Postcolonialism, Decoloniality and Islamism
A Marxist Critique

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Introduction

The genocidal war in Gaza, with the full support of most Western governments has led to a revival of interest in theories of Imperialism, anticolonial struggles and the continuing division of the world between the global north and a global south. Rather than being an anomaly in an otherwise globalizing liberal order, the Gaza war should be considered in the context of other glaring contradictions in the global system. These include the death of tens of thousands of African and Asian migrants, every year, in the Mediterranean, and the death of thousands of Latin American migrants attempting to cross the borders of the USA, the incarceration of hundreds of thousands of Global South citizens in detention camps to prevent them entering countries of the Global North.

The Gaza genocide represents an extreme form of the racial violence that continues to be a main feature of the relationship between the Global North and Global South, not simply the logical result of Zionist settler colonialism. However, on a theoretical level, how do we understand the relationship between the Global North and the Global South? What are the continuities and discontinuities in the colonial and early post-colonial periods? This paper critically explores two theoretical schools that have been influential in the understanding of this relationship and their questions, namely postcolonial and decolonial theories.

Let us begin by placing the current genocidal violence in its historical context. Genocide has always been an administrative tool throughout the history of modern colonialism. For example, in the first decade of the twentieth century, the German General Lothar von Trotha was appointed by the Kaiser to deal with the anticolonial resistance of the Herero people in present-day Namibia. Trotha used German artillery to drive the Herero into the desert, killing 80 thousand people in the process. The general defended the genocide stating that "the Negro does not respect treaties but only brute force" (Kundnani 2023, 30).

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British colonialism was no less murderous in India. The British shot and hanged thousands of Indians or blasted them from the mouths of cannons. The latter method of killing intended to fragment bodies into so many pieces that funeral rites could not be performed. In addition to the brutal methods used to directly kill Indians, the British administration induced widespread famine as a weapon. More than 10 million Indians died in the last 25 years of the 19th century as a result of these induced famines (Kundnani 2023, 50).

The racist ideology of British colonialism was no different from that expressed by General Trotha. Thus, Winston Churchill stated: "I do not admit that a great wrong has been done to the Red Indians of America or the black people of Australia," when a "stronger race, a higher-grade race, a more worldly wise race to put it that way, has come in and taken their place" (Ali 2023, 361). For Churchill, the people of India were a "foul race" protected "from the doom that is their due" by their "pullulation" (Ali 2023, 361).

The Nazi genocides and atrocities of the mid-twentieth century are considered anomalies in modern history. Yet, as Aimé Césaire explains in his *Discourse on Colonialism* (2000), what was exceptional about Nazism was not the extremism of its racist ideas, but the fact that such practices would be applied to Europeans. Césaire explains that the coupling of modern rationality with mass murder was an ordinary feature of colonialism.

However, those massacres and the racism associated with them were part and parcel of direct colonial rule, fascism, and world war. How do we explain their persistence and expansion together with the same racist tropes in the 21st century? Predictions were made in the early 1990s, after the end of the Cold War, and with the hegemony of neoliberal capitalism and globalization, that war, imperialism, and the racist and chauvinist ideologies associated with them would recede in the 21st century. However, the opposite has been happening. The reality of three decades of neoliberal restructuring of capitalism has shown that it required and continues to require massive expansion in policing, bordering, prisons, and militarization, together with the racist ideologies required for that expansion. As Kundnani argues:

> The world the neoliberals wished to create could only be brought into existence and maintained through border, military, and economic violence on a colossal scale. And, within the terms of their philosophy, this violence could only be justified by presenting Third World cultures as by nature deficient. (Kundnani 2023, 78)

It is this process that provides the context for the Genocide in Palestine, the migrant crisis, racialized capitalism, and the widening divide between the Global North and the Global South. However, how do we understand the persistence of this widening divide on a theoretical level?

Postcolonial Theory: A Critique

An important and influential school of thought, at least in western academia, that focuses on the relationship between the colonizing Global North and the colonized Global South, both historically and culturally, has been postcolonial theory. Although this school brings together different contributions in a variety of disciplines, it is possible to group them in terms of genealogy and shared theoretical assumptions.

