



To Undiscipline Knowledge: Toward a New Geography of Reason

Sonia Dayan-Herzbrun

ABSTRACT: The social sciences were founded at the height of the Euromodern era when the belief in infinite expansion coexisted with the willingness to enclose, categorize, and lock up a large part of humanity. The invention of the social sciences was closely linked to this enterprise of disciplinarization of spaces and of populations which accompanied the expansion of capitalism and colonial conquest. Stigmatized, dominated, and colonized groups were constituted as objects by social scientists who considered themselves as pure subjects, and concealed the conditions under which they undertook their research and prohibited the colonized from expressing their own subjectivity. Colonization also imposed a binary cartography of the world and a geography of reason with obligatory references and strict disciplinary divisions. There are many ways to decolonize knowledge, but they remain marginal in a world where white male supremacy is also epistemological. The rejection of disciplinary decadence implies not only a critical but a metacritical gesture, and the refusal of the imperative of objectivation and non-engagement.

KEYWORDS: antisemitism, colonialism, decolonialization, disciplinary decadence, geography of reason, subalternism, undisciplining

An article by Lewis Gordon appeared little more than a decade ago in French calling for “*Décoloniser le savoir à la suite de Frantz Fanon*” (“Decolonizing Knowledge after Frantz Fanon”).¹ Fanon, after W.E.B. Du Bois, is among the first group of thinkers to show to what extent Western philosophy and human sciences bore the mark of coloniality. Since then, we have started to understand better how the decolonization of knowledge would lead to outlines of a

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new geography of reason that would connect instead of splitting, delimiting, and hierarchizing thought.

Social Science between Capitalism and the Colony

Let us begin with a return to the founding moment of the social sciences as we have come to know them, at the height of what is called “modernity.”² Reading Max Weber has taught us that the entry into the Euromodern era was intrinsically linked to the development of capitalism with all its corollaries—in particular (Euromodern) science and the instrumental rationality that puts calculation at the center of all intellectual processes and all political projects. Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno showed that although this instrumental rationality allowed for an incredible development of productive forces, technique, and technologies—in short, that it gave the feeling of being able to control the world—it was also a bearer of dehumanization, destruction, and death. Rationality, promoted by the much-vaunted European Enlightenment, had as a dark side the transformation of human beings into things (reification) or animals (animalization) treated at best as beasts of burden, or, at worst, doomed to be exterminated as pests, insects, or small mammals.³

The Euromodern era was equally marked by the belief in infinite expansion with the conquest and enslavement of distant worlds—namely, colonization.⁴ At the same time, and in a manner that was both dialectical and complementary, this expansion undertook to enclose, categorize, delimit, and lock up the rest of humanity. Locking them up in asylums and prisons through inventing madness and criminality as categories, as Michel Foucault has shown, included locking people up in factories and domestic spaces.⁵ The advent of bourgeois society was indeed marked by the exclusion of women from the open space of the street. Thanks to the work of historian and linguist Éliane Viennot, we now know that bourgeois modernity, far from ensuring progress for the condition of women, has, on the contrary, deprived us of rights and freedoms.⁶

The invention of the human sciences, then of the Euromodern social sciences, is closely linked to this enterprise of control and disciplinarization: disciplinarization of spaces and disciplinarization of populations, which accompany the expansion of capitalism and colonial conquest. One of the earliest efforts to organize these sciences emerged in 1799, within a learned society, *La Société des Observateurs de l’Homme* (“Society for Observers of Man”), which brought together naturalists, physicians, and “explorers.” It included the navigator Louis-Antoine de Bougainville, for whom, as they themselves claimed, nothing human was foreign. The objective of this group was clearly drawn. It

was, as one of its members, Aubin-Louis Millin—an archaeologist, librarian, and naturalist—wrote: “man followed in different scenes of life.” “Man,” he added, “will become the subject of work that is all the more useful as it will be free from all pressure, prejudice, and above all from any systemic spirit.”⁷ Seeking knowledge of man was a secularizing effort; it escaped the control of the Church and was no longer limited to philosophical reflection. But very quickly it also diversified and transformed into science.

The Société des Observateurs de l’Homme launched global expeditions with an interest in “exotic” foreigners such as the Chinese A Sam, a trader from Nanjing, China, who was somehow stranded in Paris.⁸ More decisive was the discovery, in a forest in the department of Aveyron in Southern France, of a so-called “feral” child who was given the name of Victor. The “alienist” (today psychiatrist) Philippe Pinel wrote a report on this “wild” child, who was supposed to have been abandoned by his parents and then raised by wolves. But it was above all the memoir written by Jean Marc Gaspard Itard, a physician at the Institut des sourds-muets (“Institute for the Deaf and Mute”) in Paris, who attempted to socialize Victor and teach him some language, that was a landmark.⁹ From the almost daily observation of Victor over many years, Itard drew conclusions that would be foundational for what became sociology, which definitely broke with the belief in the existence of innate human nature. In his preface to the memoir, Itard wrote:

In the savage horde the most vagabond, as well as in the most civilized nations of Europe, man is only what he is made to be by his external circumstances; he is necessarily elevated by his equals; he contracts from them his habits and his wants; his ideas are no longer his own; he enjoys, from the enviable prerogative of his species, a capacity of developing his understanding by the power of imitation, and the influence of society.¹⁰

Society makes humanity. The savage is no longer the inhabitant of the forest, which represents a first and “natural” stage of humanity. It is the one who developed outside of all human society and therefore was not humanized by it. The observation of man became the study of societies.

