

# *A History that does not yet exist. Historiography and the Postcolonial Question at the Crossroads of Postmodernity*<sup>1</sup>

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## **Abstract**

This historiographical essay explores the relationship between postmodern criticism and postcolonial studies within the context of the challenges of historiography today. Starting with a reconstruction of the role of the historical discipline and historiography in the modern colonial expansion, we situate the postmodern crisis as one that centrally crosses historiographical discourses and has produced a series of bifurcations and isolations concerning postcolonial debates in the rest of the social sciences and humanities. We analyze the bifurcation produced between the field of postmodern criticism and postcolonial studies, on the one hand, and the estrangement between historiographical production and postcolonial criticism, on the other. The present article aims to offer new hypotheses that will explain the divergence between historiographical production and postcolonial studies.

**Keywords:** Historiography, modernity, colonialism, postcolonialism, postmodernity.

## **Introduction**

The relationship between the social sciences and colonialism has been explored critically in recent decades. On the one hand, as many authors have pointed out, the social sciences played a significant role in the justification and implementation of colonialism, as they were used to construct a framework for understanding the societies and cultures of the colonized peoples. Disciplines such as history, anthropology, sociology, geography, and psychology were used to justify the superiority of European culture and to categorize and hierarchize the colonized peoples based on their perceived cultural and racial differences. This led to the construction of a discourse of "civilizing mission," where the colonizers saw themselves as bringing enlightenment and progress to the supposedly inferior peoples they colonized.

On the other hand, the social sciences also played a critical role in the resistance to colonialism. Scholars and activists from the colonized societies used social sciences to critique the colonialist discourse, to challenge the stereotypes and assumptions about their cultures, and to mobilize their communities for self-determination and independence. In recent years, there has been a growing awareness of the role of social sciences in colonialism, and efforts have been made to decolonize the social sciences by questioning the Western-centric perspectives, the power relations embedded in research methodologies, and the ethical implications of research in the context of unequal power

relations.

We have to understand all this in the context of what I call the third era of decolonization. The first era of decolonization, produced between the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century, fragmented empires into minor units that inherited the project of universal empires such as the United States of America, the First Mexican Empire (1821-1823), and Greater Colombia (1819-1831). The second era of decolonization was produced between the end of World War I and the end of the Cold War (1917-1989). Those decolonization processes created new countries and societies that already had a critique of the idea of an Empire and a political commitment to the right to decolonization and self-determination. But there was still no questioning of the ways of knowing, interpreting reality, and thinking about the world. The third era of decolonization, as I propose to call it, emerges from the end of the 1980s to the present day and involves not only a critique of political or administrative colonialism but also the forms of knowledge and thought developed and imposed by colonialism and imperialism throughout the world. The resistances of this third era of decolonization show the rejection and challenge of colonialism's cultural epistemological and ontological legacy. They, therefore, contest its representations, statues, universities, and museums.

In this third era of decolonization, the social sciences and humanities have undergone a process of profound theoretical renewal. Critical thinking from the Global South has challenged the legacies of Eurocentrism, colonial projects, and the hegemony of Westernized universities. This debate has resulted from anti-colonial thinking in Africa and Asia, Indian subaltern studies, postcolonial literature, and Latin American decolonial theories. However, the field of historiography has been one of the areas in which postcolonial productions have achieved the least theoretical and methodological renewal. Nevertheless, why has no postcolonial discussion taken place within the historiographical field? How can we construct historiographical practices beyond colonial legacies and imperial projects? Critiquing universalism, historicism, and the archive were central to postmodern and postcolonial criticism. This contribution analyzes the dialogue between postmodern criticism and postcolonial studies about historiographical production.

This article aims neither to conclude nor to close the debate on the future of the dialogue between historiographical productions and postcolonial studies. On the contrary, we offer new hypotheses to explain the disagreement between the two knowledge spaces. We will investigate the consequences for historiographical productions of the emergence of postcolonial studies as a critical reinterpretation of post-structural and postmodern paradigms. Historiography quickly connected with postmodernity, developing an important legacy of debates and new historiographical productions. The same did not happen with historiography and postcoloniality, whose encounters and dialogue have yet to occur. To paraphrase Dipesh Chakrabarty, *the decolonization of historiography refers to a history that does not yet exist*.