Significantly, the origins of this school lie in several Gramsci-inspired studies of peasant rebellions by a group of historians led by Ranajit Guha. They launched a series of volumes entitled Subaltern Studies, published by Oxford University Press in India from 1982 onwards (*Subaltern Studies*, 1982–2005). These historians were critical of the stagnant and stagiest ideas represented by the Stalinist parties then dominant on the Indian left. They were also influenced by the works of British Marxist historians, producing what became known as history from below (e.g., Hobsbawm and Ranger 1992; Hill 1975; Thompson 1966; James and Walvin 2001).

By the late 1980s, with the global retreat of the left and the shift towards poststructuralism in western academia, many scholars in the postcolonial school rejected Marxism altogether as Eurocentric and part of a Western Enlightenment tradition that should be dismissed as not helpful in understanding the complex, multiple, and fragmented histories of the Global South. Chakrabarty summed it up as a shift from the attempt to "write better Marxist histories" to an understanding that "a critique of this nature could hardly… ignore the problem of universalism/Eurocentrism that was inherent in Marxist (or for that matter liberal) thought itself" (Chakrabarty 2008, 99).

Perhaps one of the most critical expositions of the main common themes in postcolonial theory, particularly as it relates to Marxism, is that put forward by Chibber in *Postcolonialism and the Spectre of Capital* (Chibber 2013). The first theme is that the Global North and Global South are fundamentally different from one another and that any attempt at understanding both under a common "universal" framework is necessarily Eurocentric. Second, Marxist theories of global capitalism and modernity take the history of capitalism in western Europe as a template for what has happened in the rest of the world, whereas in reality, colonial capitalism was completely different from that in the West and produced qualitatively different societies and cultures.

According to Chibber, postcolonial theorists shared a view of Bourgeois revolutions in the West. According to this view, the Bourgeoisie in the West led the revolutions against feudalism by being able to achieve ideological hegemony over the main oppressed classes, thus leading them to a frontal attack on absolutist monarchies and eventually established parliamentary democracies. However, in the postcolonial context, capitalism took a completely different trajectory. The Bourgeoisie there was never hegemonic, did not fight for democracy, and produced a postcolonial society based on

"dominance rather than hegemony" (Guha 1997, 1). Both liberal and Marxist theories of history have predicted a trajectory similar to that of the West, meaning similar bourgeois revolutions with similar results to western Europe, and since that is not what happened, it pointed to the inadequacy of these theories in understanding the history of the Global South, with its fragmentary nature, as well as the overestimation of the unifying and universalizing nature of capital expansion across the globe.

In *Provincializing Europe* (Chakrabarty 2008), Chakrabarty puts forward a critique of Marx and Marxism that helps situate his influential version of postcolonial theory. The first problem, a common one for poststructuralists since Foucault, is historicism; that is, understanding history as an internally unified process that develops over time. Here, time is considered a linear homogeneous process. Even E.P. Thompson, whose "Making of the English Working Class" had a significant influence on the early Subaltern historians, is considered tainted by historicism. His distinction, based on Marx, between "formal" and "real" subsumption of labor to capital (Marx 2010), which allows him to give a rich account of the varieties of capital/labor relations in English history, is considered too "historicist," since " it still keeps in place the idea of empty and homogenous historical time, for it is over such time that the gap could ever close between the two types of subsumption"(Chakrabarty 2008, 49). In other words, one assumes that "real" capitalism means "real" subsumption.

Chakrabarty distinguishes between what he calls History 1 and History 2: History 1 is that of Capital, its accumulation, expansion, and "abstraction" of labor. History 2, which encompasses the histories that do not belong to the capital's life process, "as a category charged with the function of constantly interrupting the totalizing thrusts of History 1' (Chakrabarty 2008, 66). However, which tools do we use to understand the fragmented world of History 2? Which methodology? Which ontology? Which epistemology? These questions led postcolonial theorists to search for the "Authentic," which can only be found in a world not affected by capitalist modernity.

