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Reconfiguring the pathological construction of the modern subject: double consciousness as a premise in transformative social research

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Decolonial critical theory suggests that elements overlooked within the normative framework of critical theory are associated with the Frankfurt School. This paper's objective is to explore the potential of reconfiguring Frankfurian critical theory's "subject" category through a "double consciousness" lens rooted in decolonial perspectives. Starting from "coloniality," understood as the invisible structuring logic originating in the "modernity" project, this work focuses on the relationship between structures and knowledge-producing subjects in academic institutions. It addresses the colonial legacy within social research premises and discusses proposals for reconfiguring the key concept of the researcher "subject". This approach contributes to understanding colonial legacies in knowledge production while expanding analyses and interpretations of contemporary societies.

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Introduction

This text addresses the mutually determining relationship between the recognition of knowledge about social theories and the subjects who produce it¹. Grounded in decolonial theory, we assume that the social sciences, established within the framework of modern/colonial power relations embedded in the “modern project”, have led to “ideological knowledge” that disregards the “impact of the colonial experience” (Castro-Gómez, 2000, pp. 152–153). In this context, Castro-Gómez (2000) noted that postmodern philosophy and cultural studies criticized the “pathologies of Westernization” of the late 20th century. These pathologies, he argued, arise from the dualistic and exclusionary nature of modern power relations. Furthermore, he asserted that modernity “is a machine that generates otherness which, in the name of reason and humanism, excludes hybridity, multiplicity, ambiguity, and the contingency of concrete life forms from its imaginary” (Castro-Gómez, 2000, p. 145). With respect to this “ideological knowledge”, for the nascent social sciences of the 17th and 18th centuries, one of the essential elements of the project was the construction of the “modern” subject and its counterpart: the “other”. This categorical binary configuration of the subject influences contemporary social theories in their attempts to understand social formations and provide scientific explanations for their development and current structures.

Critical theory, however, is inscribed and understood as an intellectual-theoretical endeavor that extends beyond mere comprehension and explanation, aspiring instead towards social emancipation. Nonetheless, critical theory originating from Western thought, particularly that associated with the Frankfurt School, is critiqued as inadequate and biased by various currents, including post- and decolonial perspectives². These perspectives, often rooted in the so-called “Global South,” primarily argue that colonial legacies in the formation of Western social theories remain unacknowledged. That is, colonial vestiges are overlooked both in the context of European social theory and in their discursive and material impact on understanding current social formations (Bhambra, 2021; Bhambra and Holmwood, 2021; Mignolo, 2010). These theoretical currents argue that the Eurocentrism inherent in Western social theories, along with ideological knowledge, obstructs an adequate understanding of global phenomena such as inequality, oppression, and discrimination, thereby hindering generalized social emancipation processes.

In seeking answers to this constrained or disabled emancipation, this article addresses the thesis that reconfiguring the constructed alterities and differences in subjectivities could facilitate overcoming the aforementioned “pathologies of Westernization.” Specifically, this article focuses on the subjective dimension concerning the need to complement the categories of critical theory (Bhambra, 2021). Inspired by the suggestions of Bhambra and Holmwood (2021) and coincident elements in the interpretations of Honneth (2023), this article aims to deepen the effort to reinterpret one key category: the notion of the subject³. The need to reinterpret the category of the “subject” and the issue of racialized and nonracialized identities is particularly linked to Bhambra’s (2021) assertion that “[t]he issues of colonialism (...) go beyond the hierarchies of identity and representation” (p. 75). Her notion of “epistemic justice” refers to the recognition of other knowledge claims in two senses: “respect and (re)constructive response” (p. 77).

The guiding question for addressing this issue will, thus, focus on how the category of the “knowledge-producing subject” can be complemented within a social theory that enables an understanding of social phenomena in global coloniality. To address this question, the general objective is to explore the potential for complementing Frankfurt School critical theory with the concept of “double consciousness” rooted in decolonial theory. A preceding objective is to demonstrate the need to review the canon of

social theories produced by subjects contextualized and socialized in Eurocentric knowledge. This exercise emphasizes the knowledge-producing subject and a specific context in which the object of study is situated: the university as a space for institutionalized academic teaching. This work aims to contribute to the debate on reconfiguring the subject category within the critical task of understanding colonial legacies and broadening the interpretation of contemporary societies from a “double consciousness” horizon in sociological research.