**Social Sciences, Historiography, Modernity, and Colonialism**

As Edgardo Lander pointed out, the birth of the social sciences as disciplines of academic knowledge are closely associated with the professionalization and disciplinarization of knowledge, that is, the creation of permanent institutional structures designed both to produce new knowledge and to reproduce hegemonic narratives about the past (Lander, *Ciencias sociales: Saberes coloniales y eurocéntricos*; Grosfoguel, “Islamofobia epistémica y ciencias sociales coloniales”). In most European nations, contemporary social sciences are part of colonial expansion experiences (Walsh and Castro-Gómez, *Indisciplinar las Ciencias Sociales*). During the expansion of the Second French Empire and the French penetration of the Arab world, North Africa and the Middle East developed the French *Écoles*. Especially France or England found in the social sciences new intellectual tools with which to explain their colonial expansion (Lisa Lampert-Weissig, *Medieval Literature and Postcolonial Studies* 27-28).

The formation of the modern world system brought a whole series of new re-encounters between European societies and the peoples of the rest of the world. In many cases, these re-encounters involved military conquests and annexations. Within the European experience, we find two very different ways of categorizing the different peoples and social structures encountered in the colonial expansion (Wallerstein, “Opening up the Social Sciences”). Throughout the 19th century, people lived in relatively small communities without archives or written documents. They did not participate in a geographically far-reaching religious system and were militarily weak in European technology. These peoples were quickly incorporated into European domination and were not geopolitical competitors. Studying these peoples became the new field of a new discipline called anthropology.

On the other hand, Europeans had long had contact with other cultures called “high civilizations,” such as the Arab Muslim world and China. Europeans considered these areas “high” civilizations, mainly because they had written religious systems spread over large geographical areas and political organizations in the form of large bureaucratic empires. Between the 13th and 18th centuries, these “civilizations” resisted European conquest militarily, in many cases even dominating European territories such as Al-Andalus, Sicily, Corsica, Sardinia, or the Balkans, as well as dominating Europe’s borders, such as Anatolia, the Maghreb or the Near East. In the 19th century, these “civilizations” became European colonies or semi-colonies. The disciplines that took on the study of these societies were Oriental studies for non-Western civilizations and classical studies for civilizations considered antecedents of contemporary Western Europe, such as Mesopotamian cultures, the classical period in Egypt, Phoenician-Carthaginian culture, Greek culture or the Roman Empire until the Fall of the city of Rome in 476 AD (Goody, *The Theft of History*; Sousa Santos, *Un Occidente no occidentalista*).

Nevertheless, the great discipline of studying the past became known as history. From the 19th century onwards, this discipline dealt with modern world history. This discipline became universal. As Wallerstein has pointed out, natural history, from theology, became universal history, now also modern

(19).

According to Wallerstein, the pressure of the nascent European states led to a specific universal history within each state. It was called national history. A more or less circumscribed definition of the nation was constructed by a movement backwards in time, from the space occupied in the present by existing state borders or those under construction (19). It was handy for states because of the capacity of such discourses for homogenization and social cohesion at a time of developing national education. These national histories were especially effective for the new metropolises of Western Europe, whose rise coincided with a new world division in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The Berlin Conference of 1885, the Algeiras Conference of 1905, the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1915, and the Treaty of London would involve a whole new state reconfiguration of dissolving imperial spaces, as well as the incorporation of new colonial territories in both Africa and the Near East.

As Eloy Martín Corrales has pointed out, all this required a whole series of new national histories that would normalize and establish the geopolitical spaces that European imperialism was configuring internally and externally (“Descolonizar” 170). In addition, and according to Wallerstein, due to the way history separated itself from the humanities, literature and philosophy, the historiographical discipline was born with a vital "anti-theoretical" component typical of early historicism (19).

