Global connections, anti-colonial discourse, and multi-scaler divides

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Keynote

Anti-colonial social science thought is part of a clutch of epistemic-ontological perspectives such as indigeneity, endogeneity, Orientalism, Eurocentrism, postcolonial and decolonial. Given the many versions of this perspective, this paper uses anti-colonial as a generic term. While searching for new ontological-epistemic positioning to create alternate theories of modernity, these perspectives highlight methodological issues organising 19th century social sciences and explore the tools needed to explicate colonial-capitalist interests in knowledge-making. The following maps through a historical methodology the five trends that have emerged today.

The proto-history of the theories of colonial modernity lies in the interventions made by organic intellectuals such as Jose Rizal (1861–1896) from the Philippines and Dadabhai Naoroji (1875–1917) from India. These early forays consolidated themselves in the 1940s and divided themselves into liberal and Marxist perspectives that argued for a need for sovereign/self-rule in knowledge production. They demanded a new model of economic and political development – that of 'autarky', an import substitution industrialisation. In the 1960s and 70s the liberal perspective was adopted by countries from Asia and Africa. They invested in intellectual infrastructure – institutions of teaching, research, and publication for supporting human resources that could frame autonomous social sciences. They formulated a theoretical and methodological perspective termed indigenous or indigeneity to produce relevant social science knowledge by scholars. 'Indigenous' social sciences postulated the following methods: a) the use of local sources and local languages; b) research by and for natives/citizens/insiders; c) aligning to nationalist agendas; and d) engaging with local philosophical and cultural traditions to create alternate social sciences. But by the late 1970s and 80s, there was a slow decline of the non-aligned/third world movements (Patel 2021, 2021a).

In the 1980s and 90s, when the new bipolar world order came to be constituted, a renewed effort to create a critical anti-colonial social science emerged once again. These interventions combined Marxist scholarship with structuralist, post-structuralist, and deconstructive positions to present, once again, tools to critically re-examine colonial/imperial knowledge and the nature of modernity in the ex-colonialised countries and thereby reframe global social theory. Below I briefly narrate the concerns structuring five distinctive trends of social theory in this domain.

Anti-colonial Theory: Five Trends

First, in North and West Africa, there developed a Marxist perspective to re-orient the received indigenous approach. Initially, scholars asked questions regarding the limitations of the indigenous perspective in terms of its methods of study: can one generalise from local sources and local languages that are restricted to ethnic groups across other groups within the nation-state, the region, and the continent? And are folk songs, myths and/or other oral traditions adequate representations of contemporary culture(s) and can this frame the constitution of sociological theories? Soon, there developed a substantive critique that extended the above-mentioned interventions and presented a novel way to comprehend them. Developed by the Benin philosopher Paulin Houtondji (2009), it argued that the term 'indigenous' had colonial moorings and was conceptualised within European African Studies programmes and assumed European methods of studying the 'other'. This perspective, according to Houtondji, was ideological because it was objectified and promoted a partial understanding of the 'other'. He suggested that not all resources in local languages or native/insider research or searching for philosophical traditions based on ethnic cultures can yield good practices for constituting autonomous and scientific social sciences of Africa. Scholarship in Africa, Hountondji contended, needs a new perspective which he termed endogenous.

This approach did not reject the use of local or native insider knowledge but suggested a need to include methodological protocols that helped to identify and recognise oral traditions that may have relevance. These, he contended, need to be interrogated in systematic scientific ways such that these can present new hypotheses or a theory. Houtondji argues that scholars should first assess the processes that reorganised and erased the many memories of cognitive thought in Africa, such as forced migration and slavery, before identifying such sources for investigation. He argued that local sources might have been overlaid by the objectifications made by colonial authorities in distinct historical times, and if accepted, these would become ideological. He also maintained that critical scientific rationalities had not developed within African knowledge traditions to interrogate such local knowledges and thus comprehend its contemporary relevance. Without these, it would be difficult to separate the ideological from the scientific. In these circumstances, a search for pre-colonial local knowledge and cognitive traditions can only be possible, if at all, within marginal cognitive traditions whose practices were not tainted by colonial knowledge. Houtondji argues that unearthing these and interrogating them with scientific rationalities is particularly important in today's context – the late 1990s, given that contemporary African knowledge fields were characterised by academic dependencies, which he called 'extraversion' (externally produced knowledge). The latter was defined as a process by which knowledge fields are circulated and reproduced in the periphery by the metropole as academic tourist circuits (Houtondji, 1997).

