the one hand, that was far from happening, on the other, considering that development, whether scientific or social, was not homogeneous in the world, postmodernity could easily be understood as one more privilege of core societies, where modernity had been better fulfilled.

Going from the epistemological to the social and political field, it became evident that the concept of postmodernity I was proposing had little to do with the one that had been circulating in Europe and the United States. The latter’s rejection of modernity – always conceived of as western modernity – implied the total rejection of modernity’s modes of rationality and its values, as well as the master narratives that transformed them into the beacons of emancipatory social transformation. In other words, postmodernism in this sense included in its critique of modernity the very idea of the critical thought that modernity had inaugurated. As a consequence, the critique of modernity ended up paradoxically celebrating the society that modernity itself had shaped. On the contrary, the idea of postmodernity I subscribed to aimed to radicalize the critique of western modernity, proposing a new critical theory, which, unlike modern critical theory, would not convert the idea of an emancipatory transformation of society into a new form of social oppression. Such modern values as liberty, equality and solidarity have always seemed fundamental to me, as fundamental, indeed, as the critique of the violences committed in their name, and the denunciation of their poor concrete fulfilment in capitalist societies.

In order to counterpose my conception of postmodernity to celebratory postmodernism I designated it “oppositional postmodernism”. My formulation was grounded on the idea that we live in societies confronted with modern problems – exactly those deriving from the lack of practical fulfilment of the values of liberty, equality and solidarity – for which there are no modern solutions available. Hence the need to reinvent social emancipation. Hence, as well, the fact that, in my critique of modern science, I never adopted epistemological or cultural relativism. For the theoretical reconstruction I proposed I drew, rather, on ideas and conceptions, which, while modern, had been marginalized by the dominant conceptions of modernity. I have specifically in mind the principle of community in the pillar of modern social regulation and the aesthetic-expressive rationality in the pillar of modern social emancipation. By the mid-1990s, however, it was clear to me that such reconstruction could only be completed from the vantage point of the experiences of the victims, that is to say, of the social groups that had suffered the consequences of the epistemological exclusivism of modern science, including the reduction of the emancipatory possibilities of western modernity to

the ones made possible only by modern capitalism. Such a reduction, to my mind, transformed social emancipation into the double, rather than the opposite, of social regulation. My appeal for learning from the South – the South understood as a metaphor of the human suffering caused by capitalism – indicated precisely the aim to reinvent social emancipation by going beyond the critical theory produced in the North and the social and political praxis to which it subscribed.

For the past few years, I have come to realize that learning from the South, as a serious demand, requires some reformulation of the theory I have been proposing. As I said, I have never been happy with the designation “postmodern”, if for no other reason, then because the hegemony of celebratory postmodernism virtually incapacitated its alternative – oppositional postmodernism. Furthermore, the idea of postmodernity points to the description that western modernity offers of itself, thus risking concealing the description that has been presented by those who have suffered the violence imposed on them by western modernity. This matrilineal violence had a name: colonialism. It was never included in self-representations of western modernity because colonialism was conceived of as a civilizing mission within the historicist boundaries of the West (historicism including both liberal political theory and Marxism), according to which European development pointed the way to the rest of the world. The question is, therefore, whether the “post” in postmodern means the same as the “post” in postcolonial. To put it another way: what are the limits of a radical critique of western modernity?

We are indeed living in a complex intellectual time that can be characterized in the following, somewhat paradoxical manner: culture, specifically western political culture is today as indispensable as inadequate to understand and change the world. Should a radical critique of such a culture imply both the radical nature of its indispensability and the radical nature of its inadequacy? Ultimately, what needs to be decided is whether this critique can be made from inside or if it presupposes the externality of the victims, that is to say, the victims that were part of modernity only by the exclusion and discrimination imposed by modernity itself. The issue of externality necessarily raises many problems. Those that argue for it (for example, Enrique Dussel, 1994, 2000) prefer to speak of transmodernity to designate the alternative the victims present to western modernity by way of resistance. In Dussel’s view, the idea of being outside western modernity is crucial for formulating the concept of postcolonialism.

I submit that counterposing the postmodern and the postcolonial absolutely is a mistake, but also, by the same token, that the postmodern is far from responding to the concerns and sensibilities generated by postcolonialism.

By postcolonialism I mean a set of theoretical and analytical currents, firmly rooted in cultural studies but also present today in all the social sciences, sharing an important feature: in their understanding of the contemporary world, they all privilege, at the theoretical and political level, the unequal relations between the North and the South. Such relations were historically constituted by colonialism, and the end of colonialism as a political relation did not carry with itself the end of colonialism as a social relation, that is to say, as an authoritarian and discriminatory

mentality and form of sociability. For this current, knowing to what extent we live in postcolonial societies is problematical. Moreover, the constitutive nature of colonialism in western modernity underscores its importance for understanding not only the nonwestern societies that were victimized by colonialism, but also the western societies themselves, especially as regards the patterns of social discrimination that prevail inside them. The postcolonial perspective draws on the idea that the structures of power and knowledge are more visible from the margins. Hence its interest in the geopolitics of knowledge, that is to say, its eagerness to problematize the question of who produces knowledge, in what context, and for whom.