Since the second half of the 20th century, critical reflections on the way of conceiving the past have taken place in anthropology, philosophy, and literary criticism, but not in the field of historiography. Overcoming historicist paradigms has always occurred through the impregnation of other disciplines. Social history was influenced by sociology; cultural history by anthropology or cultural studies.; and women's history by feminist or gender studies. However, to this day, there has yet to be a theoretical, methodological, and intellectual renewal that has affected the historiographical field, highlighting its Eurocentric and Western character. Cultural studies, anthropology, philosophy, and literary criticism have displaced historiography from theoretical production. These disciplines have constituted what the Indian author Saurabh Dube has called “theoryland” (*Pasados postcoloniales* 28).

For several decades, numerous authors have pointed out the weight of colonial countries in historiographical production. Eloy Martín Corrales has spoken of the necessary decolonization and denationalization of historiography (171). Salvador Morales has proposed the concepts of historiographical nationalism (*Eurocentrismo y descolonización de la Historia* 9), and methodological Eurocentrism (22). In the face of the exhaustion of the postcolonial debate, as pointed out by authors such as Boaventura de Sousa Santos (*Socialismo, democracia e epistemologias do Sul* 22), the hypothesis that we will sustain in this article is that the emergence of postcolonial historiography can allow us to extend the cycle of postcolonial productions. To this end, this article aims to shed light on the development process of Postcolonial Studies in the context of the postmodern critique of historiography. It will allow us to understand the distance established so far between historiographical

productions and postcolonial studies.

### **From Postmodernity to Postcolonialism: Implications for Historiography**

For many authors in the Western world, the last significant intellectual rupture has come to be called postmodernity (Rosenau, *Postmodernism and the Social Sciences*; Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*; Perry Anderson, *The Origins of Postmodernity*). Nevertheless, many non-Western authors have also contributed to thinking of postmodernity as a specifically European and Western intellectual crisis. This postmodern critique gives rise to new voices from the peripheries where a new locus of enunciation emerges throughout the Global South, or anti-imperial South (Sousa Santos, *Una epistemología del Sur*). Postcolonialism and postmodernism are two distinct intellectual movements that emerged at the end of the 20th century. Still, they share some common theoretical concerns and overlaps, and both reflect, in different ways, the decline of the West, seen from within and outside.

Postcolonialism is a critical perspective that focuses on how colonialism and imperialism have shaped societies' social, political, and economic conditions worldwide. Postcolonial scholars examine how the legacies of colonialism continue to affect contemporary societies, and they are interested in understanding how power relations, knowledge production, and cultural practices are intertwined with colonial histories. Postmodern theorists argue that knowledge is not neutral but rather shaped by social and cultural factors and that no fixed or universal truths can be known objectively. On the other hand, postmodernism is a philosophical and cultural movement that challenges the idea of objective truth and reality. It emphasizes the role of language, discourse, and power in shaping social relations and cultural practices.

Despite these differences, there are some critical points of intersection between postcolonialism and postmodernism. Postcolonial scholars often draw on postmodern insights to critique Western modernity's universal claims and highlight the diversity of cultural practices and experiences. Similarly, postmodern theorists often engage with postcolonial perspectives to challenge the Eurocentric assumptions that underpin many Western discourses of knowledge and power. For example, both views are interested in understanding how power operates in society and the complex ways in which wisdom and culture are produced and reproduced. While postcolonialism and postmodernism are distinct intellectual movements, they share some common theoretical concerns and are often in dialogue with each other in academic scholarship.

According to Walter Mignolo, in his work *The Darker Side of Western Modernity*, postcolonialism is the non-Western reverse of postmodernity. According to Ramón Grosfoguel, the crisis of postmodernity and the postcolonial condition make it possible to re-articulate a discursive space around Western modernity and its constitutive colonial, capitalist and racial dimension (“La compleja relación entre modernidad y capitalismo”). These new discursive spaces call for new critical perspectives on the significant milestones of European modernity. As a pillar of the discourses of modernity, history has

been one of the most privileged fields in the crisis of modernity. For Marx and Weber, modernity, the Enlightenment, and scientific rationalism meant the world's disenchantment. Revisiting this metaphor, Mauro Vega suggests that the crisis of Western paradigms entailed the disenchantment of modernity (112), distrust, and disbelief, in Lyotard's terms (*La condición postmoderna*).