This is how societies, social facts, and social phenomena, turned into objects of knowledge developed by those who posed as knowing subjects.¹¹ The development of capitalism, on the one hand, and colonial or imperial enterprises, on the other, gave rise to unforeseen and disturbing encounters: with working (and dangerous) classes of people;¹² also with exotic figures emerging from what Joseph Conrad called the “heart of darkness” in his novel bearing

that title. These were the groups that researchers would have to “board” (“qu’il va falloir arraisonner”), to use the particularly apt expression Nicole-Claude Mathieu used for their attitude toward women.¹³

The study of society was turning into science. Humanity witnessed the birth and development of social sciences that fit or attempted to fit into the framework of modern science. Many practitioners successively or concurrently took physics as their model, as Claude-Henri de Saint-Simon encouraged them to do, and then not only clinical but also experimental medicine; Émile Durkheim refers explicitly to the physiologist Claude Bernard. Designed to discipline societies—that is, to tidy them up and administer them—they themselves were being disciplined. This process brought together two separate instances: on the one hand, the knowing subject (authorized to act); on the other, the object or objects. This double separation (among the disciplines and between the subject and the object) is given as a pledge of scientificity and is marked by the injunction to objectivity, which will be modulated into objectification.

What it Means to Be an Object

The privileged objects of the social sciences are the groups or the situations that are problematic, that are perceived as problems. “Being a problem is a strange experience,” wrote Du Bois, the first Black American to earn a doctorate from Harvard University. He could also have written that *being an object* is a strange experience, since he had pointed it out, by designating it as a “particular sensation,” as “double consciousness,” “this feeling of always being observed through the gaze of others.”¹⁴ What happens when those seen as problems to society and as problems to be solved for the community of “social scientists” come to analyze not only their own situation, but also their relationship to those who made them into pure objects—including characters, psyches, social logics, and worldviews? What happens when those who supposedly can only be deciphered by the external subject (first and foremost the male, bourgeois, white subject), become armed with his knowledge? I am thinking here, in a list that is far from exhaustive, of Blacks, Jews, women, colonized people, and migrants.

When I write “Blacks, Jews, women, colonized people, and migrants,” it is to recall once again the reflection inaugurated by Du Bois in *The Souls of the Black Folk*. It is also to recall that of Adorno, who co-edited with Max Horkheimer and Samuel H. Flowerman the *Studies on Prejudice* (focused on antisemitism), from his clearly themed situation as a German Jew in exile in a country the language and customs of which were not his, where he felt and knew he was stigmatized.¹⁵ “German words of foreign derivation are the Jews of language,” Adorno wrote in *Minima Moralia*.¹⁶ Sociologist Viola Klein, a Jewish feminist in exile,

also analyzed the so-called “feminine character” from her own situation.¹⁷ In all three cases, what caused the problem was Negrophobia, antisemitism, or sexism, and therefore the societies which conveyed these thoughts, forms of pseudo-knowledge, and the affects and behaviors that accompany them, not the groups concerned.¹⁸ In their works, reflexivity replaced the subject/object separation.

Regarding the colonized, Talal Asad showed as early as 1973, in his introduction to *Anthropology & the Colonial Encounter*, that even if anthropologists have generally not been directly and voluntarily at the service of the colonial enterprise, anthropology itself was rooted in an unequal confrontation between the West and what, in the terminology of the time, was called the Third World, which is equivalent to what we today call the Global South. This “encounter” allowed the West “access to cultural and historical information about the societies it has progressively dominated, and thus not only generates a certain kind of universal understanding, but also reenforces the inequalities in capacity between the European and the non-European. . . .”¹⁹ The very structure of colonial power made it possible “to work in the field” and study, in complete safety, societies that were subject to economic, political, and intellectual domination. However, anthropologists seemed to be blind to the real conditions (or situation of colonial domination) in which they carried out their research, and they obscured them and did not take them into account. They therefore neither perceived what was happening with their position nor understood that what they observed was precisely a society under colonial economic, political, and epistemological domination created by those relations of domination. Their approach bore the mark of the absence of reflexivity, which does not consist of vain introspection, as Pierre Bourdieu states in his *Pascalian Meditations*, but in a decentering, a putting into perspective, an explaining of the place from which the observer looks and theorizes.²⁰

Under these conditions, knowledge is never neutral, nor even neutralizable. For that, the observer would have to become an object of observation and theorization—for example, as a white man from the North or the West. By posing as a pure subject in front of what is only an object, or what is to be objectified, the anthropologist and the sociologist transform the process of studying nonwhite people into “objectification.”²¹ Extending Asad’s reflection, Hamid Dabashi posits that the subjugation of non-Europeans by Europeans has transformed non-Europeans into simulacra of human beings, with them only becoming human again as objects of anthropological investigation and as subjects of colonial rule, but never as knowing and acting subjects in history. In the best cases, they achieve the status of indigenous informants.