The Decolonial Turn

Another school of thought that emerged in Latin America in the 1990s, critically related to postcolonial theory, is decoloniality. If postcolonial theorists shifted the focus from the political and economic to that of culture, decoloniality theorists such as Anibal Quijano, Enrique Dussel, and perhaps most influentially, Walter Mignolo developed theories about an epistemological divide between the colonial West and the colonized peoples of Latin America, Africa, and Asia. This epistemological divide is not only geographical but also historical, separating the world before and after 1492.

According to decolonial theory, a Colonial Matrix of Power (CMP) develops with colonization and includes three main dimensions: colonialities of power,

knowledge, and being. Western epistemology, which became dominant with colonialism, poisoned knowledge production in the colonized continents of Africa, Latin America, and Asia. This western epistemology was instrumentalist, hierarchical, and racist, with white able-bodied males as the subjects of history and the rest of humanity as the exploitable objects. Colonization led to the suppression and corruption of indigenous beliefs and practices, and the epistemologies on which they were based. The only path to true decolonization is, therefore, a rediscovery and restitution of authentic precolonial epistemologies. Thus, Mignolo states:

> The politics of decolonial investigations shall work toward restituting and preserving dignified modes of existence [reexistence] that have been shattered by the ideological juggernaut of salvation, progress, civilization, development, modernization, and universal democracy. (Mignolo 2021, 225)

However, how do we find these original, authentic epistemologies untainted by Western modernity and colonialism, which, according to Mignolo, are two sides of the same phenomenon? Perhaps more importantly, in the case of pre 1492 epistemologies, were they not based on slavery, exploitation, war, and empire building? How, for example, in the case of Africa, do we deal with Arab-Islamic expansion which involved both religious conversion and trade in slaves? What about Ancient Chinese, Indian, Mayan, and Egyptian civilizations? Their epistemologies were non-Western and premodern, but were they not tainted by slavery, forced labor, and patriarchy? In fact, the decolonial search for non-European, non-Western epistemologies not only leads to an idealization of ancient non-Western civilizations, but even in the case of Mignalo, an idealization of contemporary anti-Western nations:

> The three diverse pillars of de-Westernization today are, first, China, Russia, and Iran; second, the ambiguous foreign policies of India and Turkey, which are still playing their game between de- and re-Westernization; and third, the ever-changing heads of state in Latin America. (Mignolo 2021, 102)

In fact, the idealization of anti-Western projects has a long history which started with Michel Foucault in the late 1970s. It is important to note that the postcolonial school, heavily influenced by Foucault, inherited this search for a non-Western, non-European political, and cultural project. As in the case of Mignolo, questions about class and politics were ignored.

In 1978, Foucault declared in an interview that humanity was at ‘point zero’ in terms of political thought, and that Iran offered new possibilities of a concept of revolution that attempted to go beyond liberalism and Marxism. The coming revolution in Iran would reduce the two centuries from 1789 to 1979 to a

"modernist parenthesis amid something far deeper and more permanent," namely, the phenomenon of "elemental and irreducible religious uprisings" (Kaiwar 2014, 2).

The search for an "Authentic" alternative to Western theories of history and revolution, particularly Marxism, is a major feature of both postcolonial and decolonial theories, perhaps its main weakness. It is important to note that the search for the Authentic "other" is very much part of the Western intellectual repertoire, particularly in the work of Heidegger (Heidegger 2010; 2015).

By presenting capital as nothing but a narrative category that is part of a Western historiography of progress, the search must be on for an alternative from outside Western thought and modernity. One alternative is to search within the antiquity of non-European civilizations of the distant past, uncontaminated by foreign intrusion, and filtered from the effects of European conquest and modernization. However, this returns us to a type of Gandhian conservatism. For Gandhi, a study of "our Eastern institutions is sufficient to evolve a truer socialism and a truer communism than the world has ever dreamed of" (Lazarus 2011). Nearly the same words were used to describe Islam. As Kaiwar has noted:

> Gandhi and Khomeini make strange bedfellows, but for the likes of Alvares that is hardly a problem: after all, in the xenogeography of post-development being anti-western is the virtue. Thus, while Gandhi sought to liberate India (and the West itself) from modern civilization, Khomeini sought to save Islamic civilization from western culture. (Kaiwar 2014, 72).