From the turn of the geography of reason as proposed by Grosfoguel, postmodernity implies the withdrawal of Western meta-narratives and cultural hegemony (“Caos sistémico”). This withdrawal, according to Grosfoguel, allows for the opening of new spaces from which new enunciations, new theoretical proposals, and new local intellectual traditions emerge in the international context. These new voices enunciated from the cultural peripheries have allowed a dialogue between frontier knowledge. This dialogue will enable us to redefine the center and the geopolitics of knowledge. The categorizations born of the postcolonial world seek to redefine the specificity of each territory, society, or culture. However, they also could establish a new global dialogue. What seems to us most relevant in this essay will be to read these emergencies in a new transit from the periphery to the center. It means reading the postmodern question from specifically postcolonial or global south readings. These readings have given rise to different re-appropriations of modernity, such as the *counter-modernity* proposed by Indian and subaltern studies or the *transmodernity* proposed by liberation philosophy and taken up by theorists of decolonial thought.

One of the first discussions in the 1990s, following the emergence of postcolonial studies and postmodern critique, was about the specific relationship between both. The first inquiries began to look at the different interpretations that the two phenomena made of each other. Also, the consequences of thinking the postmodernity and postcoloniality as interconnected processes. According to Grosfoguel, modernity constituted as colonial expansion from the 16th century onwards transfers to other territories logics of economics (capitalism), social classification (racism), the spirituality of conquest (forced spiritualities), and political subordination (colonialism, coloniality or neo-colonialism (“Caos sistémico”). If we consider, therefore, that modernity is not only a phase of emancipation for humanity but, above all, a period of colonial expansion, we would also understand that the retreat and crisis of modernity would be a retreat from its civilizational logic. This discussion on the complex relationship between modernity and colonialism has been one of the topics that, for the specific historical discussion, has produced the most confusion and opposing points of view.

Firstly, we could ask several questions about the historical relationship between modernity and capitalism. For example, to what extent is colonialism a specific product of modernity born after 1492? To what extent can there be modernity without colonialism? How would the reproduction of colonial relations in the cultural, philosophical, and epistemological spheres in the so-called postmodern era be the reproduction of colonial relations in the cultural, philosophical, and epistemological spheres? Here we can already see a second element of discussion introduced by decolonial authors concerning modernity called by Grosfoguel, “the turn of the geography of reason” (“Caos sistémico”). The

Western hegemonic tradition enunciates modernity as a global transformation of humanity, a phase of advancement and overcoming. The intellectual traditions of the colonized world define modernity as a movement of arrival, of conquest, produced by this colonial expansion. Thirdly, we would like to point out a new conception introduced by postcolonial authors, which considers postmodernity as a withdrawal.

In the same way that the Western hegemonic tradition understood modernity as a global process that affected humanity, postmodernity was also assumed to be a global transformation and not a phenomenon that explicitly affects the Western world—a phenomenon of cultural, philosophical, and intellectual exhaustion of the Western world itself. Authors from independent countries or colonial territories that emerged in the face of the postmodern retreat always found an opportunity to enunciate themselves in this retreat. According to Simon During, in his book *Postmodernism or Postcolonialism Today*:

This is that the concept of postmodernity has been constructed in terms which more or less intentionally wipe out the possibility of postcolonial identity. Indeed, intention aside, the conceptual annihilation of the postcolonial condition is necessary to any argument which attempts to show that 'we' now live in postmodernity. Postcolonialism is regarded as the need, in nations or groups which have been victims of imperialism, to achieve an identity uncontaminated by universalist or Eurocentric concepts and images. (125)

Fourthly, postmodernity also allows, according to other postcolonial authors, the rise of new modernities, so-called critical modernities, or counter-modernities born in the heat of Western withdrawal. These other modernities were taken from the margins but in a different way. Instead, they are linked through a complex transmission belt. According to Homi Bhabha, these other modernities challenge the historicism that analogically links, in a linear narrative, late capitalism and the fragmentary symptoms of postmodernity (213). Fifth, the question of common origin about postmodernity and the postcolonial question has been under-researched.

