
Sandro Luce. Ph.D in Ethics and Political-Legal Philosophy at the Università di Salerno, where he currently teaches Common Goods of Knowledge and collaborates with the Chair of Political Philosophy. He has published several essays in journals and collective volumes and some monographs including *Soggettivazioni antagoniste. Frantz Fanon e la critica postcoloniale* (Meltemi, 2018).

Contact sluce@unisa.it

Serena Marcenò is an Associate Professor of Political Philosophy, Department of Cultures and Society, University of Palermo. She is the author of several volumes and essays, including *Critica alla cooperazione neoliberale. Resilienza e governance nelle politiche di cooperazione allo sviluppo*, Mimesis 2018 (*A critique of Neoliberal Cooperation. Resilience and Governance in Development Policies*); *Conditional Cash Transfers. Empowerment, Resilience, and Good Behaviours in Development Policies* (Soft Power, 2018).

Contact serena.marceno@unipa.it

EDITORIAL

POSTCOLONIALISM

AND DECOLONIALITY. RESISTANCE

AND COUNTER-CONDUCTS IN

THE CURRENT NEOLIBERALISM

Sandro Luce

(Università degli Studi di Salerno)

Serena Marcenò

(Università di Palermo)

Post and de-colonial studies define a huge and heterogeneous field of research, crossing several disciplines and territories. Their interdisciplinary interaction produces a fruitful and open space with vague boundaries. Divergent positions, sometimes even contradictory, different ways of being postcolonial prevent us from considering them as a homogeneous entity. However, the heterogeneity of the positions inside and across postcolonial and decolonial studies cannot be separated from a common basis, a core of concepts that move the analysis from the same starting point: the event of colonization.

In the area of postcolonial studies there are attempts to critically rethink the present, starting from the effects and legacies deriving from colonialism, which only formally ceased with the processes of national independence, and continue to be working today, albeit in different forms and a profoundly changed context. The theoretical urgency of these studies arose from the need to highlight the theoretical partiality of Western discourse and its Universals, as well as the conditions in which it has been

reproduced. Thus, not a *sui generis* critique of the West, as to its effects in term of violence and subjugation produced by a specific conception of reason, universalism and humanism. In the colonial conditions, therefore, a rift was dug that separates European ethical thought —condensed in declarations of universal rights and in aporetic and ambiguous concepts such as that of humanity— from the practical, political, and symbolic conditions in which the colonized have been thrown (Mbembe, 2006).

The epistemological question has assumed a central role, imposing the need to provincialize the Eurocentric narrative on the transition to Modernity and Capitalism, that depicted Europe as the Master-Signifier of development and historical progress, as well as the universal subject of philosophy of history (Chakrabarty, 2000). Hence the need for counter-narratives, which —as in the case of Subaltern Studies— have highlighted the limits of Western historiography based on a teleological model, which celebrates its own pedagogical and civilizing role in a narcissistic way.

Postcolonial Studies made an important contribution to the emerging of different experiences of modernization (Parameshwar, 2001), allowing not only a global and differentiated understanding of Modernity, but above all showing how modernization processes have been the terrain of struggles and resistances that have continually challenged the Western domination, revealing its European face behind its monolithic and universal image.

Decentralization and deconstruction implemented by postcolonial scholars were decisive for the challenge to modern categories and concepts such as nation, race, citizenship, identity, and for the attention paid to the foreclosure processes that invested women, represented through the *puppet of Third World Woman* by removing the spectrum of different desires and subjectivities (Levis & Mills, 2003; Loomba & Lukose, 2012; Jad, 2018; Mestiri, 2019; Mohanty, Russo, Torres, 1991; Mohanty 2003; Oyèrónkẹ, 1997; Spivak, 2008; Vergès 2019).

Decolonization infers a critique to Modernity, the deconstruction of its paradigms consolidated through the reiteration of specific power relations, showing up the subjectivities of the colonized —even from a psychic point of view, as Fanon argued— caught by colonizers' hegemonic gaze.