The procedure is as follows: First, we briefly outline the conceptual differences in the notion of “modernity” between the Frankfortian and decolonial critical theories. Second, we introduce the relationships among knowledge, subjects, and power in decolonial thought, with a focus on subjectivation processes. Third, we explore the potential to complement the “subject” category in Western critical theory with the concept of “double consciousness” from decolonial thought⁴.

Conceptual differences in “Modernity” and their critical implications.

To contextualize the concept of the “subject,” it is necessary to locate it within the distinct starting points of Frankfortian critical social theory and decolonial theory regarding the notion of modernity. The first difference in the conceptualization of modernity lies in its temporal framework. Theorists of the modernity/coloniality network conceptualize the reciprocal relationship between modernity and coloniality as mutually constitutive. For example, during a series of lectures held in Frankfurt in 1992, Enrique Dussel (2008) asserted his central thesis that the year 1492,

marks the ‘birth’ of Modernity, although its gestation—like a fetus—requires a period of intrauterine growth. Modernity originated in medieval European free cities, centers of enormous creativity. However, it was ‘born’ when Europe could confront the ‘Other,’ control it, conquer it, and violate it; when it could define itself as an ‘ego’—a discoverer, conqueror, colonizer of the alterity constitutive of Modernity itself (p. 9).

Dussel continued: “Nonetheless, this Other was not ‘discovered’ as Other but rather ‘en-covered’ as the ‘Same’ that Europe had always already been. Thus, 1492 became the moment of the ‘birth’ of modernity as a concept, the concrete moment of the ‘origin’ of a very particular ‘myth’ of sacrificial violence and, simultaneously, a process of ‘en-covery’ of the non-European” (2008, p. 9). One of the central elements of decolonial critiques arises from this premise, positing that the birth of modernity simultaneously constitutes the birth of coloniality, understood as the hidden or “darker” side of modernity with its associated practices of exploitation and oppression in colonized territories (Mignolo, 2007). According to decolonial theory, coloniality is configured from its inception as a colonial matrix of power on the basis of structuring principles derived from a hierarchy of knowledge and being, which globally organize contemporary societies (Castro-Gómez, 2007; Mignolo, 2003; Lander, 2000). This conceptualization differs both temporally and directionally from the widely accepted European narrative, which situates the late 18th century as the “beginning of modernity” and Western Europe as the birthplace of modernity (Wagner, 1995).

Decolonial theorist Edgardo Lander (2000) referred to the aforementioned European narrative as the “master narrative of modernity,” asserting that it fulfils a specific function as a determinant in the configuration of the social sciences. In this context, the author outlines four basic dimensions encompassed by the notion of modernity:

1) [T]he universal vision of history associated with the idea of progress (through which the classification and hierarchy of all peoples, continents, and historical experiences are constructed); 2) the “naturalization” of both social relations and the “human nature” of liberal capitalist society; 3) the naturalization or ontologization of the multiple separations inherent in that society; and 4) the necessary superiority of the knowledge produced by that society (“science”) over all other forms of knowledge. (Lander, 2000, p. 22)

In alignment with Dussel and Lander, Santiago Castro-Gómez (2000), another member of the modernity/coloniality group, introduces the notion of the modernity project, referring to it as “the Faustian attempt to subject all life to the absolute control of man under the secure guidance of knowledge” (p. 146). This conceptualization implies, in turn, elevating humans to the pinnacle of all life forms on the planet and positioning scientific reason as the central pivot around which the world is organized and understood. Castro-Gómez (2000) highlighted Eurocentric rationalization and the social sciences’ framing as the comprehension of a “sterile, self-generated Europe” (p. 152). In other words, the association of the “inherent qualities of Western societies (the ‘transition from tradition to modernity’) not with Europe’s colonial interactions with the Americas, Asia, and Africa after 1492” (ibid., p. 152). For decolonial theory, a notion of modernity that ignores “the impact of the colonial experience in the formation of properly modern power relations is not only incomplete but also ideological” (Castro-Gómez, 2000, p. 152). According to the author, these are ideological knowledges originating from the newly forming social sciences in which “the colonized appears (...) as the ‘other of reason’” (ibid., p. 153). The correlation between ideological knowledge and the construction of the “colonized” as the other will be revisited in the next chapter of this work.