Not only were their desires and their ways of life destroyed to be replaced by others, but “the whole of the world and of the consciousness of this world, in which their desires and their ways of life were located, was erased from the map of the earth.”²² As also shown by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, the Kenyan author not only of the superb book *Decolonizing the Mind*, but also of globally influential novels and plays, colonialism prohibits the colonized from expressing their own subjectivity, their own way in the world. Their own experience, their history, their symbolic universe, will at best be devalued, primitivized, or translated into languages, reference systems, and symbols that are not theirs.²³ The end of direct political and economic colonization and the transition to so-called postcolonial states does not change much in this state of affairs, even if the language used makes it more complex and less readable.²⁴

Colonial Geographies

Colonization imposed a cartography of the world divided first between Europe and the rest, and then, overlaying it, one that was increasingly normative, fixed, and limiting.²⁵ Arbitrary borders were imposed on colonized peoples according to the interests of the colonizer and organized according to binary, orientalist, and hierarchical patterns: North/South, West/East. This line of borders and orientation that puts Europe (then Euro-America) at the center of the world (we go “down” to the South, we “lean” toward the East, or “head” toward the West when it comes to taking on the role of conquerors) were accompanied by a geography of reason. The latter also fixed a division-, cutting-, erasure-map. This geography of reason, with its obligatory references and its strict disciplinary divisions, has asserted itself as a discourse of truth, or at least as the only legitimate avenue of access to knowledge.

The first attempts to break away from this hegemonic relationship, to use Gramscian terminology, failed to break with it. Despite its proponents’ desire to highlight the hegemonic discourse carried by the elites or the dominant, Subaltern Studies has not totally succeeded in shedding this hegemony. As Ramón Grosfoguel concluded, it ultimately produced a Eurocentric critique of Eurocentrism, fitting into the paradigm of postmodernism and granting epistemological privilege to those he nicknamed the Four Horsemen of the European Apocalypse: Derrida, Foucault, Gramsci, and Guha, of which only one, Indian scholar Ranajit Guha, is non-European.²⁶ Moreover, subalternity, and therefore “subordinates,” are always defined from the position of the dominant. The definition is purely negative and is marked by deprivation, absence, and exclusion. The gaze focused on “subalterns,” which induces subalternity, is always directed from “North” to “South,” from “Center” to “Periphery,” and

so on. It therefore remains dependent on colonial geography, the standards of which limit imagination. Ultimately, subalternism functions as a self-fulfilling prophecy that never opens up to an act of emancipation—let alone liberation. The subordinates only ask for the right to speak. They do so in ways that draw only from the consecrated Western authors. They thus demonstrate that they also can speak well in the dominant language with a command of its concepts and theoretical tools.²⁷

Despite its incontestable contribution of identifying hegemonic language, subalternism, which does not get rid of binary oppositions (in particular, East/West, Third World/First World), seems to have internalized the colonial geography, which, as Dabashi writes, draws a “hidden map of racially profiting and ideologically foregrounding a fictive white supremacy, on the basis of which ethnographic discourses narrate a pre-historic origin for the white man’s destiny as the master of the universe.”²⁸ Rather than subalternism, it would therefore be better to speak of *subalternization* as a process to be deconstructed and put in check. It was such a deconstruction that Edward Said produced in *Orientalism*, showing not only that the East was created by the West, and that the West existed only through and against the East, and by analyzing the processes of otherness by which the figure of the Oriental was constituted.²⁹

To follow the geography of reason as it calcified in coloniality, one comes up against a double pitfall. In the first place, that of the separation between subject and object, with the privilege attributed to a subject who is supposed to know and who is supposedly neutral—and whose domination of class, gender, and race is concealed. The second is what Lewis Gordon calls “disciplinary decadence,” which, with positivism, began with the separation of the social sciences from philosophy.³⁰ The result was a philosophical discourse increasingly disconnected from what the social sciences produced, and further division between the human and social sciences, with an increasingly wavering theoretical framework.

Undisciplining Knowledge

Far from constituting progress, the strict disciplinary division that has been accompanied by the establishment of institutions and places of power and control of research has hindered knowledge. It should be added that these institutions provide access to employment and award status and financial resources in the manner of patrimonial regimes distributing prebends. One must please them or try to trick them in order to live, survive, and obtain minimum recognition. Knowledge has trouble finding its value in such terms. But is it still even a question of seeking to know or to understand?