As I have already suggested, many conceptions today claim to be postmodern. The dominant ones – including those of such important thinkers as Rorty (1989), Lyotard (1979), Baudrillard (1981), Vattimo (1995), Jameson (1984) – have the following characteristics in common: a critique of universalism and the master narratives on the linearity of history, as expressed in such concepts as progress, development or modernization while hierarchical totalities; renunciation of collective projects of social change, social emancipation being considered a myth without consistency; celebration, albeit melancholic, of the end of utopia, and celebration as well of skepticism in politics and parody in aesthetics; critique conceived of as deconstruction; cultural relativism or syncretism; emphasis on fragmentation, on margins and peripheries, on heterogeneity and plurality (of differences, agents, subjectivities); constructivist, nonfoundationalist and anti-essentialist epistemology.

This characterization, although necessarily incomplete, permits us to identify the major differences concerning the conception of the oppositional postmodernism I support. Rather than renouncing collective projects, I propose a plurality of collective projects, articulated in nonhierarchical forms by translation procedures, to replace the formulation of a general theory of social change. Rather than celebrating the end of utopia, I propose realistic, plural and critical utopias. Rather than renouncing social emancipation, I propose to reinvent it. In lieu of melancholy, I propose tragic optimism. In lieu of relativism, I propose plurality and the construction of an ethics from below. In lieu of deconstruction, I propose a postmodern critical theory, thoroughly reflective but immune to the obsession of deconstructing its own resistance. In lieu of the end of politics, I propose the creation of subversive subjectivities by promoting the passage from conformist action to rebellious action. In lieu of acritical syncretism, I propose *mestizaje* or hybridization, fully aware of the power relations that intervene in the process, that is, looking into who or what gets hybridized, in what contexts and with what purposes.

Oppositional postmodernism shares the following with the dominant conceptions of postmodernism: critique of universalism, the linearity of history, hierarchical totalities, and master narratives; emphasis on plurality, heterogeneity, margins or peripheries; constructivist, but not nihilist or relativist, epistemology.

It is not up to me to account fully for the convergences and divergences, let alone wonder if oppositional postmodernist may well turn out to be far more modernist than postmodernist.

The relation between the dominant conceptions of postmodernism and postcolonialism is complex. If not contradictory in itself, it is at least very ambiguous. The critique of universalism and historicism does put in question the West as the center of the world, thus allowing for the possibility of conceptions of alternative modernities, and allowing therefore for the affirmation and recognition of difference, namely historical difference. Furthermore, the idea of the exhaustion of western modernity helps to reveal the invasive and destructive nature of its imposition on the modern world, a revelation dear to postcolonialism. These two characteristics have been highlighted in particular by some of the varieties of postmodernism that have emerged in Latin America.

I believe, however, that these two characteristics are not enough to eliminate the western eurocentrism or ethnocentrism underlying dominant conceptions of postmodernism. First, the celebration of the fragmentation, plurality and proliferation of the peripheries conceals the unequal relation between North and South at the core of modern capitalism. The proliferation of the peripheries implies the proliferation of centers, which implies in turn the disappearance of the power relations between center and periphery that are constitutive of capitalism. In other words, the capitalist, colonial and imperial differences disappear. Secondly, dominant postmodernism often combines the critique of Western universalism with the claim of Western uniqueness, as when, for example, Rorty states that the idea of “human equality” is a western eccentricity, or that American democracy symbolizes and embodies the best Western values, thus concealing the dark face of US imperialism (1998). Lyotard, likewise, conceives of science as a western option as opposed to the traditional knowledge of nonwestern societies (1979). Actually, postmodern melancholy is full of north-centric stereotypes concerning the South, whose populations are viewed sometimes as immersed in despair without any way out. Finally, the conception of the postmodern as an exclusively Western self-representation is clearly present in Jameson, who conceives of postmodernism as the cultural feature of late capitalism (1984). Late capitalism, in Jameson’s conception, is not belated capitalism, that is to say, a capitalism that arrives too late, but rather a more advanced form of capitalism. All in all, the question remains whether pronouncing the end of metanarratives and hierarchical totalities does not indeed amount to one more metanarrative, whose totality and hierarchy undermine the celebration of fragmentation and difference.