As Bhabha has pointed out, poststructuralism provided a shared site of enunciation for what would later become postmodern discourses and postcolonial studies. It de-localized the centrality of Europe and Westernism to allow the revision of the known and the renaming of the postmodern from the postcolonial position (216). In addition to poststructuralism, other historiographical products born in the heat of postmodern critique have been cultural relativism proposed by Paul Feyerabend, the microhistory of Carlo Ginzburg, *History from below* in England, or the cultural history of Peter Burke.

Sixth, it is essential to point out that postcolonial and anti-colonial or decolonial authors have always sought support from Western thinkers who are critical of Westernism. Postcoloniality maintains a dialectical, tense, and creatively contested relationship with European thinkers critical of Eurocentrism.<sup>2</sup> In the intellectual relationship between Franz Fanon and Jean-Paul Sartre, we can find this dialogue between postcolonial thinkers and Western authors critical of Eurocentrism.<sup>3</sup> Bolívar

Echevarría and Walter Benjamin, Boaventura de Sousa Santos, and the Frankfurt School, the influence of Immanuel Wallerstein's thought on Ramón Grosfoguel, or the relationship of the works of Santiago Castro-Gómez, Achille Mbembe, and Edward Said with Foucault's thought. In reality, none of these Western thinkers theorized the relationship between Western modernity and the cultural consequences of colonial expansion. They never started from the experience of the colonized, did not consider local traditions, nor did they consider the role of relative exteriority in overcoming Western modernity and its limits. On the contrary, they all remained confined to the internal critique of Europe and the West.

### **Postmodernity and Postcolonialism in a Historiographical Dialogue**

Postmodernity and postcolonialism have both contributed to a fundamental rethinking of historical writing and the production of knowledge about the past. While they emerged from different contexts and have distinct theoretical concerns, both perspectives offer critiques of traditional historical narratives and seek to open up new possibilities for understanding the complexities of the past. Postmodernity challenges the notion of a single, objective truth about the past, arguing instead that history is always contingent and constructed through the perspectives of those who write it. Postmodern historians have called attention to how dominant narratives of history often erase or marginalize the experiences of subaltern groups and have highlighted the importance of considering alternative perspectives in historical research. On the other hand, postcolonialism seeks to understand the legacies of colonialism and imperialism in shaping contemporary societies' social, cultural, and political conditions. Postcolonial historians often challenge the Eurocentric assumptions that underpin traditional narratives of world history and have emphasized the importance of examining how colonialism and imperialism have shaped the production of knowledge about the past.

Despite these differences, postmodernity and postcolonialism have much to offer each other in a dialogue about historiography. Postmodern insights into historical narratives' contingent and constructed nature can help postcolonial historians critically examine how colonial histories have been written and built. Postcolonial perspectives, on the other hand, offer important critiques of the Eurocentric biases that view much of postmodern theory and can help to challenge the notion that all perspectives are equally valid.

Ultimately, a historiographical dialogue between postmodernity and postcolonialism offers the possibility of a more nuanced and complex understanding of the past, acknowledging the diversity of perspectives and experiences that have shaped human history. The postmodern critique of historicism was central to subaltern studies, postcolonial studies, and decolonial theory, especially in the way these currents understood historiographical practice and discourses of the past. We will point to three major contributions that poststructuralism will bequeath to postcolonial and decolonial historiographical discourses: (1) the linguistic turn, (2) the critique of the archive as an institution of power, (3) and narratives of East/West antagonism.

The linguistic turn was a concept introduced by Gustav Bergman in 1964. But it was consolidated following the work of Richard Rorty in 1968, as Jaume Aurell has reported in his work (5). Although it was a strictly philosophical movement, it soon had a notable influence on the discipline of history. The linguistic turn was born during a profound crisis in the humanities. It is, in fact, a set of disciplinary crises in which different disciplines, especially anthropology, linguistics, philosophy, and literary criticism, turn to one another. The combination of different disciplines generates several potentialities. However, at the same time, it also raises new questions, such as the exhaustion of meta-narratives, which leads to new textual and literary criticism. This textual criticism has also reached historical documents and primary sources, which have become objects of textual criticism.