As against the above, another pathway, the second, was established with the publication of a series of 12 edited volumes in the 1980s to 90s in the field of history by the Subaltern Studies scholarship. These volumes argued that Indian liberal and Marxist historiographies based on nationalist-indigenous thought reproduced bourgeois colonial categories in their historiographies. The subaltern scholars presented to the world a new methodology to deconstruct colonial archival documents in order to comprehend the dominant/hegemonic colonial and nationalist knowledges. They used the Gramscian Marxist legacy that took credence of the significant role played by the peasantry in expressing a new epistemic voice. As a first step, they suggested the need to critique liberal and Marxist historiographies that highlighted the politics of the British-educated middle-class interest-group politics, which projected its nationalism as anti-colonial. Instead, they argued this group of elites, together with the other groups such

as landlords/moneylenders and businessmen, wanted a share of political power in the colonial state and thus colluded with the colonial state.

Consequently, subaltern scholarship termed Indian nationalist historiography elitist because it did not analyse the anti-colonial protests of the 'subalterns' – groups of peasants, tribes and informalised workers who rebelled and resisted the colonial authorities but were made invisible in history writing. They contended that liberal and Marxist historians argued that these groups were pre-political and that because their resistance was not articulated in class terms nor did they manifest class solidarities, these were not actors who defined anti-colonial movements. As against this, Ranajit Guha (1982) and his colleagues presenting the subaltern argument contended that the protests by these subalterns were indeed political. They argued that though their voices expressed non-class consciousness, this does not imply that they were voicing pre-colonial capitalist primordial identities. Subsequently, subaltern scholarship has analysed the various fragmented expressions articulated by the subalterns in and through religious idioms, in songs and ballads and has assessed how their community identities of kin/sub-caste/caste or tribal groups have helped these groups to forge new identities. This scholarship has presented a new methodology of interrogating archival documents and has mined popular beliefs, folklore, and rumours to explain the political logic of such religious-political assertions during colonial and post-colonial/nationalist times (Patel 2021a).

One arm of subaltern scholarship also found resonance with postcolonialism enunciated by a group of West and South Asian migrant-scholars in the USA who made contributions in the field of Comparative English Literature. The latter contended that during the 18th and 19th centuries, the West had created and consumed an imaginary Orient to perpetuate its discursive power through literature and language (Said 1978). This position, the third one, asserted that Orientalism was not only a field of knowledge or a discipline, or a set of institutions, or a corporate institution which primarily studied oriental societies and their cultures within Western universities, but rather it was a mode of thought based on a particular epistemology and an ontology that divided the Orient from the Occident. Following Foucault, postcolonialism declared that knowledge-power combined to produce its objects of study as a discourse and that this episteme resisted change and transformation because of its linguistic constitution. Subsequently, in this scholarship, there were no phenomena outside of language; thus, language, according to the postcolonialists, defines the character of Orientalism and produces the Orient as an object of knowledge and establishes its outcome in terms of the relations of power. Postcolonial studies, in this sense, is a radical methodology that questions both the past and the ongoing legacies of European colonialism to undo them by interrogating their epistemic authority based on institutional power. Scholars using postcolonialism have redefined politics as critiquing fields of knowledge, as 'theoretical practice', a methodology that can transform relations of power within knowledge through its deconstruction. A section of the subaltern scholars affiliated themselves with postcolonialism and argued for a radical critique of the discipline of history, given its dependence on the archives as a method of documenting the processes of change. Thus, if literature/language is the site of power for literary scholars, the colonial archive is the site of power and authority for these postcolonial subaltern historians (Patel 2021a).