The conclusion, therefore, may be drawn that, even though postmodern and poststructuralist conceptions have contributed to the emergence of postcolonialism, they fail to give an adequate answer to its underlying ethical and political aspirations. Could the same be said of the oppositional postmodernism I have been arguing for? I don’t think so, which does not mean that some reformulation of my reasoning is not in order. The postmodern conception I support is clearly linked to the conception of Western modernity that is my starting point. Herein

lies some ambiguity concerning postcolonialism. I conceive of western modernity as a social and cultural paradigm that constitutes itself from the sixteenth century onwards and becomes consolidated between the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth century. In modernity I distinguish two pillars in dialectical tension: the pillar of social regulation and the pillar of social emancipation.¹ The way in which I conceive of each of these pillars seems to me to be adequate to European realities, particularly in the more developed countries, but not to those non-European societies into which Europe has expanded. For example, social regulation as based on three principles – the principles of the State, the market, and the community – does not account for the forms of colonial (de)regulation in which the State is foreign, the market includes people among the merchandise (slaves), and the communities are devastated in the name of capitalism and the civilizing mission, and replaced by a tiny, racialized civil society, created by the State and made up of colonizers and their descendents, including as well tiny minorities of assimilated natives. On the other hand, I conceive of social emancipation as the historical process of increasing rationalization of the social life, institutions, politics, culture and knowledge, a process whose precise meaning and direction are summed up in the concept of progress. Here, too, I fail to thematize specifically the emancipation of the colonial peoples, and even less so their alternative rationalities, which were annihilated by the rationality of the canons of the conquerors and the preaching of the missionaries.

Curiously enough, it is at the level of epistemology that colonialism gains more centrality in the conception of the oppositional postmodern I have been arguing for, as witness the distinction I draw between the two forms of knowledge sanctioned by western modernity – knowledge-as-regulation and knowledge-as-emancipation. Knowledge-as-regulation is a form of knowledge constructed along a trajectory between ignorance conceived of as chaos and knowledge conceived of as order; whereas knowledge-as-emancipation is constructed along a trajectory between ignorance conceived of as colonialism and knowledge conceived of as solidarity. Colonialist ignorance consists in refusing to recognize the other as an equal and converting the other into an object. Historically, this form of ignorance presupposes three distinct forms: the savage, nature, and the Orient. The gradual

1 The tension between social regulation and social emancipation is constitutive of the two major theoretical traditions of western modernity – political liberalism and Marxism. The differences between the two are significant. While political liberalism confines the possibilities of emancipation to the capitalist horizon, Marxism conceives of social emancipation in a postcapitalist horizon. Nevertheless, both traditions conceive of colonialism in the historicist framework of a temporal code that locates the colonial peoples in the “waiting room” of history, which is supposed to grant them the benefits of civilization in due time. It must be acknowledged, however, that, given the constitutively colonialist nature of modern capitalism, the postcapitalist horizon designed by Marxism is also a postcolonial horizon. No wonder, therefore, that, amongst all the European theoretical traditions, Marxism is the one that has contributed most to postcolonial studies, a fact that in part explains its new vitality.

overlapping of the logic of development of western modernity and the logic of development of capitalism led to the total supremacy of knowledge-as-regulation, the latter having recodified knowledge-as-emancipation in its own terms. Thus, the form of ignorance in knowledge-as-emancipation – colonialism – was recodified as a form of knowledge in knowledge-as-regulation – hence, colonialism-as-order. This is the process through which modern science, increasingly at the service of capitalist development, consolidates its epistemological primacy. In other words, the two contact zones between western modernity and nonwestern societies – the colonial and the epistemological zones – both characterized by drastic power inequalities, gradually turned into each other. The consequence of such a process of mutual fusion was that colonialism as a social relation survived colonialism as a political relation.

Colonialism is again still present in oppositional postmodernism in the way in which I conceive of the subjectivities capable of undertaking the paradigmatic transition in the social and political domains. I see them as emerging from three generating metaphors: the frontier, the baroque, and the South. They all connote the idea of margin or periphery: the frontier, as is obvious; the baroque, as a subaltern *ethos* of western modernity; and the South, understood as a metaphor of the human suffering caused by capitalist modernity. Through the South metaphor, I place the relations North/South at the core of the reinvention of social emancipation, explicitly demarcating myself from the dominant postmodern and poststructuralist thought (as in Foucault 1976), because it does not thematize the imperial subordination of the South *vis-à-vis* the North – as if the North were only “us”, and not “us and them”. As epistemological, political and cultural orientation, I propose, rather, that we defamiliarize ourselves from the imperial North in order to learn from the South. The caveat, however, is that the South itself is a product of empire, and thus learning from the South requires as well defamiliarization *vis-à-vis* the imperial South, that is to say, *vis-à-vis* all that in the South is the result of the colonial capitalist relation. Indeed, you only learn from the South to the extent that the South is conceived of as resistance to the domination of the North, and what you look for in the South is what has not been totally destroyed or disfigured by such domination. In other words, you only learn from the South to the extent that you contribute to its elimination while a product of empire.

Ever since the beginning of the current decade, I have been trying to give political consistency to this epistemological orientation, by analyzing globalization as a zone of confrontation between hegemonic and counter-hegemonic projects. The South emerges thereby as protagonizing counter-hegemonic globalization, whose most consistent manifestation is the World Social Forum, which I have been following very closely.