According to Jaume Aurell, since the rise of the so-called social sciences, historiography itself has experienced a bifurcation between a part of the discipline that remains in the field of the social sciences (economics, sociology, statistics, demography, political science) and another part of the discipline that bifurcates towards the so-called humanities (linguistics, philology, philosophy, arts, literary criticism, anthropology). In the latter field, historiography will dissolve as a field of its own and occupy a specific role within each disciplinary field. Economics and politics will cease to be the central pillars of historical discourses. Culture, ideas, and mentalities will take over the role previously occupied by politics and economics (3).

In his 1960 work *Wahrheit und Methode (Truth and Method)*, Hans-Georg Gadamer incorporates the foundations of the historical document's new textual criticism. He defines history as the historicity of the languages of the past. Gadamer thus envisages a new relationship between the text's historicity and the textuality of history. For Aurell, in these circumstances, history ceased to be the great social science in capital letters. Another major transformation produced by poststructuralism in historiographical practices has been the critique of the archive. According to Andrés Maximiliano Tello in his work "Foucault y la escisión del archivo," Michel Foucault was the first author to propose an interpretation of the archive as a device of power created for the custody of knowledge. This device would allow institutions to shape identity and agency through resources on memory, past, and culture (5).

The third contribution arising from poststructuralist critique will be the critique of discourses on the Orient as a constitutive place of the very idea of the West. This critique points out that the interpretation of the Oriental was a source of Western identity rather than an antagonistic geography. Edward Said took up this critique early on in the formation of his theses on Orientalism (43-44). In his work "Said's Foucault," Raúl Rodríguez Freire recounts how the role that Eastern societies have played in the West's capacity to define itself is questioned. According to the author, Said would be concerned with designating the forms of symbolic and cultural domination that Western power and hegemonic powers projected into the colonial world, especially the British and French colonial empires and their colonial territories in the Arab-Muslim world.

The linguistic turn, the critique of archival institutions, and the questioning of the East/West dialectic have brought about profound changes in the discipline of historiography. Since the formation of the humanities in the 19th century, nation-states have given history the exceptional quality of interpreting what had “really happened.” The crisis of the Western world, represented from the 1980s onwards in the so-called postmodernity, was to have a powerful impact on the discipline of history. Bhabha's definition of the postmodern condition has important historiographical implications that we are interested in taking up. For Bhabha, the broader meaning of the postmodern condition implies discovering that other new, dissonant, and dissident histories are being born at the enunciative limits of Western modernity. The histories of women, the colonized, minorities, bearers of policed sexualities, cultural diasporas, displaced peasants and aborigines, poetics of exile, and political and economic refugees start in the limit when finishing the history of the civilized world. According to Bhabha, the limit of Western modernity becomes a place from which something begins (21).

### **Towards a Postcolonial Historiography?**

The global disorder born of the end of the Cold War and the emergence of new geopolitical and cultural spaces draw attention to this Western retreat that we notice. According to Mignolo, the emergence of a multipolar world order unraveled multiple histories. Decolonization would imply the journey from Westernization, imperialism, colonization and Western hegemony to the era of de-westernization and decoloniality (“Westernisation, Imperialism,+” 138). However, in no case should we confuse the postcolonial historical moment, as a period inaugurated after the end of colonialism, with the exercise of producing postcolonial knowledge. For Mignolo, postcolonialism is not only a moment after the end of colonialism but also a critical position about its legacies. Postcolonial (as well as postmodern) does not imply separation but a desire to overcome, transcend and go beyond in a situation that is still colonial (32). In order to name the whole series of anti-colonial, postcolonial, and decolonial currents, the Canarian author Larisa Pérez Flores proposes the concept of postcolonial productions. This concept incorporates the set of theories, intellectual currents, and artistic and literary expressions that tried to transcend colonial and Eurocentric legacies. At the same time, they warned of the prolongation of colonial legacies beyond juridical-administrative independence.