The fourth pathway was developed with the enunciation by Anibal Quijano (2000), a Peruvian sociologist, of the concept of coloniality. This shifted the discussion to an assessment of the colonial experience in Latin America. The concept of the coloniality/coloniality of power combine, in new and radical ways, the mid-20th century project of conceiving an ontological-epistemology of colonialism by integrating it with an alternate political modernity. Quijano follows up the work presented by dependency theorists, world system school, early Latin American historians and the contemporary Marxist scholar Samir Amin to argue for the importance of querying Eurocentric assumptions regarding modernity to map its alternative(s). He constructs his argument through the Marxist historical sociological method, as he maps the growth of colonialism through the trade circuits constituted by Iberian capitalism with the

Americas from the 15th century and integrated later with Africa at the beginning of slavery in the 16th century. For Quijano, this model of colonial capitalism – land appropriation, resource extraction and in-migration – was first institutionalised in the Americas. Over time, he argued it had become a global cognitive model. The latter, he argues, was reproduced simultaneously in Europe and Latin America in the form of Eurocentrism, whose assumptions are "a peculiar dualist/evolutionist historical perspective" (Quijano 2000, p. 556).

Quijano suggests that these assumptions of Eurocentrism formed the basis of the European scien-tific-technological development during the 18th/19th centuries and were imbricated in many other theo-ries of universal history and culture, which influenced the formation of the social sciences in the late 19th century. Gradually, Quijano argued, it formed the contours of an ideology and of a diffuse common sense that has seduced differently the distinct and varied populous of the world it has encountered in covert and overt ways. Quijano also highlights the need to know how power embeds itself within scien-tific knowledge. While he contends that it is necessary to develop methodologies to unravel the conse-quences of what has occurred – e.g. his theory of coloniality which examines how values and norms are institutionalised in everyday life, within the family system and marriage alliances, within sexualities, in education, its pedagogies and its philosophies – it is also necessary to continuously deconstruct its re-lationship with the making of knowledge because methodologies also may become embedded in ideo-logical positions and can serve dominant interests. Consequently, both theories and methodologies need constant scientific interrogation, even if these have emancipatory origins.

The fifth trend, decoloniality, emerged within the Latin American Studies Programme in the USA. It draws on Quijano's concept of coloniality of power to present a worldwide perspective that argues that the discursive circle of colonial/capitalist modernity, of the duality/binaries of 'I' and the 'Other', was initiated in the 16th century and this form spread itself around the world. It came to be institutionalised when the twin processes of the expulsion of Jews and Muslims from Spain and the elevation of Western Christianity to religious dominance led to an early racial classification. Following Quijano, decoloniality theorists argue that the American continent became the first contact zone and battleground for deploy-ing Eurocentric ideas of civilisation, evangelisation, empire, racial difference, and subalternisation of the knowledge of the colonised. It presents a repertoire of methodological concepts, such as Occidentalism (the formation of specific forms of racialised and gendered Western selves as the effect of Orientalist representations of the non-Western Other); the colonial difference (the epistemic division of modernity from coloniality and its use to create further divisions and differences in knowledge); and imperial dif-ference (the downgrading and hierarchisation of European others, for example, the Ottomans, the Chi-nese or the Russians) to assess and examine the constitution of the 'Other' in European and North American fields of knowledge – in social sciences but also art, literature and aesthetics. It argues for a need to excavate alternate epistemologies, thus the use of the term decoloniality as a perspective which is not tainted by Enlightenment thought. In this formulation, its key theorist, Walter Mignolo (2007), suggests decolonial scholars can articulate their novel perspectives by using the methods of border epistemology, de-linking and pluriversality to create alternate knowledge.

Similarities and Differences in Anti-colonial Theory

As mentioned above, global engagement with anti-colonial/imperial social science perspectives is a re-cent development. Additionally, much of this discussion globally has been restricted to postcolonial and decolonial perspectives. As against this, I have argued above that there are more versions of this per-spective and that these have a long history stretching back to the late 19th century and that its many

versions could be divided into two phases. In order to push this discussion further, I suggest that it is imperative to ask two questions: a) what new perspectives regarding the ontological-epistemological do these offers to social sciences, and b) what lessons can one draw from its contemporary critique of dominant/hegemonic perspectives.