I may therefore conclude that, as opposed to the dominant currents of postmodern and poststructuralist thought, oppositional postmodernism aims to overcome western modernity from a postcolonial and postimperial perspective. It can be said that oppositional postmodernity places itself at the utmost margins or peripheries of western modernity to cast a new critical gaze on it. It is, however,

obvious that it places itself inside, not outside, the margins. The postmodern transition is conceived of as an archeological task of excavation into the ruins of western modernity, in search of suppressed or marginalized elements or traditions, incomplete representations in particular, because less colonized by the hegemonic canon of modernity, capable of guiding us in the construction of new paradigms of social emancipation. Among such representations or traditions I identify, in the pillar of regulation, the principle of community; and, in the pillar of emancipation, aesthetic-expressive rationality. Herein lies my construction of the idea of a paradigmatic transition. I grant that, in fact, there are only post-factum transitions. While transitions are happening, the meaning of the changes occurring is ambiguous, if not opaque. In spite of that, however, it is worth speaking of transition to highlight the need of experimentation and interpolate the meaning of change, however unmanageable the latter may be. Ruins generate the impulse to reconstruct and allow us to imagine very distinct kinds of reconstruction, even if the materials available are no more than ruins and the imagination.

To a certain extent, the excavating process I propose justifies Walter Mignolo's view (2000) of my critique of modernity as an internal critique, which, because it does not step outside the margin, does not adequately incorporate the perspective of the victims of modernity, failing, therefore, to be a postcolonial perspective.²

2 While not agreeing with Mignolo's critique, I feel I have to reformulate or refine some aspects of my theoretical framework. My critical disagreement is based on four arguments.

My first argument is metatheoretical. In a relation of domination between oppressors and oppressed, the externality of the oppressed is to be conceived of only as an integral part of its subordinate integration – that is to say, exclusion – within the system of domination. In other words, in a dialectical relationship, the externality of the opposite is generated inside the relationship.

My second argument is theoretical. The genius of western modernity resides in the dialectics between regulation and emancipation, that is to say, in a dynamic discrepancy in one sole secular world between experiences and expectations. The result is a new conception of totality that includes all that modernity is and all that it is not, or is only as a potentiality. This voracity, this auto- and heterophagic hubris is what best characterizes western modernity, explaining as well why modernity has been conceived of in so many different ways, as many and as different as the alternative projects that have confronted it. Under these conditions, it is difficult to conceive of an absolute alterity or exteriority to western modernity, except in religious terms. This is perhaps why to confront religious fundamentalism you have to be inside western modernity.

The third argument is sociological. After 500 years of western global domination, it is difficult to perceive what is external to it, beyond what resists to it, and what resists to it, if resisting from the outside, is logically in transit from the outside to the inside.

Finally, the fourth argument concerns the characterization of my proposal. My proposal for the reconstruction of social emancipation from the South and by learning from the South allows for oppositional postmodernity to be legitimately conceived of as more postcolonial than postmodern. In other words, at the farthest margins it is even more difficult to

This said, I still think that some reformulation is necessary. As I refine my theoretical framework in order to deepen its postcolonial dimension, however, I feel compelled to question the dominant versions of postcolonialism. It seems, then, that I am condemned to being an oppositionist, going from the oppositional postmodern to the oppositional postcolonial.

My first point is that western modernity has been colonialist since its origin. In my description, this founding factor is not stressed enough. Furthermore, historically, I situate my characterization of modernity as social and cultural project between the end of the eighteenth and the middle of the nineteenth century in Europe. Excluded is, therefore, what Dussel (1973, 1994, 2000) and Mignolo (2000) designate as first modernity – Iberian modernity – that is precisely at the origin of the first colonial drive. If, as I have been arguing, Portuguese colonialism has very distinct characteristics from those of nineteenth-century hegemonic colonialism, my conception of modernity must include it, in its specificity, in the modern world system. Actually, as I will show further down, the specificity of Portuguese colonialism induces the specificity of postcolonialism in the geopolitical space encompassed by the former.

Second, in the past there has been colonialism, as a political relation, without capitalism, but since the fifteenth-century capitalism is not thinkable without colonialism, nor is colonialism thinkable without capitalism. In my characterization of western modernity, I have emphasized its relations with capitalism, but failed to pay attention to its relations with colonialism. Now, this needs to be done, not only to bring about strategies to analyze the South in such terms that will not reproduce its subordination *vis-à-vis* the North, but also to analyze the North in such terms that will encourage the North to reject such subordination as unfair. That is to say, the aim of the postcolonial perspective is not merely to allow for the self-description of the South, i.e., its abolishment as imperial South; it aims to ascertain as well to what extent colonialism prevails as a social relation in the colonizer societies of the North, even if ideologically concealed by the way these societies describe themselves. This analytical mechanism is particularly urgent in the geopolitical space of the Portuguese language, given the long duration of the colonial cycle, which, in the case of Africa and Asia, lasted until the last quarter of the twentieth century.