As soon as we are dealing with human beings and their phenomena, disciplinarization at best only allows access to bits and pieces, to fragments of knowledge. Totalization, or the synthesizing of these fragments, takes place elsewhere, frequently using commonplace or purely ideological statements. One of the consequences of this “disciplinary decadence,” which has been accompanied by an exponential growth in media discourse, is that today it is the self-proclaimed “experts” who have seized the monopoly of the interpretation of social and political phenomena offered by the media.³¹ These avowed experts, often in the form of pundits, are mostly left to themselves to offer totalizations and pseudo-theorizing from very poorly constituted elements, stemming from preconceived ideas, pseudo-knowledge, and prejudices. Their purpose is, in the end, to consolidate the powers and policies in place. Foucault had shown the link between knowledge and power. Today, we could speak instead of a link between no- or pseudo-knowledge and power. There is a chance that the work of knowledge will regain its critical force. We still need to give it the means to develop and be heard. Rather than calling for checks and balances, we should imagine counter-places—an “epistemic mangrove.” As Olivier Marboeuf writes, “We will not be able to decolonize if we do not take the white masters to the mangroves, where we will have to speak another language from other bodies.”³² This necessary escape, or, to use Édouard Glissant’s terminology, this “detour,” only makes sense when followed by a return. Or rather, we should not stop coming and going between the mangroves and the inhabited shore.

How then can we attempt to reconcile knowledge, in its full and strong sense, with its power to transform the world “toward liberation”?³³ First, by reintroducing the dimension of experience, as the Fanon of *Black Skin, White Masks* and the second-wave feminists did.³⁴ Universalization, or positing the universal as a horizon but never as a given, is only possible from an anchoring in experience that is both individual and immediately common, experience intended for sharing in a reciprocity of “I” and “we.”

This means that we state that we analyze the position, the situation, from which we strive to constitute a piece of knowledge and to transmit it to others. This process is particularly difficult when one is convinced that to express ideas is to do so from the point of view of “science,” as if there were a point of view of Sirius. There is a fine line between a sincere and legitimate concern for rigor and method, and the claim to science, which confers authority and power, locked in as it is in its disciplinary straitjacket.³⁵ The emergence of other modes of expression and writing becomes essential, or rather the mixing, the fusion, of these styles of speech that the academy has tried to separate. Examples abound, from the memoirs of Frederick Douglass, to the seminal 1892

book published by African-American feminist Anna Julia Cooper, *A Voice from the South: By A Black Woman of the South*.³⁶ In the texts of Édouard Glissant, the work of thought is developed at the very heart of a poetics nourished by the experience of the Caribbean. A whole perspective on the production of knowledge emerges from the theatrical endeavors of Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong’o, who, in the village of Kamirithu, in Kenya, created, with the villagers, a theater where their stories and their struggles were told. The villagers, men and women, were both co-authors and actors of a show that took place in the very center of the village, in their own language and with their own body language styles.

More traditional academic research has much to gain from breaking out of the confinement of the androcentric and colonial library. The passage through the experience of subjects who freed themselves from the grip of hegemonic thought allowed new concepts and new theorizations to emerge. The deconstruction, for example, of essentialized notions such as that of a feminine nature or of a feminine character, and the elaboration of the concept of gender, as a “political category,” opened up extremely rich perspectives, with contemporary writers and theorists taking into account plural masculinities or the need to articulate, in each specific analysis, gender with class and race, which is referred to as intersectionality.³⁷

Reluctance to accept these new paradigms remains widespread. With regard to race, for example, the use of the concept of “whiteness,” not to describe pigmentation of the skin but, instead, a position of power, is still too often taken for a form of “anti-white racism.” Because whiteness doesn’t have to be seen, white doesn’t have to be a color.³⁸ To speak of “whiteness” is to make visible what is denied from a hegemonic standpoint and to force those who might claim it to move away from “color blindness.” This white color, which is also a metonym of a relationship of social and economic domination, is not only political. It is also symbolic and intellectual.³⁹ For “white” researchers, accepting this designation is accepting becoming objects under the gaze of those they are believed to observe and taking this gaze into account, becoming reciprocally subjects and objects for each other.