As Dube has pointed out, the first significant task facing anti-colonial literature was the development of theories that analyzed colonial discourses. This meant examining the imperial projects that have played a key role in elaborating theoretical projects, such as historical anthropologies or ethnographic histories (5). A second task, pointed out in this case by Bhabha, was to critically review the categories with which the colonial and Eurocentric traditions had produced the tremendous historical discourses. Also, the cultural representations determined the history of colonial territories about the metropolis's history (Bhabha 211). According to Bhabha, postcolonial critique took it upon itself to denounce that forces were always unequal in cultural representation and the contest for

political authority within the current order. According to Bhabha, the historical discourses that intervene in the history of races, nations, peoples, and communities, peoples seek to normalize and justify these inequalities and normalize historical differences (Bhabha 211).

Boaventura de Sousa Santos, in a similar vein, defines postcolonialism as a set of theoretical and analytical currents whose shared origin is cultural studies but crossed with the theories of the anti-imperialist tradition, the school of unequal development, and dependency theory. These theories were also linked to the alter-globalization movements of the global South born in the heat of the World Social Forum (36). The connection between all the postcolonial intellectual currents questions the fact that the unequal relations between North and South were constructed by colonialism. Santos points out that the end of administrative colonialism did not bring the end of colonialism either as a social relation or as a form of authoritarian and discriminatory sociability (39). On the other hand, according to Mignolo, postcolonial intellectuals had to recognize that colonized societies did not start from a single dichotomy between two cultures confronting each other in colonial contact. On the contrary, there are overlapping colonial legacies that must be taken into account in new postcolonial theorizations (37), especially theorizations that claim to have a certain depth concerning interpretations of the past.

From this point, it is up to us to understand the relationship established between postmodernism and postcolonialism concerning the historiographical production that may arise from this dialogue. According to de Sousa Santos, postmodernism's critique of universalism and historicism questions the role of the West as the center of the world and, to that extent, opens up possibilities for alternative conceptions of modernities. They thus make possible the affirmation and recognition of historical differences.

On the other hand, the idea of the decline of Western modernity shows us the invasive and destructive character of its imposition on the modern world (*From the Postmodern* 40). Postcolonial productions should also be noted as narratives that intervene in two ways between the Western and colonial worlds. The first is what Sousa Santos has called postcolonial oppositional thought (47). With this concept, the Portuguese author points out the oppositional function of postcolonial discourses as critical devices with Western, colonial and Eurocentric paradigms. Before constituting social sciences with self-centered theoretical scenarios, postcolonial theorists had the function of taking a critical distance from the theoretical legacies of imperialism and colonialism in Westernized universities. This first mediating function of postcolonial production leads us to the second, pointed out very accurately by the Ghanaian-born author Kwame Anthony Appiah in his work. The postcolonial and the postmodern, when he describes postcolonial intellectuals as follows:

A relatively small, Western-style, Western-trained group of writers and thinkers who mediate the trade in cultural commodities of world capitalism at the periphery ... In the West, they are known through the Africa they offer; their compatriots know them

through the West they present to Africa, and through an Africa, they have invented for the world, each other and Africa. (119)

Theorists from countries of the Global South have sometimes projected formulations on postcolonial issues that have been constituted as an internal product of Western academic circuits. It has reproduced what they sought to confront. In many cases, intellectuals such as Said, Bhabha, and Mbembe have been very focused on academic discussions in the context of European or North American universities, sometimes with minimal contact with the cultural contexts or geo-cultural circuits that they were trying to represent. It alerts us to the possibility that certain postcolonial, Afro, Orientalist, or Latin American discourses are merely Western representations for the consumption of Western academic elites.

