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Transmodern Heritage as Radical Delinking from Modernity

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Abstract Guided by decolonial border thinking (Mignolo, 2007), this conceptual paper questions the rhetoric of alternative modernities proposed as a way of reclaiming the place of post/colonial heritage of Africa alongside the modern heritage *in* Africa. Interrogating modernity's European legacy, its precepts and the associated values, it proposes instead to define African heritage of the 19th and 20th century from the standpoint of "exteriority" and as an expression of transmodernity, in a move to delink it from the colonial matrix of power. Transmodern heritage, transversal and rooted in the decoloniality movement, represents an alternative to modernity that accounts for alterity affirmed as difference and provides space for manifold cultural expressions produced by African people liberated from modernity's colonial foundation and its vexing binary opposition of "traditional" and "modern".

In 2001, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and its partners launched the Modern Heritage Programme to bring focus to the world's 19th and 20th century built heritage, which was considered to be under threat from developmental and other factors. The programme sought to establish a conceptual framework for defining modern heritage and to prepare guidelines for the identification, preservation and valorisation of its outstanding examples in architecture, town planning and landscape design. The basis for the framework was Jürgen Habermas' description of the "project of modernity" as a set of cumulative and mutually reinforcing processes that included

the formation of capital and the mobilization of resources; the development of the forces of production and the increase in the productivity of labor; the establishment of centralized political power and the formation of national identities; the proliferation of rights of political participation, of urban forms of life, and of formal schooling; the secularization of values and norms.

(Habermas, 1987, p. 2)

Guided by this conceptualisation of modernity, UNESCO (2003) accepted the advent of the Industrial Revolution as the point of departure for the "modern era", and Europe as its geopolitical point of enunciation. The key driving forces of modernisation, in line with this model, were individualisation, democratization and industrialization, all processes that have shifted the way the world has

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been perceived since the end of the 18th century. UNESCO recognized that modernity eventually engulfed the entire world, with each region reacting differently to the socio-economic transformations it announced, each producing its own version of a “modern society” and, accordingly, its own version of modern heritage. Yet, among the many variations, Western modernity as a prototype remains the point of reference for local interpretations and cultural inflections of “being modern”, including the multiple expressions of modern heritage produced around the world. It begs the question, therefore, as to whether or not “modern heritage” outside of Europe and the Western world in general, is necessarily a typological model of the historical transformations brought about by modernity? Can it be conceptualized in a way that would make it more than a subcategory of (Western) modern heritage to account for both the subject and the object of history and their different understandings of space and time?

This paper looks at the post/colonial heritage of the colonized world, and particularly Africa, to address the issue of representativity that is at the heart of UNESCO’s Modern Heritage Programme. It analyses the term “modern heritage” from the standpoint of the decolonial school of thought with the aim of liberating (African) heritage of the 19th and 20th centuries from the discourse of modernity, and proposes a transversal heritage category that would account for the voices and experiences of the oppressed.

MODERNITY FROM A DECOLONIAL PERSPECTIVE

In the words of Mudimbe (1988), “history is both a discourse of knowledge and a discourse of power” (Mudimbe, 1988, p. 188). Modernist history, centered on the civilizing mission of the West, is a good albeit painful example of how discourses of power and knowledge of otherness can produce marginal societies, cultures and human beings.

Two points of departure are usually used to speak of the origins of modernity. Historians see its beginnings in the 15th century, with the Renaissance, the Reformation and the discovery of the New World announcing its arrival. This historical modernity, and in particular the invasion of America by Spain, is considered by decolonial scholars the geopolitical opening for modernity in the West. It starts with the “invention” of the colonial system and the introduction of capitalism, which “would progressively shift the politico-economic balance in favor of the peripheral and isolated old Europe” and lead to its controlling of the world system (Dussel, 2012, p. 38). Decolonial scholars see modernity, colonialism, the world-system, and capitalism as simultaneous and mutually-constitutive aspects of the same reality, and, in this light, consider Spain as the first “modern nation”. Philosophers tend to think of modernity in relation to the Enlightenment movement and the French Revolution (Dussel, 2012; Mignolo, 2007). Thus they situate its origins two centuries after the colonization of America began, when Europe’s hegemony built on the back of the colonial system was already well established. The Industrial Revolution and the Enlightenment helped modernity reach its maturity, in the time when colonialism was being spread to Asia and Africa through Northern European expansion. Historical modernity is therefore not contemporary with European

domination. Europe became “modern” two centuries before it “ruled” the world – by extending its capitalist world system to other parts of the globe, it became the centre of the world market with the advent of the Industrial Revolution, and through colonialism asserted itself as the “core” of the modern world on the back of the Enlightenment movement.