One of the very first to highlight this need was Paul Rabinow. A young ethnologist sent to an “exotic” terrain (a small Moroccan town, but it could have been a Parisian suburb), he immediately had recourse to an “informant.” This conformed to the still-current practice among ethnologists and anthropologists of calling on indigenous informants who are responsible for making possible access to supposedly raw information, which only the social scientist can interpret. The informant functions like the “fixer” of journalists in a foreign country or in a war zone.⁴⁰ Rabinow reveals the underside of the cards. His

work shows how an informant, his own in this case, this intermediary, considered essential between the investigator and the interviewee but often hidden in the publication of the final results, becomes part of the knowing subject. He develops knowledge about the anthropologist who employs him. For example, he thinks he observes in the anthropologist an unacknowledged sexual need and provides him with the services of a prostitute. He transmits information to the anthropologist which, far from being crude, is strained by an interpretive theory. We do not know exactly what type of codes to which this theory relates. The informant is offered as the true originator of the theory, except that, in most cases, it is a sham theory, a theory that reflects the prejudices and presuppositions of the investigator. Caught up in his fantasy of omnipotence and all-knowing, and finally fooled by the informant who is playing with him, the investigator believes he has discovered what in fact he was already projecting onto his “object.”

Rabinow did not continue falling for this trap; he gave up exotic lands and informant services. The lucidity with which he relates his experience as an ethnologist in Morocco—a sort of ethnology of ethnology—should persuade his readers of the importance of replacing the unilateral subject/object relationship with the reciprocity of gazes and speeches. On the horizon of this project, we find the requirement—simultaneously ethical, political, and epistemological—of the construction of a common world, where, as Hannah Arendt showed, the places of observer and observed would be interchangeable. However, in the current state of political and epistemological power relations, full humanity, *humanitas*, includes only the western white man, while the rest of the “featherless bipeds” are *anthropoi*, only objects of knowledge: anthropological.⁴¹ “In this logic, it is clear that the informative anthropologist or the indigenous anthropologist is not part of *humanitas*.”⁴² To build a common mode, to make a real world, we must give up an organization of knowledge—ways of doing, of speaking, of classifying, of symbolizing—of Euro-American knowledge/power and proceed with deliberate speed to what is akin to a true Copernican revolution. It is in reciprocity, listening, and looking back on oneself critically, that the work of knowledge will draw new strength.

We will then see that the common world is by no means homogeneous. On the contrary, it is plural, colorful, rich in its differences and its roughness. It is also a world of doing. We can only contribute to its permanent construction if, by deviating from the imperative of objectivity and non-engagement (which masks all of the political implications of supposedly purely scientific statements), we articulate knowledge in relationship to an explicitly political project of emancipation, then liberation. The African American singer Paul

Robeson, who chose the path of internationalism to fight against segregation in the United States, thus linking the cause of Blacks to that of the other oppressed and “damned of the earth,” wrote in June 1937: “The artist must take sides. He must fight and choose between freedom and slavery. I made my choice. I had no alternative.”⁴³ Is there an alternative for those who are trying to get to know their social world better? The reinvestment of action requires the mobilization of diverse knowledge, and therefore that we go beyond disciplinarization.

According to Lewis Gordon, what characterizes disciplinary decadence is first the fetishism of method, which results in methodology becoming more important than the development of knowledge.⁴⁴ A first sketch of this approach was developed by the epistemologist Paul Feyerabend, who, outlining an anarchist theory of knowledge, stated that the only principle which does not hinder progress in knowledge is “all is good.”⁴⁵ Feyerabend attacked the collusion between the State and science, but his archive remained entirely colonial, even though he proposed to put not only myth, but also religion, magic, and witchcraft on an equal footing with what is called science as sites of the rational, and he denounced the destruction of the intellectual independence of non-Western societies by “the Western invaders.”⁴⁶ Like the big names, particularly in functionalist anthropology, to whom he exclusively referred, he spoke in terms of “traditional” or even “primitive” societies and of “African myths.” Non-Europeans remained fascinating objects certainly, essentialized without history and without proper words.

Gordon, in a decolonial approach, reverses his gaze, and shows that Western thought is itself fetishistic and idolatrous. Each discipline, closed in onto itself, evaluates others from its own point of view, as if it were a divinity on its own. Neither interdisciplinarity nor transdisciplinarity provides an effectual solution, although he prefers the latter. Rather, Gordon calls not for the abolition of disciplines, but instead for a “teleological suspension of disciplinarity”—that is to say, the implementation of the will to go beyond disciplines to generate knowledge. In such a suspension, disciplines can regenerate, transform, meet, and finally exchange and co-produce.

The decolonial paradigm enacts this type of teleological suspension. It braids and interweaves what, in the eyes of academic thinkers, would be philosophy, art, social sciences, corporeal aesthetics, poetry, literature. Its implementation supposes an approach that is not only critical but also metacritical, which makes visible what, in its coloniality, hegemonic knowledge, even in many critical forms, was blind. Horkheimer defined critical theory as a critical theory of itself. The metacritical work does not end once colonial foolishness is revealed in the eyes of those who accept facing their nakedness. There remains

the gender dimension, which also requires a whole undertaking of deconstruction, highlighting, and re-elaboration. Freed, at least in part, from the weight of “white privilege,” the colonial paradigm must confront the question of the masculinity of the knowing subject, including when that subject claims to be free from the grip of the coloniality of knowledge. In other words, the decolonial paradigm, which undertakes a process of liberation, must open up to decolonial feminism.