The above critiques of the absence of the relational–global dimension and the colonial experience in scientific notions of modernity are expanded in the works of sociologist Gurminder K. Bhambra. In her article, *Decolonizing Critical Theory? Epistemological Justice, Progress, Reparations* (2021), she questions critical theory as conceived by the Frankfurt School. She argues that such critical theory “never explicitly acknowledged colonialism or colonial histories” (p. 73). According to Bhambra, this lack of acknowledgement can be explained by the recurring notion of modernity in Frankfurtian theorizing, among other reasons, which understands it as an “unfinished project”, a notion coined by Jürgen Habermas, the influential theorist of the second generation of the Frankfurt School. His idea of modernity “represents the progressive rationalization of worldviews and modes of life”. In this sense, modernity is seen as an ongoing and incomplete process that “continually raises new questions concerning issues of domination and emancipation” (Bhambra, 2021, p. 80 referring to Habermas, 1996).

Bhambra critiqued that in this context, the colonial constitution of modernity remains unaddressed, and the subjects dispossessed and subordinated in the processes that established what is understood as “European modernity” are not afforded a place from which they can participate in the development of freedom on their own terms. This, she explained, constitutes an “epistemological injustice” (Ibid., p. 74).

Bhambra (2021) questioned the categories underpinning dominant social theory, considering them inadequate for addressing social phenomena shaped by the coloniality of power, knowledge, and being. To overcome this epistemological injustice and address the conceptual biases of coloniality, she argues, in line with Nelson Maldonado Torres (2007, in Bhambra, 2021), that modernity is not an unfinished project; rather, it is the

decolonization project that remains incomplete. Consequently, Bhambra suggested that the issue is not so much about decolonizing Frankfurt School critical theory as it is for Frankfurt School theorists to seriously engage with colonial histories in their understanding of modernity. By focusing on the “producers of knowledge” (p. 76), Bhambra highlighted the centrality of subjectivity in her analysis and how it interacts with the dimensions of coloniality in knowledge and power (Lander, 2000; Quijano, 2000).

Complementing Bhambra’s critique of Western-origin social theory is a more extensive treatment of the topic in the book *Colonialism and Modern Social Theory* by Gurminder K. Bhambra and John Holmwood (2021). This work illustrates the varied ways in which the colonial legacy is unacknowledged in the so-called “classics” of social theory, such as Hegel, Marx, Weber, and Durkheim. Bhambra and Holmwood’s book has been meticulously scrutinized by Axel Honneth, a central figure in the third generation of the Frankfurt School who has made significant contributions to the analysis of the modern subject, particularly highlighting its embeddedness in social relations characterized by recognition and disrespect. With some caveats, Honneth (2023) emphasized the critical analysis presented in the book. He even used the term *Erbsünde* (“original sin”) to describe the troubling fact that,

hardly any of the theories long considered part of the canon of political and sociological thought in Europe have attempted to understand the imperial ambitions of Western states—extending to territories in Africa, South and North America, and Asia—as a constitutive component of a primarily European mode of state politics aimed at securing existence and increasing prosperity (Honneth, 2023, p. 167).

Building on the achievements of feminist contributions to social theory, Honneth proposes a similar approach concerning possible contributions to the criticized “classical” strands from post- and decolonial perspectives. According to him, this process involves rereading social theory, adding new thinkers, and redefining its key concepts. One of the suggestions Honneth draws from Bhambra and Holmwood is to include W.E.B. Du Bois’ work among the series of sociological classics, particularly because the author “did not see racism as a challenge primarily for Black people but for the White part of the population” (Honneth, 2023, p. 176). Nonetheless, along with the necessary processes of rereading and complementing social theory with anticolonial sources, Honneth advocates for the essential task of reformulating or reconsidering the key concepts of the so-called “classics,” such as “labor” or “subject,” by deepening or complementing them with previously unacknowledged aspects and thus giving them entirely new contours of meaning (Honneth, 2023, p. 177)⁵.

From the concerns raised by post- and decolonial authors, we connect our research question to reconfiguring the “subject” category in critical theory. In this sense, it is appropriate to introduce the reading and interpretation of this category by decolonial authors who draw on postmodern philosophy and cultural studies critiques of the “pathologies of Westernization.” According to Castro-Gómez (2000), both perspectives pointed out that these pathologies “stem from the dualistic and exclusionary nature of modern power relations” (p. 145). Regarding the effects of modernity, he proclaims that it “is a machine that generates otherness which, in the name of reason and humanism, excludes hybridity, multiplicity, ambiguity, and the contingency of concrete life forms from its imaginary” (Castro-Gómez, 2000, p. 145). In terms of the generation of