This “core” required a “periphery” to exist, a space of otherness against which Europe could self-define. In this sense, modernity is essentially not an exclusively European phenomenon but rather “a European phenomenon constituted in a dialectical relation with a non-European alterity that is its ultimate content” (Dussel, as cited in Mignolo, 2007, p. 453). The non-European alterity was created through a narrative of colonial difference against Europe. It converted differences into values in order to establish a hierarchy of beings – superior and inferior “human” beings, civilized and barbarian – to describe the non-European populations (Mignolo, 2009). The process of dividing people based on “colonial difference” was part and parcel of the construction of “exteriority”: that place on the outside inhabited by *anthropos*, invented and defined in the process of creating the inside that was inhabited by *humanitas* (Mignolo, 2009). The outcome of this process was the “invention” of the cultures of the margin, scorned in line with the ideals of the age of Enlightenment, where “evolution, conquest, and difference became signs of a theological, biological, and anthropological destiny, and assigned to things and beings both their natural slots and social mission” (Mudimbe, 1988, p. 17), and subjected to forced deculturation. Justified by the naturalization of the racial ranking of human beings, modernity reached a point where some lives were considered expendable and people were sold as slaves.

The same rhetoric of modernity “invented” tradition using the Western linear theory of socio-cultural transformation that clearly divided history into a pre-modern period – characterized by an “immature/primitive” state of traditional societies, from modernity – constructed on the premises of rational and scientific thinking, secularization, materialism, individualism and man’s control over nature (Gusfield, 1967; Rostov, 1960). It created the binary opposition of tradition (the outside) and modernity (the inside) to ensure the latter as the locus of enunciation of knowledge. It juxtaposed traditional cultures, with their holistic ways of doing things, against universal modern culture focused on science, specialization and spatio-temporal universalism (Giddens, 1991). Eventually, modern Europe used tradition as a tool to marginalize and suppress communities it encountered on its colonizing march, in the name of lifting the *primitives* from a state of *savagery* to *civilisation* (Ferguson, 2006). Modernity created four versions of this rhetoric: salvation through Christianity and civilizing missions, newness or innovation through Enlightenment and secular humanism, progress through the Industrial Revolution, and development. The aim of modernity became then to dominate the non-European otherness by conversion, civilisation and later by development; the latter being an ongoing economic project of the West (Mignolo, 2009) and the newest version of colonization (Escobar, 1995). Grosfoguel (2011, as cited in Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015, p. 29) deemed today’s Euro-North American centric modernity as a racially hierarchised/racist, patriarchal, sexist, Christian-centric, hetero-normative, capitalist, military, colonial, imperial and modern form of civilisation. It continues to dictate what knowledge and understanding are, how economies and politics should function, what belongs to ethics and philosophy, what technology means, and how society

should be organized. Modernity as an end goal in itself is a utopian idea. Once seen as a telos, when it lost its appeal it became either an unreachable fixed global “first class” status or simply an aspiration (Ferguson, 2006).

Elements of the Project of Modernity

All of the versions of salvation proposed by the West are intertwined with the logic of coloniality, which, as Mignolo (2005) explains, exists as “an embedded logic that enforces control, domination, and exploitation disguised in the language of salvation, progress, modernization, and being good for everyone” (Mignolo, 2005, p. 6). Coloniality, constitutive of modernity and representing its “dark side” (Mignolo, 2009), centres on the notion of “colonial difference”. It is composed of four mutually articulated domains: (1) management and control of economy (through appropriation of land and exploitation of labor); (2) control of authority (represented by a viceroyalty, colonial states, military structures); (3) control of gender and sexuality (through Christian notions of family, gender and sexual values and conduct); (4) control of subjectivity (by Christian faith, and the secular idea of subject and citizen) and of knowledge (by secular philosophy and the concept of reason) (Mignolo, 2007). This colonial matrix of power, as coloniality is also known, was created at the inception of the “modern world” back in the 15th century, and is still upheld today by the underlying racial and patriarchal organization of knowledge-making and by capital (Mignolo, 2007, 2009). Mudimbe (1988) called it a “colonizing structure” devised to transform the African periphery into fundamentally European constructs and integrate local economic histories into the Western perspective by means of:

the procedures of acquiring, distributing, and exploiting lands in colonies to dominate the physical space; the policies of domesticating natives to reform the minds of people; and the manner of managing ancient organizations and implementation of new modes of production. (Mudimbe, 1988, p. 2)