In fact, Arab Islamists had been developing a critique of Western modernity since the 1920s and 30s, that has many similarities to both the postcolonial and decolonial schools of thought that emerged in the 1980s and 1990s.

Islam, Authenticity, and the West

Ever since the 1930s, the Egyptian intellectual scene was focused on questions of whether to follow Western European models of thought and culture or to search, in our precolonial history, for an "authentic" model independent of the Western tradition on the cultural, epistemological, and even scientific levels. Perhaps the most extreme version of a clearly Eurocentric theme, although it was quite influential in the secular nationalist milieu of the Wafd party, was that presented by Taha Hussein's in his book: *Mustaqbal al-Thaqāfa fī Miṣr* [The Future of Culture in Egypt] (1938). For Hussein, becoming part of European culture and civilization was the only way forward for an independent Egyptian nation:

> We must become European in every way: We must follow the path of Europeans so as to be their equals and partners in civilization, in its

> good and evil, its sweetness and bitterness, what can be loved or hated, what can be praised or blamed.[1] (Hussein [1938] 2012, 41)

Egypt has undertaken "a clear and binding obligation before the civilized world that we shall tread the path of the Europeans in government, administration and legislation" (Hussein [1938] 2012, 67). Hussein even goes as far as putting forward a new clearly Eurocentric version of history to show not only that Egypt has to be "European," but also that it has always been part of European civilization:

> There are two qualitatively different civilizations in the world. One is derived from Greek philosophy and art, Roman laws and political organizations, and the moral values of Christianity. The other source was derived from India. Egypt belongs to the first…Islam assimilated Greek and Persian civilization easily and can do the same with that of modern Europe. (Hussein [1938] 2012, 54)

There are two significant intellectual responses to Hussein's vision. The first was from Sayed Qutb, the Islamist writer, and later from one of the leaders and theoreticians of the Muslim Brotherhood in a booklet criticizing Taha Hussein's influential book. For Qutb, Egypt's authentic history is an integral part of the Islamic East. The encounter with the West, whether in ancient or modern times, was one of colonialism and struggles. In ancient times, for example, "The Greeks occupied Egypt using mercenary troops and colluded with local leaders. These mercenaries were ruthless and hated by the Egyptians" (Qutb 1969, 14).

Qutb asks Hussein the following question: "If Egypt was so culturally part of Europe, why did Egyptians fight against the French expedition? Why did they not accept them as liberators from Ottoman rule?" (Qutb 1969, 15). For Qutb, making use of European advancement while preserving our culture requires making a clear distinction within civilization between culture and what he calls civility (المدنية). Culture is a system that includes religion, arts, morality, traditions, and superstitions. Civility should include applied sciences and arts and should be taken from Europe in its totality. Qutb was later to take his anti-Western ideas to the extreme in his later book *Maʿālim ʿalā al-Ṭarīq* [Milestones on the Road] (1965). This became the theoretical and theological inspiration for militant Islamic groups in the 1980s and the 1990s.

It is important to note that reactions to Hussein's ideas did not come only from Islamism. In 1955, two Marxist writers, Mahmud Amin Al-Alim and Abdel Azim Anis, put forward an alternative view of the relationship with Western culture in a collection of essays published in a book titled: *Fī al-Thaqāfa al-Miṣriyya* [On Egyptian Culture] (1988). Their theoretical framework was heavily influenced by the Stalinist School of Socialist Realism and Moscow Conference of Writers and Artists in 1935. They presented a universalist view of culture as follows, "Human reason is not divided, in its basic features. There

is no Eastern versus Western reason, nor is there a Western versus Eastern culture. There are only differences based on the different social contexts and types of social processes and relationships" (al-Alim and Anis 1988, 27). For them, interestingly, art and literature had to be politically committed and related to social struggles:

> Culture as intellectual, literary or artistic expression, or as a particular way of life is always a reflection of the social work that a particular people is involved in, with all its strata and groups. It is an expression of social relationships, efforts, and tendencies. The basis on which culture stands are not something static or definite but rather a process that has its dynamics and progress. (al-Alim and Anis 1988, 37)

Al-Alim defines the social reality in Egypt as that of colonialism and the struggle against it in all its aspects, whether economic, military, political or cultural. The colonial and national question shapes all aspects of social life and therefore, culture including "unemployment, love, religion, freedom, decadence, marriage, vice, illness and health…" (al-Alim and Anis 1988, 38).