This approach is not entirely new. The way has been paved by the first generation of the Frankfurt School. In Horkheimer and Adorno’s already mentioned five volumes of *Studies on Prejudice*, all the extant disciplines of the human and social sciences were summoned successively and simultaneously, as in “constellation” (according to the concept common to Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno). The link with literature, the arts, and philosophy was made in the texts that the two coordinators of the project wrote at the same time—in particular, *Minima Moralia*, *Aesthetic Theory*, and *Dialectic of the Enlightenment*.⁴⁷ The object of this collective and non-disciplinary reflection, even if the various collaborators were personally attached to a particular discipline, was, we should remember, the demonstration not only of the fascist potentiality, through studies of antisemitism, but also of other forms of stereotypes, and the constitution of society as a problem. We see there a series of complementary views on fragmented and administered society. Horkheimer and Adorno, themselves victims of the phenomena they were analyzing, were in a way precursors to the kaleidoscopic approach to which the philosopher José Medina invites those who think from a non-hegemonic position: “The expression of oppression gives the possibility of going beyond the dominant point of view as it is received, to know its limits and shortcomings, occasionally to develop an alternative point of view, a consciousness dual, and even a kaleidoscopic consciousness, able to hold together and simultaneously maintain multiple perspectives.”⁴⁸

Said, for his part, had shown, especially in *Culture and Imperialism* and in *Reflections on Exile*, how it is possible to link not only geographical territories, but also disciplinary ones.⁴⁹ This is precisely what he did by enveloping discursive productions apparently as distant from one another as literary texts, political speeches, “scientific” writings, even an opera like that of Verdi’s *Aida*, in the concept of “Orientalism.” In France, the birthplace and geographical root of the positivist tradition, this non-assignment to the canons of disciplines has most often been misunderstood or condemned. Said also proposed “travel theories.” These “traveling theories” transform and evolve when they are reappropriated in circumstances and places from which they were not

originally forged. It is by no means a question of molding oneself artificially into intellectual frameworks formed in the North or the West, but rather, and here I am extrapolating from Said, to proceed to what, following Édouard Glissant, we call creolization.⁵⁰ This opened the way first to postcolonial criticism, then to the decolonial paradigm.⁵¹

By Way of Conclusions

From the outset, the social sciences had given the illusion of an opportunity to master the world and improve the lives of the human beings who inhabited it. We are living in times of great turbulence which need to be thought of in their specific dimensions. As globalization and neoliberalism selectively abolish borders but increase bottlenecks and inequalities, it has become necessary to undiscipline. The time has come to replace borders with connections, circulation, and networking, and to promote polyphony and polyfocality. The fetishism of method and scientificity has ended up being an obstacle to the cultivation of knowledge. Rigor can be combined with imagination and constant reflexivity. Such a project is also entirely political. The hierarchical and competitive organization of the disciplined research community has diffused an ideology of fragmentation and individual competition. The rejection of disciplinary decadence, in all its decolonial scope, implies on the contrary the reinvention of the collective, because we only know in common, in circulation, through listening and exchange. It therefore constitutes a major political gesture, like a moment of what Eboussi Boulaga calls “dedomination,” toward liberation, which remains the utopian—but not unrealistic—horizon of knowledge.

Translated by Lewis R. Gordon

Sonia Dayan-Herzbrun is Professor Emerita of Political Sociology at Paris Diderot University-Paris 7. A globally renowned intellectual, she is editor of *Tumultes*, an interdisciplinary journal focusing on contemporary political thought. She has been a member of the National Interdisciplinary Network on Gender and a member of the French Commission for UNESCO, where she was also vice-president of its Social Sciences Committee. She is a recipient of the Frantz Fanon Lifetime Achievement Award. She can be contacted at soherzbrun@yahoo.fr.