To answer the first query, it is important to identify the strategies that these perspectives present. They affirm the methodological assumption that the knowledge of their 'social' has been constituted within colonial/imperialist knowledge processes and represents dominant/hegemonic perspectives. Consequently, it is argued that there is a need to debunk the knowledge-power relationship before an alternate theory of modernity is constituted. Understanding colonial/imperial geopolitics thus becomes a prerequisite to assessing both the theory of politics of knowledge production and modernity. The contemporary critique of Eurocentrism is a starting point for building an ontology from an anti-colonial perspective. This implies, first, a shift from linearity and theories of evolutionism to an assessment of colonial/imperial spatial connections that organise the flows of commodities, ideas and ideologies and fields of knowledge between metropole(s), semi-peripheries, and peripheries of the world. Second, it also implies a move away from a hierarchical theory of difference of 'I' and 'Other' into a new theory of difference that explores and displaces the binary of domination-subordination as theorised in exploitation, discrimination, exclusion, and marginalisation for an alternate ethical vision wherein difference is conceptualised outside colonial-capitalist hierarchies.

As is noted above, contemporary anti-colonial/imperialist social sciences have used the methodologies that have combined structuralism, post-structuralism, deconstruction with dependency theory, world system analysis together with a critical Marxist historical sociology to interrogate Eurocentrism's attributes. Consequently, these have argued variously that dominant/hegemonic social sciences are a) ethnocentric – these projects present the European experience of modernity as an ideal-type, b) that these universalise European historical and cultural patterns of modernity and thus promote path dependency, c) sometimes reconstruct partially and sometimes efface non-European history in order to reproduce it through binaries that include racist, caste-ist, ethnics, gendered and other categories of hierarchies, d) divide and create boundaries and borders between social sciences, and e) promote an Orientalist way to look at the non-European world.

Given the tenuousness of these discussions, it is not surprising to note that there is tension and dissonance between the above-mentioned trends in terms of theoretical and methodological issues. This tension is best seen in the way decolonial scholars distinguish their work from postcolonialists which they argue originates in Western experiences of modernity and is implicated with Eurocentrism. Eurocentric assumptions it is contended were coproduced within Europe and Latin America and spanned across the world through migration, slavery, and other communicative media. These found legitimacy and defined the protohistory of Western ideologies and, in turn, impacted knowledge fields as capitalism spread across the world. Consequently, the decolonial perspective contends that indigenous thought of the original inhabitants needs to be the voice to constitute new epistemic moorings.

Despite these articulated differences these two positions have more in common than sets them apart. Rather, there are more fundamental divisions between them and the Marxist scholarship that has intervened in this intellectual domain than between decoloniality and postcolonialism. The differences mentioned above between Marxists and the others are not only about theoretical perspectives but also about methodologies being used – those used in humanities as against those of the social sciences. Postcolonialism and decoloniality hardly ever engage with analysis and data that organise the field of political economy. Also, they have tended to distance themselves from the diachronic perspective (for decoloniality, this is true as practice more than perspective). Additionally, both tend to be anti-foundationalists. This attribute raises problems for social sciences, for it becomes difficult to study the 'real world' if 'true' descriptions are completely rejected.

This brings me to the second query; the contemporary understanding of anti-colonial thought in the various peripheries of the different metropoles. Today within social sciences, colonialism has been used as a paradigmatic concept even though early literature has highlighted the differences between English, French, Dutch, and German colonialisms. However, with the introduction of Anibal Quijano's theory of Iberian colonialism and in context to the debate generated with the introduction of subaltern scholarship, it is possible to now distinguish between two systems of colonialism: settled and non-settled colonialism. These interventions, by generating a critique of received dominant social science scholarship on and in these regions, have gestured to the need to examine the tools needed to comprehend the very long history of Iberian colonialism as against that of British colonialism and as well comprehend the distinct articulations of colonialism/imperialism in its institutions, ideologies and practices as these have organised forms of exploitation and oppression in context to slavery on the one hand and casteism and other hierarchies on the other.