Although mutually constitutive, capitalism and colonialism are not to be confused. Capitalism may develop without colonialism as a political relation, as history shows, but not without colonialism as a social relation. This is what, after Anibal Quijano (2000), we may call coloniality of power and knowledge. As a possible characterization of colonialism, ample enough to contemplate all its many forms, I propose the following: the set of extremely unequal exchanges that depend on denying humanity to the weaker people in order to overexploit them or exclude them as being discardable. As a social formation, capitalism does not

distinguish between what is inside and outside the margin, and even if that were possible, it is doubtful that such a distinction would make any difference.

have to overexploit every worker and cannot, by definition, exclude and discard every population, but, by the same token, it cannot exist without overexploited and discardable populations. Granted that capitalism and colonialism are not to be confused, the anti-capitalist and the anti-colonial or postcolonial struggles are not to be confused either, but neither can be successfully undertaken without the other.

These two reformulations pose some theoretical, analytical and political challenges to the social theories that may want to use them. But before I go on to mention the challenges, I want to stress the oppositional nature of the conception of postcolonialism I am here presenting. As I have already said, the reformulations I propose engage in conflicting dialogue with the dominant versions of postcolonialism. In the following, I identify some of those conflicting points.

The first one concerns the culturalist bias of postcolonial studies. Postcolonial studies have been predominantly cultural studies, i.e. critical analysis of literary and other discourses, of social mentalities and subjectivities, ideologies and symbolic practices, which presuppose colonial hierarchy and the inability of the colonized to express themselves in their own terms, and which go on reproducing themselves, even after the colonial political link ends. This is a very important line of research, but if it remains confined to culture, it may run the risk of concealing or neglecting the materiality of the social and political relations that make possible, if not inevitable, the reproduction of those discourses, ideologies and symbolic practices. Without meaning to establish priorities among economic, social, political or cultural struggles – as far as I am concerned, they are all political when confronting power structures – I consider it important to develop analytical criteria to empower them all.³

The second point of conflict with the dominant conceptions of postcolonialism regards the articulation between capitalism and colonialism. The dominant conceptions tend to privilege colonialism and coloniality as explanatory factors of social relations. For example, Anibal Quijano (2000) maintains that all forms of oppression and discrimination in colonial capitalist societies – from sexual to ethnic to class discrimination – were reconfigured by colonial oppression and

3 The fact that some Eurocentric traditions – e.g. deconstruction and poststructuralism – are often too conspicuous in postcolonial studies tends to undermine the latter on the political level. To emphasize the recognition of difference without likewise emphasizing the economic, social and political conditions that guarantee equality in difference runs the risk of mixing radical denunciations with practical passivity regarding the required tasks of resistance. This is all the more serious because, under the current conditions of global capitalism, there is no effective recognition of difference (whether racial, sexual, ethnic, religious, etc.) without social redistribution. Moreover, structuralism pushed to the extreme may render invisible or trivialize the dominant forms of power, thus neutralizing all forms of resistance to them. To extreme poststructuralism, I prefer a pliable, plural structuralism, as when I identify six space-times in which are produced the six forms of power in contemporary capitalist societies: patriarchy, exploitation, unequal differentiation, fetishism of goods, domination, and unequal exchange.

discrimination, which subordinated all the others to its own logic. Thus, the fact that we were under a patriarchal society did not prevent the white woman from prevailing over a black or indigenous man. This stance parallels the classical Marxist conceptions that ascribe to capitalism and the class discrimination it produces a privileged explanatory role as regards the reproduction of the remaining forms of discrimination in capitalist societies. To my mind, even in colonial and former colonial societies, colonialism and capitalism are integral parts of the same constellation of powers; privileging one of them to explain practices of discrimination does not seem, therefore, to be adequate.⁴ For the same reason, I think it is wrong for postcolonial criticism to focus more on western modernity than on capitalism. In this regard, I suggest two cautionary measures. First, all triumphant struggles against the cultural hegemony of western modernity must be considered illusory, if as a consequence the world is not less comfortable for global capitalism; second, we must not applaud the survival of capitalism beyond western modernity, unless we are sure that capitalism has not made an alliance with a worst barbarism.

The third dimension of the oppositional nature of the kind of postcolonialism I propose concerns the provincialization of Europe, an insight of Hans-George Gadamer (1965) recently popularized by Dipesh Chakrabarty (2000). The phrase, provincialization of Europe, intends to designate the historical process – begun in 1914 and concluded by the end of the Second World War – of Europe's loss of cultural and political centrality in the modern world system and the subsequent crisis of the values and institutions that Europe has spread as universal from the nineteenth century onwards. This idea is central to postcolonialism and dear to postmodernism as well. I basically agree with it, but I suggest that the reflection it provokes calls for further probing. The dominant conceptions of postcolonialism provincialize Europe at the same time that they essentialize it, converting it into a monolithic entity that counterposes itself uniformly to nonwestern societies. Such essentialization always relies on the transformation of part of Europe into its whole. Thus, dominant postcolonialism universalizes colonial experience on the basis of British colonialism, and the emergent Latin-American postcolonialism somehow does the same, this time on the basis of Iberian colonialism. In both cases, the