ENDNOTES

1. Lewis R. Gordon, “Décoloniser le savoir à la suite de Frantz Fanon,” trans. Sonia Dayan-Herzbrun, *Tumultes* 31 (2008): 103–23.
2. Although I focus here on a Euromodern genealogy and critiques of it, the reader should bear in mind that critical work on society can be found in antiquity and analyses similar to those found in the Euromodern era (from the 15th century onward) are evident in the thought of Ibn Khaldûn (1332–1406); see his *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, Abridged Edition, trans. Franz Rosenthal (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015).
3. The title of Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno’s work, *Dialektik der Aufklärung. Philosophische Fragmente*, published in 1944, first questions the Enlightenment (*Aufklärung*) and not reason. It is available in English as *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. Edmun Jephkott (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007).
4. These themes are at the center of the work of the Latin American “modernity-coloniality” network established at the end of the 1990s. For these thinkers, it is 1492, the date of the “discovery” of the Americas following the Reconquista of the Iberian Peninsula, that constitutes the major turning point and not the period of the Enlightenment and the end, after nearly three centuries, in France, of the Old Regime.
5. See Arlette Farge, *Vivre dans la rue à Paris au XVIIIème siècle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1992).
6. See, in particular, volume 3 of his important intellectual study, *La France, les femmes et le pouvoir* (“France, Women, and Power”). The 3rd volume is called *Et la modernité fut masculine* (“And Modernity Was Masculine”), (Paris: Perrin, 2016). See also Joan W. Scott, *Sex and Secularism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018).
7. Cited in Jean Copans and Jean Janin, *Aux origines de l’anthropologie française. Les Mémoires de la Société des Observateurs de l’Homme en l’an VIII* (“On the Origins of French Anthropology: The Memoirs of the Society for the Observers of Man in Its 8th Year”) (Paris: La Découverte, 1978), 9.
8. This was an organization of archaeologists, historians, linguists, philosophers, physicians, and writers founded in France in 1799 under the leadership of John de Maimieux and Louis-François Jauffret.
9. J. M. Itard, *An Historical Account of the Discovery and Education of a Savage Man, Or of the First Developments, Physical and Moral, of the Young Savage Caught in the Woods Near Aveyron, in the Year 1798* (London, UK: Richard Phillips, 1802), available online at: <https://archive.org/details/anhistoricalacc00itargoog>.
10. Itard, *An Historical Account of the Discovery and Education of a Savage Man*, 4–5.
11. At this level, the masculine prevails. And this masculine is, of course, white and bourgeois.
12. See the study that has become a classic by historian Louis Chevalier, *Classes laborieuses et classes dangereuses à Paris pendant la première moitié du XIXe siècle* (Paris: Plon, 1958), available in English as *Laboring Classes and Dangerous Classes: In Paris During the First Half of the 19th Century* (New York: Howard Fertig, 2000). The precursors of sociology,

who also cultivated philanthropy, were going to make their debut through studies of these populations. The first of them was undoubtedly the physician Louis-René Villermé, with his *Table on the Physical and Moral State of Workers Employed in the Cotton, Wool and Silk Factories*, published for the first time in 1840. Villermé was also the author of reports on mortality, prisons, hygiene, etc.

13. See Nicole-Claude Mathieu, ed., *L'arrondissement des femmes: Essais en anthropologie des sexes* ("The Boarding of Women: Essays in Anthropology of the Sexes") (Paris: Éditions de l'École des hautes études en sciences sociales, Cahiers de L'Homme, 1985).
14. W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches* (Chicago: A. C. McClurg & Co., 1903), "Forethought."
15. The publication of the five volumes, sponsored by the American Jewish Committee's Social Studies Series, was completed in 1950.
16. Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from the Damaged Life*, trans. E.F.N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 2006), 110.
17. See Sonia Dayan-Herzbrun, "Être un problème est une expérience étranger: Entre Viola Klein et Theodor Adorno" ("Being a problem is a foreign experience: Between Viola Klein and Theodor Adorno"), in Eve Gianoncelli and Eleni Varikas, ed., *Viola Klein (1908–1973). Une outsider dans les sciences sociales de la seconde moitié du XXe siècle, Les Cahiers du genre*, automne 2 (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2016).
18. I do not mention Islamophobia or homophobia, but a similar argument could be made about them.
19. Talad Asad, ed., *Anthropology & the Colonial Encounter* (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books [1973] 1995), 16. The "encounter" to which I refer is, literally, between two groups or two people who recognize each other in a reciprocity that has never actually taken place.
20. Pierre Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations*, trans. Richard Nice (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000).
21. Asad, *Anthropology & the Colonial Encounter*, 104.
22. Hamid Dabashi, *The Arab Spring, The End of Postcolonialism* (London, UK: Zed Books, 2012), 51.
23. The long obscure guts of the Musée du Quai Branly, in Paris, devoted to the "primitive arts," suggest an intrauterine state of humanity and its artistic production before its true European birth. The report presented in November 2018 by Benedicte Savoye and Felwine Sarr for the restitution of African heritage asserts itself as a break with this unilateral relationship. As they say in an interview published in *Le Monde* on 30 November 2018: "What is at stake in this gesture of restitution is the deconstruction of a relationship still strongly marked by the persistent traces of coloniality that are the asymmetry, the non-recognition of others, and the absence of reciprocity. Moreover, by what cunning of the mind are we led to consider that the universal can only be played out in a Western inter-self?"