Scholars studying settled colonialism have deconstructed current dominant perspectives to suggest that successful settler colonies had tamed the original inhabitants considered 'wild'. Only recently has this repression and co-option, which sometimes have led to the complete extinction of original inhabitants through genocide, been theorised in comparative terms. If racialisation influenced by Christianity was the key to this process of imposing colonial modernity, it had uneven articulations in various regions of settler colonialism. With distinct state bureaucracies, legal mechanisms and ideologies colonialism and imperialism left uneven footprints. Additionally, historians have argued that as colonialism spanned over 400 hundred years in new ways, the processes of colonial modernity also changed and led to further distinctions within and between them. In non-settled colonialism, a sustained drive for material exploitation led by the native elite at the behest of the colonial elite has led to the subordination of the colonised through the reconstitution of local hierarchical systems, such as caste. In some of these regions, pre-modern theories of difference and hierarchy have legitimised the colonial-capitalist processes. Obviously, further research needs to be done to assess these trends within various regions of the world.

A second argument is regarding the role played by nationalism, the nation-state, its institutions, and the nationalist elite in promoting the Eurocentric episteme. It was first mentioned by the subaltern theorist Ranajit Guha (1982), who criticised nationalist historiography for its European understanding of the political domain and consequently presented subaltern consciousness in all its complexity as an example of an alternative way of thinking of modernity. Recently drawing from Partha Chatterjee's theory of derivative nationalism, Patel (2017) has contended that the two assumptions of Eurocentrism – linearity and binaries – embedded themselves within nationalist social sciences as these engaged with western social sciences in India. The latter were divided into traditional and modern social sciences or those dealing with the arenas of the private and public domains, that is, sociology and anthropology as against economics and politics. Thus, she argues that after independence, methodological nationalism reconstituted the epistemic assumptions of Eurocentrism.

Third, recent literature emerging from the analysis of the eastern parts of Europe and Russia as well as the 'Far East' have asked whether the assumptions of colonial modernity have also impacted social sciences in these regions and, if so, what new perspectives can be posited regarding modernity. Contemporary scholarship suggests that this is true of a large part of the world where colonialism had little to no footprint, such as Russia or Thailand, while Manchuria was colonised but not all of China, and Japan was both a colonised and a colonial country. Recently, the historian of the 'Far East', Tani Barlow (2012) has argued for a theory of colonial modernity that can assess multiple and overlapping projects of contemporary colonialism and imperialisms. The contemporary circulation of commodities across the world has established and reshaped styles of governmentality, juridical norms, administrative innovations, and intellectual discourses, thereby legitimising domination-subordination structures defining

the metropole(s) with the peripheries actualised first during colonialism. These flows define all spaces of everyday life, even those which have not experienced colonialism.

Fourth, Houtondji (2009) has drawn our attention to the reproduction of Eurocentrism through institutions of higher education. His work suggests a need to comprehend the way knowledge circulates through its products: journals and books, curriculum and pedagogies which are reproduced through knowledge institutions, such as publishing houses, libraries, the internet, research councils and academies, research institutions and universities. Extraversion (externally produced knowledge) can be noted in attributes such as the lack of financial and human resources in universities that can promote research specialisations; small presence of the publishing industry, little to no infrastructure to house libraries and archives; and an absence of philosophical location of concepts and their scientific understandings. Such scientific cultures promote dependencies between the core and the periphery, he contends.

Lastly, what do these interventions imply for social theory? Assessing the above trends presents an opportunity to understand the ways and manners in which these can help in organising social theory and comprehend the diversities of perspectives constituted within colonialist and imperialist spatial flows. Colonialism has framed knowledge territories of distinct cognitive geographical circuits connecting the various metropoles with their semi-peripheries and, in turn, their continuously expanding peripheries. These divisions have restricted debate and deliberation in terms of borders and have been sustained by divided academic language communities. These multiple and overlapping knowledge projects connect the global, regional, and national and local academic communities and simultaneously reflect the ways in which these circuits reproduce themselves across various scales in unequal and uneven discourses of modernities. Given this, a universal theory, a 'one fits all' position, has become dysfunctional. Scholars need to be sensitive to these histories and sociologies organising knowledge territories.

Today, we are integrated by many complex cognitive circuits within the overall divisions created by their colonial and nationalist histories, their geographies and the unequal distribution of income, privilege, status, and power. These circuits have created differences and variations within the global world system consequent to the way events and processes have been organised and sociabilities constituted. Subsequently, it is imperative to understand these cognitive geographies and the system that reproduces them and to do research through these varying scales, bringing back local and regional scholarship within the global as it connects the scholarship of organic intellectuals with formal knowledge.

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