

The unnoticed creed of “Decolonialism”

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Abstract

This essay critically examines the evolution of "decolonial" thought, showing how it moved from being a tool of denunciation to becoming a doctrinal current. The central hypothesis argues that, when repeated as an uncritical creed, "decolonialism" loses its emancipatory power and risks essentializing the Global South while reducing the West to a negative caricature. Through a comparative analysis of postcolonial critiques in Latin America, Africa, and Asia, tensions are identified between the denunciation of Eurocentrism and the danger of falling into Manichean or anti-Western visions. It is proposed that anthropology, far from sacrificing its epistemic rigor in the name of ideological activism, should sustain a critical dialogue with modernity, recovering both the emancipatory contributions of decolonial thought and the universal values of the Enlightenment tradition, including human rights.

Keywords: Decolonialism; Critical Epistemology; Anthropology; Modernity

1. Introduction

In recent decades, "decolonial" thought has gained a central position in anthropology and the social sciences of Latin America. Born as a critique of the persistence of colonialism in the structures of knowledge and power, this approach has made it possible to make visible historical inequalities, denounce Eurocentric hegemony, and open spaces for the recognition of situated knowledges and practices. However, in its evolution, part of this current has shifted from being a critical tool to becoming a rigid doctrine, repeated as a creed and used as an identity icon rather than as an analytical proposal.

The hypothesis that guides this essay holds that "decolonialism", understood as the dogmatic crystallization of decolonial thought, has diminished its emancipatory potential by falling into essentialisms that simplistically oppose a virtuous "South" to an oppressive "North". This shift not only limits the reach of academic debate but may lead to an impoverishment of intercultural dialogue and scientific reflection.

To examine this transformation, the text resorts to a comparative analysis of postcolonial and decolonial critiques in Latin America, Africa, and Asia, as well as to a dialogue with authors who have pointed out internal tensions within the current. The methodology combines three axes: critical literature review, regional comparison, and theoretical reflection. From this journey, the essay seeks to answer two central questions: to what extent has decolonial thought become an ideological creed? And what possibilities exist to recover its emancipatory potential without sacrificing anthropology's epistemological complexity?

This analysis embraces a vision of the world interconnected by a global network of cultures, where interrelations do not imply homogenization but hybridization, mestizaje, and local reinterpretation (1). Cosmopolitanism allows reading multiple cultural codes and acting with sensitivity toward difference, guided by Eduard Said's assertion (2) that no

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knowledge is innocent and that ordinary subjects are not passive but exercise creative forms of resistance in the face of structures imposed by power (3).

Within this framework, the essay proposes relocating the discussion in a critical and nuanced anthropology that maintains dialogue with modernity, recognizes the agency of peoples beyond victimization, and promotes a genuine encounter among diverse knowledges without falling into ideological simplifications.

2. Methodology

This essay is based on a critical literature review that combines three strategies:

- Comparative regional analysis: the decolonial proposals of Latin America are contrasted with African and Asian critiques of colonialism, highlighting similarities and differences in their theoretical and political foundations.
- Dialogical reading of key authors: central categories (coloniality of power, epistemic disobedience, necropolitics, subalternity) are placed in conversation with contemporary critiques that warn of risks of essentialism, dogmatism, or simplification.
- Theoretical-critical reflection: from this dialogue, an interpretative hypothesis is constructed: the transition of decolonial thought from an analytical tool to an ideological creed.

This methodology does not seek an exhaustive examination but a reflective and comparative assessment that allows rethinking the contributions and limitations of the decolonial current in contemporary anthropology.

2.1. "Decoloniality" in the Latin American Perspective

Decolonial thought has gained increasing prominence for its radical critique of the persistence of colonialism in the ways of knowing, inhabiting, and organizing the world. Although it is mainly associated with Latin America, critiques of Eurocentrism and the "coloniality" of power are not exclusive to this region. In Africa and Asia, intellectuals and social movements have elaborated, since the mid-twentieth century, profound proposals for the decolonization of being, knowledge, and culture. In Latin America, decolonial thought formally emerges in the 1990s with the work of Aníbal Quijano (4), who coins the concept of "coloniality of power" to explain how colonial logic continues to operate in the global organization of labor, knowledge, and identity.

To this initial core are added intellectuals such as Walter Dignolo (5), who develops the idea of "coloniality of knowledge" and proposes an "epistemic disobedience" against Eurocentric knowledge. Catherine Walsh (6), for her part, links critical thought with the struggles of indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples on the continent. What distinguishes the Latin American approach is its systematization around the categories of coloniality of power, knowledge, and being, as well as its articulation with social movements and the proposal for other knowledges.

2.2. African Critiques of Colonialism

In Africa, the critique of colonialism has earlier roots, directly linked to processes of political independence. Frantz Fanon, in *"The Wretched of the Earth"* (7), analyzes the structural violence of colonialism and the need for a decolonization that is not only political but existential and psychic. In *"Black Skin, White Masks"* (8), he describes how the colonized internalizes racism and disdain for his culture. Fanon, although antecedent to Latin American decolonial thought, anticipates its concern for the coloniality of being and indeed inspires authors such as Dignolo and Quijano.