Postcolonial Studies worked out through a sort of *anti-systematic syncretism*. While starting from heterogeneous positions, they share some elements acting in an antagonistic way with respect to the systematizing drift of Western thought, without however merging into a single voice. They have engaged in a struggle against the *reductio ad unum* matrix of Eurocentric Modernity, without producing positions that

can be assimilated to each other. This characteristic has given rise to syncretism in subverting the universalizing rationality, without taking on a systematizing vision.

Dubois' diasporic perspective can be an example, as well as that of Gilroy's, who made the Black Atlantic —as a transnational oceanic formation— not only the experiential place of the violence suffered by Africans during the slave deportation but the unity of his analyses. A transnational and de-territorialized space that outlines a specific diasporic dimension and cultural contamination which, on the one hand, is mirrored in the 'ethnic absolutisms' of the politics identity of national orders, becoming, on the other, the metaphor of what we can consider one of the characteristic elements of contemporary global society.

The critique of colonialism assumes disharmonious and anti-systematic positions, but how do they risk falling into representational, homogenizing, nominalist, and even identity rationality, which they claim to destroy?

The risk emerges, once again and in certain respects, with the Estudios Decoloniales and the introduction of concepts such as that of *colonialidad* through which, starting from Quijano's remarks (Quijano, 1990; 2000), not only the colonies always represent the lowest step in the construction of a hierarchical system of States, but they also do so in the perpetuation —in a continuous metamorphosis— of a hierarchical organization albeit the formal independence.

Although semantically alike to colonialism and deriving from it, coloniality shows how racial and sexual classifications, economic dynamics of exploitation, centralization of the West as a place of production, and enunciation of knowledge, are firmly established into the current power relations, and constitute one of the specific elements of the global capitalism.

According to these scholars, Modernity produces a space-time fracture where the discovery of America represents the main reference of this break. The crucial event in the self-representation of Europe as a sovereign subject on a global scale, capable of affirming its political and military superiority, and above all of producing a hierarchy of knowledge that affects the ways of thinking the world.

These assumptions derive the need to deploy a strategy of disobedience towards the consolidated Western knowledge, thanks to practices that push towards other "modes of life, existence, being, and thought" (Walsh & Mignolo, 2018, p. 19), which cannot be reproduced in the structure of Western domination.

Although they insist on *vincularidad*, understood as the need to expand and integrate the interdependent relationships between living beings, *decolonialidad* represents,

above all, an alternative and antagonistic way to the Western one, capable of rediscovering and reactivate an autochthonous identity, and ancestral knowledge, in order to achieve complete emancipation from the Western model of modernization and development. An alternative understanding of Modernity—in some aspects, quite similar to the Postcolonial Studies' proposals— based on a dualism that constantly reproduces an ineluctably excluding relationship with otherness.

The centrality recognized to living beings, the insistence on praxis as a conflict time, and, at the same time, as the construction of the very meaning of decoloniality, up to the strong and continuous defence of the environment and the territory, doubtlessly constitute remarkable aspects of this line of thought. The risk inherent in their proposal, however, stays on conveying a new identitarianism of subalterns through which the identity again falls to an appropriative logic by reactivating a way of representing otherness within the Western discursive strategies (Moreiras, 2001). The risk is the revival of the dichotomous and hierarchical logic of modern political concepts, of their aporias and traps, which had already been the object of the Dependency Theory and Philosophy of Liberation: colonized vs. colonizer, centre vs. periphery, development vs. underdevelopment, etc. In order not to get trapped in an identity thought with essentialist connotations, critics should reactivate processes in which otherness, instead of being hypostatized through archaic and immutable figures, should be understood as the becoming of multiple uniqueness, opening a radical crack in the wall of representative thinking able to destabilize and subvert it.

However, the aim of this work is not to face questions and themes within the post-decolonial debate, to which we dedicate some essays in “Notas y discusiones” section (Ascione, Biondi, Luce, *infra*, p. 295-326). Rather, our purpose is to verify how useful these critical studies are for understanding current political and social dynamics, and their capability to offer perspectives, categories, and methods which—as Sandro Mezzadra pointed out— constitute an important archive to be combined and hybridized with “other archives, perspectives, and conceptual languages”.