24. See Joseph Tonda, *L'impérialisme postcolonial. Critique de la société des éblouissements* ("Postcolonial Imperialism: Critique of the Dazzling Society"), (Paris: Karthala, 2015).
25. Sonia Dayan-Herzbrun, "L'État : de l'entreprise coloniale à la vision décoloniale" ("The State: From Colonial Enterprise to Decolonial Vision"), in *L'État : concepts et politiques*, Sonia Dayan-Herzbrun, Numa Murard, and Étienne Tassin, ed., *Tumultes* 44 (2015).
26. Ramón Grosfoguel, "Decolonizing Post-Colonial Studies and Paradigms of Political Economy: Transmodernity, Decolonial Thinking, and Global Coloniality," *Transmodernity: Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World* 11 (2011). Also available online in an early version dated 4 July 2008. http://www.humandee.org/spip.php?page=imprimer&id_article=111. Accessed 16 September 2020.
27. The obligatory reference here is the famous essay by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the subalterns speak?" in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, ed., *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 271–316. For an in-depth critique of subalternism, see Hamid Dabashi, *Post-Orientalism: Knowledge and Power in Time of Terror* (New York: Routledge, 2017).
28. Hamid Dabashi, *The Arab Spring: The End of Postcolonialism*, 47.
29. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1979).
30. See Lewis R. Gordon, *Disciplinary Decadence: Living Thought in Trying Times* (New York: Routledge, 2006).
31. Edward Said analyzed this growing power of "experts" at the start of the 1980s in *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World*, revised edition (New York: Vintage, 1981).
32. Olivier Marboeuf, in Leïla Cukierman, Gerty Bambury et Françoise Vergès, eds. *Décolonisons les arts* ("Decolonizing the Arts"), (Paris: L'Arche, 2018), 76.
33. Herbert Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1969).
34. See Frantz Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1952). Recent edition in English: *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove, 2008).
35. Theodor Adorno spoke of the "unquestioned authority of the authority of science," which he opposed to the (always negative) dialectic which "believes it must continue to think where its adversaries stop," in Theodor Adorno and Karl Popper, *De Vienne à Francfort. La querelle allemande des sciences sociales* ("From Vienna to Frankfurt: The German Social Science Quarrel"), (Bruxelles: Éditions Complexe, 1979), 58.
36. Anna Julia Cooper, *A Voice from the South: By a Black Woman of the South* (Xenia, OH: The Alding Printing House, 1892).
37. I am referring here, of course, to the foundational work of Joan Scott.
38. See Sara Ahmed, "Declarations of Whiteness: The Non-Performativity of Anti-Racism," in *Borderlands ejournal* 3, no. 2 (2004).
39. On this subject, see the very beautiful analyses of Patrice Yengo on *Mundele*, the equivalent of white in the Congo Basin, neither a color nor a human being, but the

- double and the phantasm of the colonist. Patrice Yengo, *Les mutations sorcières in the Congo Basin* (“Witchcraft mutations in the Congo Basin”), (Paris: Karthala, 2016).
40. I owe this comparison to the French researcher Wajdi Limam, who has the privilege of occupying the double position of researcher and man “of North African origin,” as it is customary to say. Having grown up in a suburb and said to have been underprivileged, he has often been used as part of a field of study for social scientists.
 41. Social scientists say in a more modest and enveloping way what journalists and politicians naively express: there is no full humanity except white. When the journalist Marc Semo, in a recent program on French culture devoted to the political situation in Tunisia, twice used the expression “political animal” to describe Rachid Ghannouchi, the leader of the Ennahda Party, which makes it clear its meaning is political and democratic, the metaphor is not trivial. When Donald Trump, Jr., in a post on Instagram at the beginning of January 2019, compares the wall that his father wants to build on the border between Mexico and the United States to the barrier of a zoo, all the precautions of usage cease.
 42. Joseph Tonda, *L'impérialisme postcolonial*, 213.
 43. Paul Robeson, *Here I Stand* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1998 [1958]), 52.
 44. Lewis Gordon has developed this analysis on numerous occasions. I am referring here to his article “Disciplinary Decadence and the Decolonization of Knowledge,” *Africa Development* 39, no. 1 (2014): 81–92.
 45. Paul Feyerabend, *Contre la méthode. Esquisse d'une théorie anarchiste de la connaissance* (“Against Method: Outline of an Anarchist Theory of Knowledge”), (Paris: Seuil, 1979).
 46. Feyerabend, *Contre la méthode*, 336.
 47. *Minima Moralia* and *Dialectic of Enlightenment* are already cited; Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1998 [1970]).
 48. José Medina, *The Epistemology of Resistance: Gender and Racial Oppression, Epistemic Injustice, and Resistant Imaginations* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2012), 74.
 49. See Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage, 1994) and “*Reflections on Exile*” and *Other Essays* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 2002).
 50. See, for example, Sonia Dayan-Herzbrun, “Créoliser Marx avec Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o” (“To Creolize Marx with Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o”) *Journal of French and Francophone Philosophy? Revue de la philosophie française et de langue française* 25, no. 2 (2017): 45–53.
 51. For a recent discussion with a genealogy of the decolonial paradigm from its sources in the Global South, see Walter Mignolo and Catherine Walsh, *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018).