### **Towards a Decolonization of the Ways of Interpreting and Writing the Past**

One of the most current expressions of the cultural crisis that the social sciences are going through in these first decades of the 21st century is what we can call the malaise in the past. Modernity, colonialism, and historiography are inseparable as intellectual projects. Historiographical production has played a central role in expanding colonial powers in representing societies incorporated into the Western experience. Historiography assigned symbolic spaces and representations in the formation of the modern world from the sixteenth century onwards, especially in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The so-called crisis of postmodernity has brought to the surface all the theoretical and epistemic contradictions of a system that connected the forms of historiographical knowledge production and the forms of colonial domination. The crisis of modernity has allowed new voices to emerge. The crisis of universalist discourses and the archive, characteristic of poststructuralist philosophy and postmodern reason, allowed the nascent postcolonial studies to enunciate themselves from a strong critique of historiographical productions in the 1980s and 1990s. It has provoked an essential bifurcation between historiography and the rest of the humanities and social sciences, incorporating postcolonial and decolonial critiques.

The role of the West in world history, positivist historicism, and the archive's role in hegemonic methodologies have posed a significant difficulty in producing new non-Eurocentric historical narratives produced from the global South and the contexts of postcolonial theoretical production.

While postmodern paradigms have generated a vast literature of renewed historiographical production, the same cannot be said of the encounter between historiography and postcolonial criticism. In a way, as we have developed in the text, postcolonial studies grew out of the critiques of Westernism, historicism, and the archive produced by the authors of poststructuralism. Postcolonial historiography must be an approach to writing history that seeks to understand the legacies of colonialism and imperialism in historiography and the humanities field, which is focused on the past. It

should challenge traditional Eurocentric narratives of history and aim to give voice to subaltern groups marginalized in the production of historical knowledge.

Postcolonial historiography must recognize how colonialism has fundamentally shaped how we see the present and the past. It must seek to understand how colonialism has impacted not only colonized societies but also the societies of the colonizers. It also acknowledges the diversity of experiences and perspectives of people who lived under colonialism and sought to represent these experiences in historical narratives. One key aspect of postcolonial historiography is using alternative sources of knowledge. It allows for a more diverse and nuanced understanding of the past and can help challenge Eurocentric perspectives' dominance in historical narratives. Historians must look beyond traditional archives and written sources to incorporate other forms of knowledge, such as oral histories, cultural practices, and material artifacts, in their research. Another critical aspect of postcolonial historiography is the recognition of the ongoing impact of colonialism on contemporary societies. Historians must examine how colonialism has shaped modern societies' social, economic, and political conditions and consider how colonialism's legacies continue to impact these societies today. We need history to accompany societies and their present.

Historiography is a discipline in constant movement because the past is always thought from a present in continuous movement. This obliges us to continue reformulating the paradigms of historiographical production, the forms of interpretation and representation of history, now in a post-colonial and post-Western context. To paraphrase Marx, historians must only interpret the past, yes, but perhaps the time has come to decolonize our way of interpreting it.<sup>4</sup>

## Notes

1 This article is a publication of the research carried out as part of the project "Memoria y lugares de memoria de la esclavitud y el comercio de esclavos en la España contemporánea," funded by the Agencia Estatal de Investigación del Ministerio de Ciencia del Gobierno de España. The call granted corresponds to the year 2019, being the project code PID2019-105204GB-I00. The project has been led and directed by Martín Rodrigo i Alharilla, Professor of Contemporary History in the Department of Humanities at the Pompeu Fabra University in Barcelona.

2 The Eurocentric critique of Eurocentrism has allowed postcolonial productions to start from perspectives denouncing modernity's pathologies. When they question the theoretical foundations of modernity, postcolonial theorists find a possibility for dialogue in Western authors critical of Western culture, modernity, and capitalism, for example, with Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, Benjamin, Adorno, Horkheimer, Arendt, Levinas, Foucault, or Deleuze.

3 One of the keys to the impact of Franz Fanon's work in France was undoubtedly Jean-Paul Sartre's prologue to his posthumous work *Les damnés de la Terre* [1963].

4 The fragment is in thesis 11 of his work *Theses on Feuerbach*. It is a paraphrase of a sentence by Karl Marx. The original sentence would be, "Philosophers have done nothing more than interpret the world in various ways, but it is a question of transforming it."

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