otherness, Castro-Gómez (2020) noted that if we consider “the conquest of America as the moment of ‘emergence’ (*Entstehung*) of this differential system of forces, we might then say that there is no Indigenous, Black, or European identity that predates the consolidation of that geopolitical network of relations” (p. 19). In other words, the discursive and material legacy of European colonization in the territories of *Abya Yala* (Walsh, 2013) operates today in the coloniality of power, knowledge, and being, including within the global realm of universities. Regarding the constitution of global hierarchies interwoven between subjects and groups of people, we have previously noted that coloniality, conceived as a heterogeneous historical structure (Quijano, 2000), is reflected in the derived principles that organize societies around constructed otherness. Alternatively, as Grosfoguel (2006) stated, hierarchies in a differential system are based on subjective conditions such as gender, race, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, spirituality, and language. These structuring principles also operate in the university context, specifically in the relationship between the subject who produces knowledge and the validity ascribed to it.⁶ For the purpose of addressing the issue of this article, we will outline in the next section how divergent definitions of modernity and social sciences are determined and complemented in relation to the construction of the “other” subject. Furthermore, we delve into understanding post- and decolonial perspectives on how the coloniality of knowledge, being, and power operates within the university.

The indissoluble relationship between knowledge, subject, and power. The strategy of universalizing knowledge played an essential role in the colonizing project, with repercussions that persist in today’s global coloniality. The university represents the institutionalized entity—or, in other words, a “privileged device of the coloniality of knowledge, through which its Eurocentrism is naturalized” (Restrepo, 2020, p. 11). In other words, the knowledge produced in today’s global universities is based on the foundations of so-called “classics” of European origin, which are taught in academic faculties. The essays compiled by Lander (2000) on Eurocentrism in the social sciences and their legacies address colonial heritage and the systematic reproduction of hegemonic perspectives from the Global North in Latin American universities due to the universalization of knowledge. Lander (2000) and other members of the modernity/colonial network critique universalization as “a *eurocentric* construct that thinks and organizes all of time and space, all of humanity, on the basis of its own experience, positioning its historical-cultural specificity as a superior and universal frame of reference” (p. 23). He also noted that “the forms of knowledge developed to understand this [European] society become the only valid, objective, and universal forms of knowledge” (p. 23).

Regarding the questioned universalization and validation of knowledge, it is essential for this study to highlight that this phenomenon also involves determining the epistemological and ontological conceptualizations of social analysis:

Categories, concepts, and perspectives (economy, state, civil society, market, classes, etc.) thus become not only universal categories for analyzing any reality but also normative propositions that define what *should be* for all peoples on the planet. These knowledges then become the standards by which deficiencies, backwardness, barriers, and negative impacts arising from the primitive or traditional in all *other* societies can be analyzed and detected (Lander, 2000, p. 23, italics in original).

On the basis of this critique of the universalization of knowledge with its corresponding limitations for social analysis,

decolonial theory emphasizes understanding subjectivity and the subject in the production and dissemination of legitimate knowledge. It considers the hierarchy of knowledge closely linked to the coloniality of being and knowing (Castro-Gómez, 2007). This relationship is particularly evident in the constructions of “otherness” tied to notions of superiority and subalternity. In other words, it highlights the connection between social stratification elements that shape global social structures or the overlapping hierarchies previously discussed (Boatcă, 2009; Grosfoguel, 2006). One of the main points of decolonial criticism is therefore to show that this indissoluble link between recognized, universalized knowledge and the legitimately knowledge-producing subject should be understood as originating in the construction of the subject as the Other of modernity.

To better understand the genealogy of “otherness,” we must situate ourselves in the historical context. As previously discussed, from the 16th century onwards, the social sciences and emerging European nation-states “needed” each other for the “modernization” project. This need arises from the fact that the knowledge produced by the social sciences legitimized the state’s regulatory policies. The sociopolitical-economic framework of these mutually constitutive processes is the “need to ‘align’ human life with the apparatus of production” (Castro-Gómez, 2000):

All state policies and institutions (...) would be defined by the legal imperative of ‘modernization’ (...) “It was about binding all citizens to the production process through the submission of their time and bodies to a series of norms defined and *legitimized by knowledge*” (Ibid., p. 148, italics in original).