The most influential Islamist view on the question of colonialism, nationalism and the "authentic" Islamic alternative was put forward in the writings of Mohamed Al-Ghazaly. His most important writings were published during the struggle against colonialism in Egypt in the late 1940s, and during the Algerian War of Liberation in the 1950s and the 1960s. For Ghazali, Western civilization owes its success to the influence of the Islamic East:

> Without prejudice, we can say that the idea of free reason was born first in Cairo, Damascus, Jerusalem, Baghdad … before being born in London, Paris, Berlin, and Rome; the early crusaders returned to their lands with the idea of free reason that they brought from the East and used it to regenerate their lives and break powerful chains that, if not broken, would have prevented them from reaching any real progress or wealth. (al-Ghazaly 2006, 23)

He quotes Abdel Halim al-Guindi's *Tawḥīd al-Umma al-ʿArabiyya* (1964) in ancient Islamic society, "in that society a scientific civilization flourished based on applied sciences, industry, architectural sciences and social sciences, and that was for the first time in history…" (al-Ghazaly 2006, 54). However, more significantly than his views on the history of civilization were his ideas on the role of relying on our authentic culture in the battles against colonialism:

> Our authentic culture is our religion and our way of life. It is our past and future, and it is our origins and branches that emerged from it. We arm ourselves with all forms of human knowledge in order to better preserve our culture…The people that are fighting in Algeria

> and Morrocco derive their fighting spirit from their Islamic belief… There is no battle won, however big or small that did not have Islam as its inspiration. (al-Ghazaly 2006, 227)

For Ghazali, it is only through a regeneration of that authentic Islamic culture and identity that we can face the challenges posed by colonialism and build an alternative civilization: "If we follow Western cultural instructions, we will lose our identity, become confused and end up neither western nor eastern. Our collective existence is based on the fact that we belong to an Islamic East that is rich in human culture and civilization" (al-Ghazaly 2006, 319). In fact, Al-Ghazaly wrote articles on Algerian resistance in the same period as Franz Fanon wrote his articles in Al-Mujahid in the late 1950s. If Franz Fanon was a theorist of the National Liberation Front (FLN) until the early 1960s, by the 1980s the FLN government looked to Al-Ghazali for guidance, inviting him to settle in Algeria as a leading theologian at al-Amir ʻAbd al-Qadir University.

The late Tareq al-Bishri, possibly the greatest Egyptian historian of the 20th century was, until the 1980s, a left-wing secular nationalist. In the 1980s, with the success of the Iranian Revolution and the failure of the Arab left, he turned to Islamism. In the introduction to the second edition of his classic: *al-Ḥaraka al-Siyāsiyya fī Miṣr, 1945-1952* [The Political Movement in Egypt-1945–1952], he explains the shift. His transformation parallels in many ways the shift of postcolonial theorists from Marxism to Poststructuralism in the late 1980s. For him, the problem of the left and secular nationalists in general was that they neglected the struggle between "authentic" inherited culture and beliefs and the imported Western culture that came with and through colonialism. For him, it is Islam and the inherited precolonial Islamic culture that represents the authentic identity that was diluted and weakened by colonialism:

> The secular nationalist, for example, regards the separation of religion from politics and civil life… as the natural and obvious way of doing things. In making such a statement, he does not realize that his viewpoint is a recently imported idea and has only been around in our environment for a century. It did not develop in the environment of Egyptian thought and civilization before the 20th century and did not gain its legitimacy except after the 1919 revolution. (Bishri 1983, 32)

For al-Bishri, the European incoming culture took many routes of infiltration:

> Adventurers, financial institutions including banks, lending and mortgage houses, loans to the state… and missionary expeditions paving the way to the creation of Egyptian minorities whose loyalty would be to the West and its churches. Then came the imitation of lifestyles, clothing, housing, and everyday living patterns. This

> stormed into an Egyptian environment. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, western thought seeped through political, social, and philosophical theories. The situation was no longer simply the use of a style of organization or a borrowed set of demands but became one of the adoption of theories and schools of thought, forms of literature, and poetry. This became a complete theoretical, mental, and existential system. This was no longer imitation of lifestyles… this became the building of a new civilizational and intellectual structure…the basis for a new way of thinking. (al-Bishri 1983, 37–39)

In the 1960s, according to al-Bishri, the emphasis was placed on the economic and political aspects of the struggle with imperialism. What was missing and what was central was the cultural and civilizational struggle. Again, we see similarities with the shift towards culture in postcolonial theory, the inclusion of Marxism in Western Enlightenment ideas, and the search for authenticity:

> The polemics of the 1960s were about choosing between two western models: capitalism and socialism. The discussion focused on two forms of struggle we were involved in: the political struggle against colonialism and the social struggle between classes with contradictory economic interests. The third dimension of the struggle was absent, and that was the one between imported and inherited belief systems. (Bishri 1983, 46)

There are clear parallels between the postcolonial and decolonial search for authenticity, and the Islamist project of a return to an original, inherited, precolonial belief system. On the ideological level, the rejection of Marxism by all three schools of thought seems to be a result of the disillusionment with the left, both theoretically, in the case of postcolonial and decolonial thought, and politically in the case of Islamism.

Postcolonial Theory and the Legacy of Franz Fanon

Franz Fanon, one of the pioneering theorists of decolonization, was part of the Marxist inspired anticolonial movements of the 1950s and 1960s. His legacy, however, like that of Antonio Gramsci, has been defanged, sterilized, and diluted into that of a reformist cultural critic in the academic world of postcolonial studies and decoloniality. It is therefore important to reclaim his legacy as a theorist and activist of the very real and violent struggle against colonialism and racialized capitalism. For Fanon, racist ideology is a result rather than a cause of colonial oppression.

Not only was Fanon influenced by Marxism, typical for his generation of anticolonial thinkers, but he was also influenced by a Hegelian version of Marxism through the interpretation of Alexander Kojeve's lectures on the

Phenomenology of Spirit, particularly the master–slave dialectic. Fanon adopts the concept of labor in which, by transforming the material world around us, we infuse the world with our activities and thus acquire a meaningful social existence. In the case of the colonized subjects, this meaningful social existence was impossible. Only a struggle for liberation, followed by the rebuilding of society in the postcolonial world on a new basis, could make this possible (Macey 2001).

As Arwa Awan argues in a recent paper, there are three dimensions to Fanon's liberation project. The first is the violent struggle for national liberation. This has a humanizing effect on the dehumanized subject of colonialism. The second dimension is collective political work in which the masses participate directly and democratically in deciding political, social, and economic issues. The third and final dimension is a socialized production system in which labor is humanized and unalienated, to replace capitalist degradation (Awan 2024, 23–27)

As Fanon puts it, "capitalist exploitation and cartels and monopolies" which "are the enemies of under-developed countries" must be replaced by "a socialist regime… completely oriented towards the people as a whole and based on the principle that man is the most precious of all possessions" (Fanon 2004, 55–56). In a passage that might be of interest to Arab readers in general and Egyptian readers in particular, he writes the following:

> If the building of a bridge does not enrich the consciousness of those working on it, then don't build the bridge, and let the citizens continue to swim across the river or use the ferry…"The bridge must not be…foisted upon the social landscape as a deus ex machina, but, on the contrary, must be the product of the citizens' brains and muscles…the techniques [employed must] seep into the desert of the citizen's brain so that the bridge in its entirety and in every detail can be integrated, redesigned, and reappropriated… Then, and only then, is everything possible. (Fanon 2004, 141)

It is also important to remember that Fanon was a leading and active member of the Algerian FLN. Fanon resigned from his psychiatry job with the French colonial state in 1956 and dedicated himself to the Algerian liberation struggle until his death. In fact, his posthumously published *Pour revolution Africaine* and parts of The Wretched of the Earth were made up substantially of Fanon's writings for the underground FLN organization, El-Mougahid (Shatz 2024).