This critique is accompanied by rejection of colonial languages. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o argues in *"Decolonising the Mind"* (9) that colonial domination is perpetuated through language. The imposition of English and the abandonment of African languages are, for him, forms of alienation. His proposal to write in Kikuyu or Swahili constitutes a political and pedagogical act, close to what Dignolo will call "other epistemologies".

African thought even proclaims that Western modernity was built upon the racialization of the other. Achille Mbembe identifies among colonialism's effects the capacity to decide who deserves to live and who may die, revealing colonial continuities in contemporary democracies. In *"Critique of Black Reason"* (10), he develops this concept as "necropolitics."

2.3. Asian Postcolonial Critiques

In Asia, especially in India, critiques of colonialism develop within the field of postcolonial studies, which emerged in the 1980s and 1990s. Although not self-identified as "decolonial," they share many concerns. Gayatri Spivak, in her

famous essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (11), questions the ability of Western intellectuals to represent colonized peoples without silencing them again.

Dipesh Chakrabarty proposes in "Provincializing Europe" (12) a critique of the universal historical narrative that takes Europe as the measure of all things. He argues that local histories, such as those of South Asia, must be thought on their own terms, not subsumed to the chronology of European progress. Partha Chatterjee (13) likewise develops the concept of the nation in heterogeneous times and promotes the politics of the subaltern as an alternative to Eurocentrism.

Finally, Ashis Nandy, from a more cultural and spiritual perspective, denounces in "The Intimate Enemy" (14) how colonialism not only oppresses materially but internalizes values of domination and self-denial among colonized subjects.

2.4. Global Critiques of "Decolonialism"

The critical thoughts from Africa, Asia, and Latin America coincide in denouncing the continuity of colonialism in the present and the need to revalue knowledges, languages, and local practices. All agree that political independence did not mean true emancipation and that colonial logics are reproduced in global epistemic, cultural, and political structures. Their richness lies in the capacity to dismantle Eurocentrism, make power structures and oppressions visible, and promote alternative knowledges and non-Western voices.

Global critiques of decolonialism have pointed out risks. Gustavo Lins Ribeiro (15) has noted how Latin American anthropology often reproduces Global North hierarchies, especially in academic publishing, theoretical frameworks, and the legitimation of knowledge, denouncing an epistemological dependence on European or North American schools. We should also include Marisol de la Cadena (16), who argues that anthropology has forced indigenous peoples to fit into modern categories (nature, culture, politics) that do not respond to their own ontological frameworks. Néstor García Canclini (17), although a prominent figure in Latin American anthropology, has been self-critical about how the discipline can become trapped in cultural essentialisms or "folklorization" of the indigenous, the popular, or the national.

The tendency toward moral denunciation and the ideological rigidity of decolonial discourse—projecting forms of historical fatalism or claiming a heroic past without sufficient self-critique—has been highlighted by David Scott in "Conscripts of Modernity" (18). His approach calls for alternative narratives, not only critiques, to rebuild possible futures.

More universally, Bruno Latour (19) contrasts the "decolonial" discourses that seek to completely replace modern science with alternative knowledges, arguing that the separation between nature and society, or subject and object, has never been absolute. Latour's actor-network theory allows the analysis of colonial phenomena or resistance without relying on normative categories such as "the colonial," recognizing hybrid networks among humans, non-humans, technical knowledges, and local practices. His proposal helps to examine certain radical forms of Southern thought that demand rupture instead of interconnection.

In reality, decolonial theory has sometimes deepened ethnic divisions and conflict by addressing concepts like epistemicide and other epistemologies without laying foundations for transformation toward a more just and equal global society. Meanwhile, the speeches of southern peoples translate more into demands for inclusion than into the deepening of differences (20). The radicalism of decolonial thought becomes a creed when it ignores the emergent dynamics of capitalism in/with supposedly peripheral peoples; the idealization of the precolonial as authentic; the rejection of mestizaje; and the inability to recognize the contributions of the West. With reason, Tzvetan Todorov (21) advocates moderation against totalitarianisms, both past and present, criticizing the division between good and evil. He maintains that "respecting cultures does not mean accepting everything that happens within them." Failing to recognize the limits of method and hypothesis leads to issuing falsely irrefutable conclusions (22).

Decoloniality lost its antithesis and with it its method transformed into dogma. By attempting to create a new rationality it self-generated the irrational. By conceiving science as culture (23) decoloniality turned into creed and ritual.

3. Conclusions

The analysis allows us to sustain that a significant portion of decolonial discourse has moved from emancipatory critique toward a dogmatism that essentializes the South and demonizes the North. This drift reduces the complexity of historical and cultural experience and limits anthropology's capacity to understand social processes in their plurality.

Recognizing this risk does not imply discarding decolonial thought but recovering its critical potential in dialogue with other theoretical traditions. In particular, the paper proposes:

Overcoming essentialisms that convert the South into a passive victim and the North into an absolute antagonist.

Reclaiming mestizaje, hybridization, and cultural agency as categories that demonstrate the creativity of peoples in relation to modernity.

Strengthening dialogue between local knowledges and modern science, rather than proposing radical ruptures that impoverish reflection.

Promoting a critical and nuanced anthropology capable of articulating universal principles (such as human rights) with cultural and epistemic diversity.

In short, the anthropology our time requires is not one that sacrifices the scientific method in the name of theoretical militancy, but one that assumes cultural complexity as a field of dialogue and shared construction of knowledge.

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