This creation of profiles of state-coordinated subjectivity leads to the phenomenon that Castro-Gómez (2000, p. 148) called “the invention of the other.” He does not refer “only to how a certain group of people mentally represents others”, but points to “the knowledge/power devices through which these representations are *constructed*”. In addition, for this reason, Castro-Gómez suggested that “[r]ather than as the ‘concealment’ of a preexisting cultural identity, the problem of the ‘other’ should be theoretically addressed from the perspective of the process of *material and symbolic production* in which Western societies were involved starting in the 16th century” (p. 148, italics in original).

The postulates of Lander, Restrepo, and Castro-Gómez regarding the self-definition of modernity and the universalization of “valid” knowledge are complemented in the contributions of Manuela Boatcă (2009), who brings the debate into the realm of “boundary strategies that placed the Others of the modern West at the lowest rungs of racial, ethnic, belief system, and socioeconomic hierarchies” (p. 120). Boatcă coined the notion of “otrización” (othering processes) (p. 132) and emphasized that European colonial expansion not only initiated the construction of the Other in the colonized territories but also linked this nonmodern otherness discursively to negative attributes, as “only those [populations] with positive connotations (White, European, Christian) would enter the definition of modernity” (Boatcă, 2009, p. 120). In other words, the belonging of subjects to a particular world region became associated with a value judgment that was gradually institutionalized.

In retrospective interpretations of colonization processes, the invention of the “nonmodern” other played a key role in at least two respects. On the one hand, it was necessary as an oppositional reference to configure the modern subject, and on the other hand, the discourse about colonized peoples legitimized the colonial project. The resulting social categories, fundamentally binary and associated with different groups—such as irrational vs. rational, primitive vs. civilized, traditional vs. modern—were essential for the self-definition of modernity and

reflected the racial and colonial character of modernity (Boatcă, 2009). From the genealogical reading of contemporary societies presented here, we emphasize the importance of the construction of “otherness” and the idea of “race” as an organizing principle (Grosfoguel, 2006) that privileges “white” subjects over racialized ones.

The colonial discursive and material legacy and the lack of recognition regarding the production of legitimate knowledge are what Bhabra and Holmwood (2021) refer to as racism in the history of European thought. To understand the complexity of oppression and discrimination, it is necessary to grasp this particular racism. For this purpose, we revisit the idea of complementing the categories of the critical theory associated with the Frankfurt School, in this case, the category of “subject.” If we apply the previously presented structuring and hierarchical logics to the field of knowledge production and circulation in European universities, specifically regarding the subjects who produce this knowledge, we can develop an analytical differentiation that helps more accurately understand the colonial legacy, or racism in the history of European thought. This differentiation lies between the processes of the subjectivation of knowledge producers and the differential recognition of their work, which is mediated by variables such as *colonial* and *epistemic difference*. By “colonial difference,” Mignolo (2003) refers to “the classification of the planet according to the modern/colonial imaginary, represented by the coloniality of power” (p. 73). On the other hand, “[t]he term ‘epistemic difference’ refers to the struggles between hegemonic and subaltern positions within the geopolitical cartography of epistemes” (Castro-Gómez and Guardiola Rivera, 2002, p. 63). According to these authors, “these are *cognitive* struggles and relate to how different men and women use various ways of *producing and applying knowledge* to interact with each other, nature, territory, and wealth” (p. 63–64, italics in original).

Importantly, the intersections and interlinkages of the constructed structuring categories determine who produces knowledge deemed “legitimate” and whose productions are not granted this validity (Castro-Gómez, 2007). To anticipate potential objections to our exercise of engaging these variables of analysis to understand the “bias” in critical theory regarding modes of knowledge production, we find it necessary to emphasize that this is not about falling into so-called “subalternist essentialism,” that is, the logic that “the truth of enunciation depends on the enunciator’s belonging to a subaltern community” (Castro-Gómez, 2022). Instead, we refer to the structuring logics that come into play in the (re)production of legitimate knowledge as described earlier.

We approach the object of study from a structural-subjective perspective, meaning a constant scrutiny of the relationship between the established social order and the subjects, the tension between ascribed status—shaped by dimensions such as class, gender, race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation—and achieved status, determined by institutional and academic qualifications and merits. The concepts developed earlier clarify the background of how the coloniality of knowledge, being, and power operates within the university institution, particularly the biases that racism in European intellectual history may introduce to understanding social phenomena in global coloniality. The following section presents proposals for reconfiguring key concepts to enable the critical task of overcoming these biases.