This model, designed to reorganize all aspects of human experience, lies at the heart of a “dichotomising system”, still in operation, which juxtaposes traditional versus modern, oral versus written, agrarian and customary communities versus urban and industrialized civilisations, subsistence economies versus highly productive economies (Mudimbe, 1988, p. 4), and presupposes evolution from one extremity to the other. The marginal position of the African experience in this model is a result of the classification of beings and societies construed on the basis of taxonomies that emphasize otherness, taking European “patterns” as a point of departure. Mudimbe (1988) questions not just the European basis of the model but the evolutionary trajectory it assumes as well. With respect to the first, he asserts, “it is the ‘power-knowledge’ of an epistemological field which makes possible a domineering or humbled culture” (Mudimbe, 1988, p. 11); it creates the “identity of the Same” in response to the otherness or “abnormality” of the (African) Other to define the latter as “a negative category of the Same” (Mudimbe, 1988, p. 12). In relation to the second, Mudimbe (1988) argues that “between the two extremes there is an intermediate, a diffused space in which social and economic events define the extent of marginality” (Mudimbe, 1988, p. 4). In this space between African tradition and the modernity of colonialism, between the reality of the oppressed and an illusion of

development is “the locus of paradoxes”, which escapes the rigid definitions and proves that being human represents more than “mechanized tautologies can offer about a history of the Same” (Mudimbe, 1988, p. 198).

Identity of the Same/Alterity of the Other

Otherness enables decentering of the self in the process of experiencing the Other.

The Other, the foreigner, the stranger, is that person occupying the space of the subaltern in the culturally asymmetrical power relation, but also those elements or dimensions of the self that unsettle or decenter the ego's dominant, self-enclosed, territorialized identity.
(Schutte, 1998, p. 54)

Otherness of another being is dynamic and localized. Composed of regional ruptures and continuities, it is still determined by the beings themselves. Tarde ([1893] 1999) argued that “to exist is to differ”, so difference is the key feature of an Other. This difference, however, can be understood in different ways. Colonialists defined it in relation to their own identity (the Same) through exclusion – “the Other is not us”. Later, to “incorporate” the Other into the “modern world”, the Same was expanded in line with the thinking that “we are all different” (Czarniawska, 2008). In both of these cases alterity is “hidden” within the concept of identity of the Same, thus it can only be spoken of as same, similar, analogous or the opposite of sameness (i.e. “negative identity” or what Mudimbe (1988) calls “negative category of the Same”). All these identifications belong to the same identity continuum. Deleuze ([1968] 1997), and Mudimbe (1988) follows, proposed a radically different way of speaking about the Other, through affirmation of difference, which defines alterity in terms of its uniqueness. Schutte (1998) believes that seeing the Other through the lens of their alterity rather than one's own identity shifts our perception as subjects of a totalised notion of culture to subjects of cultural difference. She writes:

Cultural alterity points to an ethics and to ways of knowing far deeper than the type of thinking wherein dominant cultural speakers perceive themselves to be at the epistemic and moral center of the universe, spreading their influence outward toward other rational speakers. Cultural alterity demands that the other be heard in her difference and that the self give itself the time, the space, and the opportunity to appreciate the stranger without and within.
(Schutte, 1998, p. 61)

Acknowledging the incommensurability of cultural differences – that specifically cultural meaning that is “lost in translation” – the scholar argues that Other's differences, even if not fully comprehensible within one's own cultural horizon, can still become sites of appreciation where the stranger is seen fully as human.

That brings us to the discussion about alternative modernities.

WHY NOT ALTERNATIVE MODERNITIES?

Alternative modernities (also called subaltern modernities or peripheral modernities) were proposed by the non-Western countries as a response to the unilinear trajectory of economic and socio-cultural transformation presented as a universal path to achieve Western modernity. In an attempt to break out of the modernity-telos cage, new modernities started emerging as a result of mixing elements of local cultures with ideas or solutions adopted from the “global”, deemed universal, culture. Alternative modernities are the outcome of postmodernism, which proposed the possibility of an intercultural dialogue but took for granted the existing asymmetry between the participants. The origins of postmodernism remain rooted in the European vision of modernity, and the cultural hybridities that result from the process of cultural interaction between the local and the global, the centre and the periphery are inevitably marked by underlying power relations (Bhabha, 1994; Dussel, 2012). The theories of cultural hybridism, Mudimbe (1988) argues, are “by-products of a normative conception of history (. . .) [that] fail to witness to concrete temporal and localized figures” (Mudimbe, 1988, p. 195). They are “colonial shadows” born out of the non-Western societies “aspiration to membership” in the modern world (Ferguson, 2006), which hangs on their progress towards “development” and “modernity”, both of which can be deemed “imaginary constructions” (Comaroff & Comaroff, 1993, p. xiv).

Chasing the utopian status of being “modern”, but on their own terms and conditions, Asian countries focused mostly on transforming their economies in line with the capitalist model of Western modern economy but respecting their own cultural norms and local philosophical perspectives. African countries, after independence, also proposed a number of local responses to modernity, which were to adhere to the cultural and historical experiences of the continent (e.g., Nkrumah’s “African Personality”, Senghor’s “Negritude”, and Nyerere’s “African Socialism”). However, in their attempts to give the project of modernisation an African soul (Mkandawire, 2005), African intellectuals failed to disrupt the Western-created dichotomy between tradition and modernity, and instead turned tradition into an ideology, adopting the colonial oppressors’ language of one-sidedness and idealization. Today’s modernisation theorists present African cultures as a relic and an obstacle to development. As a result, African states attempt to “modernize” their cultures by eliminating what are deemed “backward practices”.