4 I do not think, for example, that discrimination against women, even in colonial societies, is a product of colonialism. The importance of colonialism and coloniality to explain or understand social reality in societies that underwent colonialism is significant enough not to have to be dramatized beyond what is reasonable and may be refuted by the complexity of the societies in which we live. I do not think, for example, that class relations are always overdetermined by colonialism and coloniality, and always in the same way. Analytical tools that put in jeopardy the discovery of the wealth and complexity of societies must be avoided *a priori*. If this holds for colonial societies, it holds with a vengeance for colonizer societies. As regards the latter, it is important enough to acknowledge that, even long after it ends as a political relation, colonialism goes on impregnating some aspects of the culture, patterns of racism and social authoritarianism, and even the dominant outlooks of international relations.

colonizer is conceived of as representing Europe *vis-à-vis* the rest of the world. Now, not only were there several Europes, but there were and are unequal relations among the countries of Europe. Not only were there several colonialisms, but the relations among them were also complex; this being the case, something is surely wrong if such complexity is not to be present in the conceptions of postcolonialism themselves.

I propose, therefore, a reprovincialization of Europe that pays attention to the inequalities inside Europe and the ways in which they affected the different European colonialisms. It is important to show the specificities of Portuguese or Spanish colonialism *vis-à-vis* British or French colonialism, for they necessarily give rise to the specificities of postcolonialism in the geopolitical space of Spanish or Portuguese language, as opposed to postcolonialism in the geopolitical space of the English or French language. More important still, however, is to thematize the inequalities inside Europe among the different colonizer countries. For over a century, Portugal, the center of a colonial empire, was itself an informal colony of England; on the other hand, in the course of centuries, Portugal was pictured by the countries of Northern Europe as a country with similar social and cultural characteristics to those attributed by the European countries, including Portugal, to the overseas colonized peoples. These factors have necessarily had a specific impact on the conception of postcolonialism in the Portuguese geopolitical space, both in the societies colonized by the Portuguese and in the Portuguese society, past and present.

The provincialization, or decentering, of Europe must therefore take into account not only the different colonialisms, but also the different processes of decolonization. In this regard, the contrast between the American decolonization and the African or Asian decolonization must be considered. Since, with the exception of Haiti, independence in the Americas meant the handing over of the territories to the descendants of Europeans, the provincialization or decentering of Europe will have to imply the provincialization or decentering of the Americas, the colonial zone where there is more of Europe. Could it be mere coincidence that the postmodernist thesis is better received in Latin America than in Africa?

To conclude, the oppositional postcolonialism I support, emerging organically from the oppositional postmodernism I have been arguing for, forces us to go, not only beyond postmodernism, but beyond postcolonialism, as well. It urges a nonwestern understanding of the world in all its complexity, an understanding that will have to include the western understanding of the world, the latter being as indispensable as it is inadequate. These comprehensiveness and complexity are the historical, cultural and political ballast whence emerges counter-hegemonic globalization as the alternative constructed by the South in its extreme diversity. What is at stake is not just the counterposition between the South and the North. It is also the counterposition between the South of the South and the North of the South, and between the South of the North and the North of the North.

From this broad conception of postcolonialism, which includes internal colonialism as well, and from its articulation with other systems of power and

discrimination that make up the inequalities of the world, there emerge the tasks of counter-hegemonic globalization, which, in turn, pose new challenges to the critical theory that is being constructed, from oppositional postmodernism to oppositional postcolonialism. In fact, the challenges of counter-hegemonic globalization push beyond the postmodern and the postcolonial in the transforming understanding of the world. On the one hand, the immense variety of movements and actions that integrate counter-hegemonic globalization are not contained in the decentering forms proposed by postmodernism *vis-à-vis* western modernity, or by postcolonialism *vis-à-vis* western colonialism. On the other, the gathering of wills and the creation of subjectivities that feature collective transforming actions require that the new critical thought be complemented by the formulation of new alternatives – and this the postmodern refuses to do, and the postcolonial does only very partially.

I identify the major challenges as follows.

The first one may be formulated thus: to think social emancipation without a general theory of social emancipation. Contrary to celebratory postmodernism, I maintain that social emancipation must continue to be an ethical and political exigency, perhaps more pressing than ever in the contemporary world. Contrary to some postcolonialism, I do not think that the term “emancipation” must be discarded for being modern and western. I do think, however, that it must be profoundly reconceptualized to integrate the emancipatory proposals formulated by the different movements and organizations that compose counter-hegemonic globalization, and that have little in common, as regards objectives, strategies, collective subjects and ways of acting, with the ones that historically constituted the western patterns of social emancipation.