In the writings of the postcolonial school, Franz Fanon is transformed from an anticolonial fighter to a cultural-psychological critic of the colonial and racial predicament. His politics, according to Homi Bhabha in his preface to the 2004 edition of *The Wretched of the Earth* are no longer relevant today:

> When decolonization had the dream of a 'Third World' of free, postcolonial nations firmly on its horizon, whereas globalization gazes at the nation through the back mirror, as it speeds toward the strategic denationalization of state sovereignty. The global aspirations of Third World 'national' thinking belonged to the internationalist traditions of socialism, Marxism, and humanism, whereas the dominant forces of contemporary globalization tend to subscribe to free-market ideas that enshrine ideologies of neoliberal technocratic elitism. (2004, xi)

The idea of the "denationalization" of state sovereignty and the dominance of the ideologies of neoliberal technocrats, an idea popularized by Francis Fukuyama, was part of the post-Cold War predictions that never materialized (Fukuyama 1992). Although the dreams of "Third World" development might have ended with the failures of the "catch up" projects of the Bandung generation (Ahmad 2000), events of the 21st century prove repeatedly that we remain in a world dominated by imperialism, imperialist rivalries, genocidal wars, racialized capitalism, and recurrent economic, environmental, and global health crises. Assumptions of the transitional moment in the 1990s were unfounded. Unfortunately, they inform Homi Bhabha's reading of Fanon. Despite the fact that he was writing in 2004, less than a year after the US invasion of Iraq, Homi Bhabha continues to transform Fanon's ideas from the political to the psycho-affective:

> Fanon's singular contribution to the theoretical understanding of the black consciousness movement lay in his extension of the economistic theories of Marxism toward a greater emphasis on the importance of psychological and cultural liberation —the psycho-affective realm of revolutionary activism and emancipation. (2004, xxix)

Again, in a section that claims to go beyond Hannah Arendt's criticism of Fanon's defense of anti-colonial violence (Arendt 1970) and Jean Paul Sartre's famous defense of that violence, he writes the following:

> For Arendt, Fanon's violence leads to the death of politics; for Sartre, it draws the fiery, first breath of human freedom. I propose a different reading. Fanonian violence, in my view, is part of a struggle for psycho-affective survival and a search for human agency in the midst of the agony of oppression. (2004, xxxvi)

In fact, in his 2004 forward to *The Wretched of the Earth*, Homi Bhabha uses the term "psycho-affective" 22 times in 34 pages. Perhaps, the only contemporary practical significance that Bhabha can find for Fanon's ideas is a

mild kind of international institutional reformism. A far cry from Fanon's revolutionary spirit:

> Fanon's call has certainly been heard by popular movements and social institutions committed to debt relief or forgiveness; it has led to health initiatives that see the availability of generic drugs for HIV-AIDS as an economic necessity for the "right" to life and human capability; and his influence is felt amongst reformist bodies that seek to restructure international trade and tariffs, and democratize the governance of global financial institutions, in favor of equitable assistance and redistribution. (2004, xviii)

The radical and revolutionary anti-colonialism of Fanon is diluted into a cultural and psychological conflict and reformist politics in the writings of postcolonial theory. In decolonial theory, anti-colonialism loses all material grounding and becomes a purely epistemological struggle.

Conclusion

As mentioned in the introduction, the Genocidal War in Palestine, the rising tide of populist racism in the West, and the horrors experienced by migrants from the Global South trying to reach the Global North have all led to a revival of interest in theories that explain the deep and widening divide between the former and the latter. Two of these theories, postcolonial and decolonial theories, were explored critically in this paper. This exploration focused on three main areas: The quest for authenticity, the relation to the anticolonial struggle and Marxism, and the parallels with Islamism. The challenge, however, lies in theorizing anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggles in a way that avoids both the universalism and progressivism rightly critiqued by postcolonial and decolonial thinkers, as well as the apolitical culturalism and "jargon of authenticity" common to both perspectives.