Such a process of contamination can be productive—from a theoretical point of view— since it allows above all thinking of today's postcolonial condition as a part of current capitalism. Gender and feminization issues, population movements, racism and de-racialization processes, pandemic, economic, financial, and environmental crises, activate processes of reciprocal signification within the sphere of current postcolonial capitalism (Aung, 2018; Mezzadra, 2011; Mitra, Samaddar, Samita, 2017; Samaddar, 2018); a space of production and reproduction that can be described—as Chakrabarty

proposes in the interview he gave us— as a new *planetary dimension*. He argues that “we have even moved on from the world-historical phase we used to describe by the word ‘globalization’”, and we are living “on the cusp of the global and the planetary” where “democratic forms of management invented over the last couple of centuries are failing to function, and authoritarian and impatient forms of struggle [...] are capturing people’s imagination” (*infra*, p. 51).

New shapes of accumulation outline streaks between spaces of inclusion and exclusion that lead us to reflect on the “planetary conjuncture” (Chakrabarty, 2009, p. 199). Such a conjuncture tells us of the gap between geological eras and human chronology, how civilization deployed along with increasingly high-energy consumption, exploitation of the planet’s resources and dispossession of human beings, and how today’s environmental crisis is unevenly spreading on the planet. It tells us of *surplus lives* that Capitalism can manage through “development policies” that serve to stem the dangerous effects of the unfair distribution of wealth beyond Western borders (Duffield, 2007).

As Sajeva highlights about the monetary metric used to value nature, we are dealing with processes of ‘capitalisation’ of nature, rhetorically envisaged as an ecological defence tool. A question that addresses one of the hot topics of environmental and development policies: to what extent some of the practices and keywords such as those of sustainability, but also of empowerment, resilience, etc. respond to logics and market mechanisms and top-down technocratic responses.

These are all issues that require theoretical and political reflections to open up new battlefields rethinking the possible ‘positioning’ of subjectivity, that link and recombine their differences through heterogeneous connections going beyond any re-emerging binarism. Following this direction, Gibran Bautista y Lugo outlines the limits of the critical historiographic perspectives of the center-periphery model, as well as the approaches centered on the agency of subordinate subjects, without understanding the dynamics that framed their histories. He addresses the limits of Latin American particularism, and proposes a set of reflections that serve as the basis for a story that moves away from the presumption of individual or collective identities, and instead focuses on action, practices and experiences as diachronic dynamics of the configuration of the social.

Baccelli’s analyses on the conquest of America show us how the reduction to a homogeneous unity doesn’t work even in the case of Bartolomé de Las Casas, who was defined by Robert Young as the founding father of anti-colonialism. Baccelli shows us all the ambiguities of Las Casas’ positions, his commitment, practical and theoretical,

to support of indigenous peoples which, although permeated with an evangelical paternalism, represents one of the first attempts to recognize the colonized peoples' forms of life, questioning colonizers' domination and violence.

Enriching the debate, Irrera proposes the category of 'extractive body', taking up some of Mbembe's considerations on the universalization of the black condition, and combining them with the Marxist schema on primitive accumulation and the Foucauldian notion of biopolitics. A fruitful propose to rethink the black condition, beyond the dimension of the neoliberal government's exploitation, not falling back into the victimization devices of humanitarian rhetoric and its identity hypostatization. A way to think of forms of subjectivation and narratives that reveal black alethurgies and their heterogeneity, opening the space to new possibilities of de-territorialization and resistance.

The "impossibility of representing", as Crippa argues, show us how the phenomenon of hybridization and cultural appropriation works as a tool for the construction of collective national identities in the postcolonial era, and the contribution of Cultural Studies in observing the storytelling on "reverse racism" starting from same specific case studies. The plurality of points of view that we present in this issue of *Soft Power*, closes the circle of reflection with Preite's analysis of the connections between evolutionism, colonialism, and social sciences. The naturalization of historical and social processes, and in particular the idea of adaptation that is at the basis of today's building-resilience policies, assumes evolutionism as a model for the processes of subjectivation, implying a constant adaptation to the environment as an improvement. Social sciences apply the natural model of evolution as a way to legitimize Western domination, using the economic mechanisms of exploitation as a kind of re-naturalization and justification for new forms of colonialism.

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