The challenge of the reinvention of emancipation unfolds into many others. Here, I identify only one. It consists in credibly imagining social emancipation without recourse to a general theory of social emancipation. This is a difficult task, not only because not having recourse to a general theory is a total novelty in the western world, but also because not every movement agrees that a general theory is not needed, and there is ample debate among those who do not about the most adequate formulation of the general theory to be adopted. I believe, therefore, that a first step would be to come to a consensus on the uselessness, or impossibility, of a general theory. The fact that a general theory of social emancipation carries two results that are today considered unacceptable by the social groups that make up counter-hegemonic globalization, must be persuasively demonstrated. On the one hand, as a consequence of the general theory, some social struggles, objectives or agents will be put in the waiting room of history with the excuse that their time has not yet arrived; on the other hand, other social struggles, objectives or agents will be acknowledged as legitimate but integrated in hierarchical totalities that ascribe to them subordinate positions *vis-à-vis* other social struggles, objectives or agents.

To underscore the need for such a consensus expressing a certain negative universalism – the idea that no struggle, objective or agent has the overall recipe

for the social emancipation of humanity – I have been suggesting that, in this phase of transition, what we do need, if not a general theory of social emancipation, is, at least, a general theory about the impossibility of a general theory. In lieu of a general theory of social emancipation, I propose a translation procedure involving the different partial projects of social emancipation. The work of translation aims to turn incommensurability into difference, a difference capable of rendering possible mutual intelligibility among the different projects of social emancipation, preventing any of them from subordinating in general or absorbing any other.

The second challenge consists in ascertaining to what extent Eurocentric culture and political philosophy are indispensable today for reinventing social emancipation. To the extent that they are, we need to know if such indispensability can go hand in hand with the recognition of their inadequacy, and hence with the search of an articulation with nonwestern cultures and political philosophies. What needs to be ascertained is to what extent some of the elements of European political culture are today common cultural and political heritage of the world. Take some of those elements as example: human rights, secularism, citizenship, the State, civil society, public sphere, equality before the law, the individual, the distinction between public and private, democracy, social justice, scientific rationality, popular sovereignty. These concepts were proclaimed in theory and often denied in practice; in colonialism, they were applied to destroy alternative political cultures. But the truth is that they were also used to resist colonialism and other forms of oppression. Moreover, even in the North, these concepts have been subjected to different kinds of critique, and they bear today very contrasting formulations, some more exclusive and Eurocentric than others, hegemonic and counter-hegemonic formulations, the latter being often integral part of emancipatory, postcolonial or anti-capitalist projects, coming from the South. Can these concepts be replaced by other, nonwestern concepts, to the benefit of the emancipatory struggles? I doubt that a general answer, whether affirmative or negative, can be given to this question. As a regulatory idea for research and practice in this regard, I suggest equal weight be given to the idea of indispensability and to the idea of inadequacy, that is to say, incompleteness. The third challenge consists in knowing how to maximize interculturality without subscribing to cultural and epistemological relativism. In other words, the point is to construct an ethical and political position without grounding it on any absolute principle, be it human nature or progress, since it was in their name that historically many emancipatory aspirations turned into forms of violence and atrocity, especially in the South. On the other hand, from the point of view of the pragmatics of social emancipation, relativism, with its absence of criteria for hierarchies of validity among different forms of knowledge, is an untenable position because it renders impossible any relation between knowledge and the meaning of social change. If anything is equally valid as knowledge, all projects of social emancipation are equally valid or, which amounts to the same, equally invalid.

It is within the scope of this challenge that ascertaining the inadequacy or incompleteness of the concepts of western political culture must encourage the

search for alternative concepts from other cultures and the dialogue among them. Such dialogues, which I designate as diatopical hermeneutics, may conduce to regional or sectorial universalisms constructed from below, that is, to counter-hegemonic global public spheres – what I call subaltern cosmopolitanism.

Finally, the fourth challenge can be formulated in the following way: is it possible to give meaning to the social struggles without giving meaning to history? Is it possible to think social emancipation without such concepts as progress, development, modernization? Postcolonialism has been making a radical critique of historicism. Based on what I designate as monoculture of linear time, historicism starts from the idea that all social reality is historically determined and must be analyzed according to the place of the period it occupies in a process of historical development conceived of as univocal and unidirectional. For example, in a period dominated by mechanized and industrialized agriculture, the traditional, subsistence peasant is probably considered anachronistic or backward. Two social realities occurring simultaneously are not necessarily contemporaneous.

Historicism is criticized today both by postmodern and postcolonial currents. On the one hand, historicism conceals the fact that the more developed countries, far from showing the way of development to the less developed ones, block it, or only allow these countries to tread it in conditions that reproduce their underdevelopment. The conception of the stages of development always silences the fact that, when they started their developing process, the more developed countries never had to confront other countries already in more advanced stages of development than themselves. Besides discrediting the idea of alternative models of development, or even alternatives to development, historicism makes it possible to think that the less developed countries, in some specific characteristics, may be actually more developed than the more developed ones. Such characteristics are always interpreted according to the general stage of the society's development.

Given that this conception is hegemonic, imprinted in many ways in the scientific community, in the public opinion, in multilateral organizations and international relations, it is not easy to reply to the question I have formulated, the negative answer being in this case the most reasonable. How can an emancipatory meaning be ascribed to the social struggles if the very history in which they occur lacks direction towards social emancipation?