The potential for reconfiguring the notion of the “Subject” in critical theory. In line with Honneth’s (2023) pertinent question about why and how Western social theory should be complemented, we propose the following two ideas: First, the question

revolves around the ultimate goal of social theory through its critical exercise: social emancipation. In the context of global coloniality in power, knowledge, and being, the central question remains: Emancipation for whom? For which people, subjects, and nonhuman entities? As discussed thus far, Western-oriented social theory requires supplementation because it is hindered by biases that prevent it from providing an understanding and explanation of coloniality. Consequently, it struggles to achieve or enable emancipation on a global scale.

This claim aligns with what Bhabra (2021) refers to as “epistemological justice” in terms of “adequately addressing the ‘grand narratives’ that structure the contexts in which we come to understand ourselves and others” (p. 19). According to Bhabra, epistemological justice would entail the following:

addressing the ways in which colonization and slavery were integral to the Enlightenment project of modernity—structuring its claims to knowledge as well as its institutions—but rendered invisible by it. This legacy, uncritically inherited by the Frankfurt School’s critical theory, requires fundamental reconsideration and transformation. (Bhabra, 2021, p. 19)

The second idea we draw from Bhabra and Holmwood (2021) is their proposal to integrate the contributions of sociologist W.E.B. Du Bois into the canon of so-called “classical” social theories. Honneth (2023) also supports Bhabra and Holmwood’s suggestion to include Du Bois’ work in sociological classics as we mentioned before.

In alignment with these suggestions for broadening the conceptual frameworks of critical theory and in accordance with the focus of this study, we emphasize one of the key concepts associated with Du Bois: “double consciousness.” The African American scholar Du Bois (1994) introduced this term in *The Souls of Black Folk*, a collection of essays on race first published in 1903. Initially, Du Bois referred to the concept as follows:

The Negro (...) born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (1994, p. 2)

Various theoretical perspectives have since developed Du Bois’ concept of “double consciousness,” including within decolonial theory. The specific contribution of decolonial thought to complement the understanding of the “subject” category in knowledge production lies in incorporating “double consciousness” as a research principle. In other words, decolonial theory introduces Du Bois’ notion of being born with a veil or possessing a second-sight as a theoretical-practical element in comprehending social phenomena and producing knowledge.

In this sense, decolonial theory and practice integrate in their proposal for scientific methodology what Sandra Harding (1986, 1987, cited in Espinosa Miñoso, 2020) called “bifurcated consciousness” and Donna Haraway (1988) termed “situated knowledge”. The essence of this epistemological-ontological proposal within decolonial thought lies in understanding “the social” from the “privilege of the racialized subject”, understood as a social construct. Various scholars suggest the use of this principle of investigation to transform what is known as *internal*

colonialism. This phenomenon was coined over four decades ago by authors such as Casanovas (1969, cited in Rivera Cusicanqui, 2010). The term refers to how discourses and discursive practices have material effects on producing subalternity in the “Global South” (Espinosa Miñoso, 2020). Informed by the documented internal colonialism present in Global South universities—even among feminists—this paper proposes applying the concept of “internal colonialism” to European universities. In other words, we suggest discussing the potential of extrapolating the principle of “double consciousness” as a research tool to the context of knowledge production in European universities.

For feminist standpoint theory, this potential is conceived as “a possibility for a more comprehensive and heterogeneous view of the world” (Espinosa Miñoso, 2020, p. 88)⁷. The contribution, therefore, lies in understanding “the social” from the intersected conditions of individuals (Espinosa Miñoso, 2020). Importantly, feminist authors reiterate that this does not mean essentializing the subject occupying a certain position within the social power structure. On the one hand, they emphasize the awareness of the intersection of structuring dimensions in all knowledge-producing subjects. On the other hand, as Curiel (2014) noted, it means taking “a stance in constructing knowledge that must consider geopolitics, ‘race,’ class, sexuality, social capital, among other positionalities (...). It involves questions such as the following: Knowledge for what? How do we produce knowledge? Who produces it, according to which political project? In what institutional and political frameworks is it produced?” (p. 10).

According to the decolonial proposals, particularly the feminist ones described here, the understanding of the “knowledge-producing subject” category in social theory capable of addressing social phenomena in global coloniality can be complemented through the methodological-epistemological principle of “double consciousness,” which starts from the intersectionality of the researcher subjects. In this sense, it would involve, first, overcoming the “hubris of the zero point,” understood as the assumption of science as objective and neutral (Castro-Gómez, 2007). Second, it represents a potential change in what Castro-Gómez (2000) criticized as the effects of modernity owing to its inclusion of the multiplicity, ambiguity, and contingency of concrete life forms (p. 145).