One of the main criticisms that Chakrabarty has of Marx is that as a historicist, he holds on to the view of historical time as empty, homogeneous, and linear. Another central criticism is the concept of progress, of history moving forward, in a teleological manner towards the future. Both postcolonial and decolonial thinkers would claim that Marxism dismisses, or even cancels, local histories and traditions and replaces them with rigid universalism. In fact, there is a reading of Marx in the writings of the German Marxist philosopher Walter Benjamin, which shows a conception of history very different from that assumed by Islamists, the postcolonialists and the decolonialists. A conception that looks back on tradition, not in search of imaginary authenticity, but as a living memory and weapon for the struggles of the day.

According to Benjamin's reading of Marx, the past and the world of tradition are not spaces to be left to conservatives, that is, those who want to reject modernity by clinging to an imagined golden era. The past is a battleground

between the Right and the Left, and therefore, in an age of fascism, the Left cannot abandon the past and its traditions. Against the evolutionary view of history as an accumulation of gains, as 'progress' towards ever more freedom, rationality, or civilization, he sees it from below, from the standpoint of the defeated, as a series of victories of the ruling classes. It is the 'redemption' of the dead generations of the oppressed, which is a necessary part of any revolutionary project. (Löwy 2005, 30). This 'redemption' is presented in religious terms but has no religious significance. As Fredric Jameson notes, those dead "demand completion by events in the future; their redemption is not a personal one, not a bodily resurrection, but a reenactment that brings them to realization and fulfillment" (Jameson 2020, chap. 9).

History for Benjamin and for Marx before him is a history of struggle. A struggle in which previous generations of the oppressed were defeated. The current struggles must involve not only the living generations of the oppressed, but also all the previous generations: "... the struggling oppressed class itself is the depository of historical knowledge. In Marx it appears as the last enslaved class, as the avenger that completes the task of liberation in the name of generations of the downtrodden" (Benjamin 1973, 260).

The monuments of previous civilizations, as those of current civilizations, are all monuments of the victors of history and of the rulers both past and present: "There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism. And just as such a document is not free of barbarism, barbarism taints also the manner in which it was transmitted from one owner to another" (Benjamin 1973, 256).

In their search for authenticity in non-Western civilizations, whether Islamic, African, Mayan, or any other civilization, both Islamists and the postcolonial thinkers idealized these civilizations ignoring the fact that they were all based on slavery, oppression, and exploitation. They also ignore the fact that those in power see continuity with the rulers of those civilizations. The victors of yesterday belong to the category of the victors today. It is the tradition of the oppressed and their struggles, the tradition of the forgotten dead, who do not have monuments in their honor that must be redeemed if we are to have a chance in the struggles of today. It is a question of enriching revolutionary culture with all aspects of the past that bear utopian hope within them: Marxism, for Benjamin, has no meaning if it is not, also, the heir to- and executor of many centuries of emancipatory dreams and struggles.

Benjamin did not conceive an event like a revolution, for example, as a natural or inevitable outcome of economic and technical progress (or the contradiction between forces and relations of production), but as the interruption of a process of historical evolution leading to catastrophe. The kind of "progressive" thinking so abhorrent to the postcolonialists was also despised by Benjamin, thus he was seriously critical of those, like Karl Kautsky, who were astonished that Fascism was still possible in the twentieth century, blinded as they were by

the illusion that scientific, industrial, and technical progress was incompatible with social and political barbarism.

Benjamin was writing at one of the darkest moments in modern history as Hitler was starting the Second World War. Victor Serge called that moment 'midnight of the century.' We live in a similarly dark period. A period in which the combination of political barbarity, technical progress, and racism represents a challenge to humanity. The Anti-colonial works of Fanon and Banjamin's theoretical contributions seem to correspond far more closely to the current historical moment than the search for "authentic" alternatives represented by Islamism, postcolonial and decolonial theory.

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