The critique of historicism and the temporal monoculture on which it is based renders impossible a metanarrative of social emancipation (be it socialism or any other), but its goal is to make possible the formulation and prosecution of multiple narratives of social emancipation as identified above. There is no emancipation, there are emancipations, and what defines them as such is not a historical logic, rather ethical and political criteria. If there is no historical logic that spares us the ethical questions caused by human action, we have no choice but to face the latter. And since there is no universal ethics, we are left only with the work of translation and diatopical hermeneutics, and the pragmatical confrontation of actions with their results. In ethical terms, the cosmopolitanism of the oppressed can only be the result of a conversation of humanity, as proposed by John Dewey (1966).

For the past ten years, the World Social Forum has been the embryo of such a conversation.

Conclusion

Can the work of a social scientist from a colonizer country contribute to postcolonialism other than being the object of postcolonial studies? This question must be asked, given a certain nativist essentialism that often contaminates postcolonialism. If it is hard to answer the question “Can the victim speak?”, it is even harder to answer the question, “Who can speak for the victim?”. Since I reject essentialism in any version, I do not hesitate to say that biography and bibliography are incommensurate, even though they may influence each other. All knowledge is contextual, but context is a social, dynamic construction, the product of a history that has nothing to do with the arbitrary determinism of origin. Such context is of interest to us in a way that transcends by far individual issues. Two notes on the sociology of knowledge are therefore in order.

The scientific, social and cultural space of official Portuguese language bears two characteristics that grant it, at least potentially, some specificity in postcolonial studies as a whole. The first one is that, given the fact that the imperial cycle lasted until thirty years ago, there are still fortunately today, acting in this space, many intellectuals, social scientists and political activists that participated in the struggle against colonialism in its most consistent sense, i.e. as a political relation. The duration of Portuguese colonialism until the twentieth century is a historical anachronism, but it interests us today as a sociological fact, whose part in our contemporaneity is still to be assessed. In the anticolonial struggles there were important solidarities and complicities between those fighting in the colonies and those fighting in the “metropolis,” and such solidarities and the way they evolved are still to be assessed as well. While in other spaces colonialism as a social relation dominates postcolonial studies, in the space of official Portuguese language, at least as concerns Africa and East Timor, political colonialism is still crucial for understanding and explaining contemporaneity, in its broadest sense, both as regards the colonizer and the colonized society, from the State to public administration, from educational politics to identities, from social-scientific knowledge to public opinion, from social discrimination inside the countries that compose this space to the international relations among them. Put it another way, in this space, the decolonization processes are part of our political actuality, and they, too, include specificities that run the risk of being devalued or neglected, if the canon of hegemonic postcolonialism (i.e. British) manages to prevail acritically. By way of illustration, only two cases waiting for social scientists in this space. Goa is the region in the world that was subjected to effective colonial occupation for the longest, between 1510 and 1962, and also the only one that did not give way to independence (even if India thinks otherwise). East Timor, in turn, colonized for very long, semi-decolonized following the April 1974 Revolution,

then recolonized by Indonesia, finally gains independence by the sheer will of its people and with the help of an unprecedented international solidarity, in which must be highlighted the extraordinary solidarity, first of the people and then of the government of the former multiseular colonial power.

The second note of sociology of knowledge was already announced above. It concerns the challenges that the specificity of Portuguese colonialism brings and how it reflects itself in the postcolonial studies of this geopolitical and cultural space, and in a way also in the construction of the scientific community gathered together here today. I mentioned above that the conception of the oppositional postmodern I have been arguing for positions itself ideologically at the extreme margins of western modernity, even if inside them. Such positioning was perhaps facilitated by the context in which the conception was constructed, in view of the social and political reality of one of the least developed countries of Europe, a country that for a short while led the first modernity in the sixteenth century, rapidly to enter a process of decadence. If this decadence dragged along the decadence of the colonies, it also opened up spaces for colonial relationships that have little to do with those that prevailed in hegemonic colonialism. As I said above, the impact of this specificity in postcolonial studies is still to be examined. This is, to my mind, our task. It is a complex task for, no matter what theme of social research we engage in, we study it from the point of view of theoretical and analytical frameworks that were constructed by the hegemonic social sciences in geopolitical spaces other than ours. That is to say, the deficit of proper representation that is inherent to the colonized, as post colonial studies have amply demonstrated, seems to involve, in our case, both the colonized and the colonizer, which suggests the need for a new kind of postcolonialism. Be it as it may, I suspect that for a while our research, whatever the topic, will be concerned with identity. Ours is therefore the contingency of living our experience in the reverse of the experience of the others. If this contingency is lived with epistemological awareness, it may ground a new cordial cosmopolitanism, which does not emerge spontaneously, as Sérgio Buarque de Holanda wanted, but which can be constructed as an eminently political and cultural task, under historical and sociological conditions which, being proper to us, are propitious to it.

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