Recognizing knowledge constructed from particular locations and by subjects defined by the intersections of stratifying dimensions substantially broadens the understanding of the complex phenomena of contemporary societies. Decolonial theory contributes to this reconfigured understanding by offering a historical-global perspective on the evolution of structuring logics. At the same time, it reveals the structuring logics that traverse the subjects participating in the social phenomena they seek to illuminate. As Catherine Walsh (2013) aptly states, decolonization does not mean “disarming, undoing, or reversing the colonial,” but rather “identifying, making visible, and encouraging ‘places’ of exteriority and alternative constructions” (p. 25).

Conclusion

This paper addressed the issue of hierarchy in the production and circulation of knowledge in relation to the subjects who produce it, understood as a “pathology of Westernization.” Drawing on the decolonial perspective, we focused on how the category of the “knowledge-producing subject” can be complemented within a social theory that enables overcoming the legacy of Eurocentric rationalization to understand social phenomena in global coloniality.

To achieve the proposed objective of exploring the potential for complementing critical theory from the Frankfurt School with the concept of “double consciousness” from decolonial thought, we

presented critiques of the concept of modernity from the decolonial perspective in the first part. Emphasis was placed on the call for a notion of modernity that considers the global dimension and a reconfiguration of key concepts in social theory that address the relationship between modernity and coloniality.

In the second part, we delved into the structuring and hierarchical logics in knowledge production and circulation. To do so, we addressed the universalization of knowledge, which is based on Eurocentric rationalization, as well as the associated “othering” processes and their repercussions for the differentiated valuation of knowledge, particularly within the university context.

In the third and final part of this work, we discuss the issue of reconfiguring the concept of the “subject” within critical theory. We presented conceptualizations of decolonial theory, especially feminist approaches, which suggest “double consciousness” as a key element in the theoretical-practical exercise aimed at understanding social phenomena and complementing rationalized knowledge production.

In this sense, we can answer the guiding research question as follows: “double consciousness” contributes, on the one hand, as a reconfiguring element in the conceptualization of the notion of the “subject” within critical theory by addressing the impact of the colonial experience on power and knowledge relations. On the other hand, it serves as a necessary premise in transformative and emancipatory sociological research, complemented by a heterogeneous and intersectional perspective on the world.

Data availability

No datasets were generated or analysed during the current study.

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Notes

- 1 In a previous paper, we discussed the invisibilization of coloniality by contrasting theories of invisibility with the decolonial perspective (Heiss and Herzog, 2021). In that paper, we concluded that coloniality in its three dimensions—power, knowledge, and being—plays out both in the realm of dynamics addressed in the conceptualization of physical and material invisibility, as well as in symbolic invisibilization.
- 2 Regarding the antecedents of decolonial critical theory, we would like to contextualize that they lie, for example, in Dependency Theory, which is based on Marxist and Weberian theses, but also draws on theoretical sources of authors from previous centuries that show a critique of exploitation and slavery, as in the works of Poma and Cugoano (Mignolo, 2010).
- 3 The constitution of the subject presented here draws specifically on the decolonial perspective and does not aim to contrast it with the meaningful contributions made by the diverse Frankfurt School authors and generations.
- 4 It should be added that we are not referring to monolithic entities when we speak of the Frankfurt School and decolonial theory; in contrast, we are aware of the differentiated positions that exist within each strand.
- 5 It is worth noting that Honneth seems to use the terms *colonialism* and *coloniality* interchangeably in his approach to rereading social theory, adding new thinkers, and redefining its key concepts. The conceptual differentiation is addressed in decolonial theory, e.g., in Castro-Gómez and Grosfoguel (2007).
- 6 Castro-Gómez already reflected in 2007 on the issue of decolonizing the university, considering that the university as an institution is inscribed in what he calls the “*triangular structure of coloniality: the coloniality of being, the coloniality of power, and the coloniality of knowledge*” (p. 79, italics in the original).
- 7 Initially proposed by Nancy Hartsock and Dorothy Smith in Espinosa Miñoso (2020).

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This manuscript has been prepared solely by the author Sabine Heiss.

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The author declares no competing interests.

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Consent statement is not required as the study does not involve human participants or their data.

Additional information

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