Whichever trajectory is chosen to arrive at modernity, these alternative ways do not question the concept of modernity as an ultimate goal. While trying to account for modernity from non-European perspectives, they maintain the centrality of Western modernity as a point of reference for local variations. Mignolo (2009) calls this process “de-westernization”. It consists in interrogating the content of the transformation to shape its properties and modalities according to the context. It carries a promise of a different course of the transformation but does not question the logic of coloniality underlying it. De-westernization has been propagated by Singaporean Kishore Mahbubani, among others, who made the case for the rise of the new Asian hemisphere and the shift of global power. This direction has also been supported by India. Along the same lines, in the Winter 2000 edition of *Dedalus* titled *Multiple Modernities*, Israeli sociologist Eisenstadt (2000) argued that “modernity and

westernization are not identical; Western patterns of modernity are not the only ‘authentic’ modernities” (Eisenstadt, 2000, p. 3). The key problem with alternative modernities lies in the fact that the concept situates the start of modernity with the Enlightenment movement rather than the colonization of the New World by Europe. Considering modernity as a process that takes place mostly on the philosophical level, it does not recognize that during the two centuries that separate the invasion of Spain in America and the Industrial Revolution, the West managed to reorganize the world using racial hierarchisation. This resulted in local populations of colonized territories being reduced to *anthropos* rather than being considered human. In line with this thinking, they were not included in the Enlightenment project, which “targeted” only *humanitas* (Mignolo, 2009).

To truly account for non-European viewpoints, there is a need to “reconstruct the concept of ‘Modernity’ from an ‘exterior’ perspective, that is to say, a *global* perspective (not provincial like the European perspective)” (Dussel, 2012, p. 37), and “to overcome the restrictions of the unities of time and space, envisaging a shift from continuous or regional history to a comparative or general history” (Mudimbe, 1988, p. 196). In other words, there is a need to look for alternatives *to* modernity.

MODERN HERITAGE AS A CONSTRUCT OF COLONIALITY

If one reads Habermas’ definition of modernity – formation of capital, mobilization of resources, increase in the productivity of labor, centralized political power, secularization of values and norms – cited earlier in the text, in light of the decolonial analysis of the processes of change that colonization engendered, elements of the colonial matrix of power become easily discernible. Addressing these shifts introduced by modernity, UNESCO (2003) uses a universalistic language to speak about “our view of the world, our sense of time and space and our place in the course of history [that] changed dramatically, bringing about irreversible changes in almost all facets of life” (UNESCO, 2003, p. 9). Yet, from the point of view of the colonized world, colonization of space and time by the West, which accompanied modernity, has not only brought a dramatic change in all domains of life of the oppressed, but excluded them from the family of human beings in general. Recognition of this fact – and thus also of the historical modernity which started in the 15th century, long before the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution – is crucial to be able to speak of “modern heritage” in an inclusive way.

In its framing document, UNESCO (2003) indicated themes that should guide identification of modern heritage of the 19th and 20th centuries. Among a long list of thematic areas, such as colonial heritage, mobility, innovation, urbanization, community buildings, open spaces and landscapes, modernity and historical continuity, economic modernisation, tourism development, or industrial heritage, the categories that stand apart are: modern heritage from an Asian perspective, modern heritage from a (South) African perspective and modern heritage from a Latin American perspective. Intentionally or unintentionally, it has been acknowledged that the heritage of the colonized people

may not necessarily correspond to the frames established using the Western modernity criteria, and the authors of the document agree that there are possible local or regional differences in the time-frames of modernity as well. The issue of valuing and conserving heritage from the colonial past has also been raised and the “quality judgment” linked to the values of one’s culture in view of establishing criteria for context-specific valuation. What is particularly of note is that colonial heritage appears in the framing document as a category separate from modern heritage from an Asian, African or Latin American perspective. It can be assumed that the term speaks to the heritage of colonialists – i.e., modern heritage *in* Asia/Africa/Latin America – rather than the heritage of the colonized – i.e., modern heritage *of* Asia/Africa/Latin America.

Another document of significance for this discussion is *The twentieth century historic thematic framework: A tool for assessing heritage places* by the Getty Conservation Institute (Marsden & Spearritt, 2021). Prepared with the aim of helping to identify and contextualize heritage places of the 20th century, it presents an array of possible topics gathered into ten interconnected, historic themes, based on an analysis of the developments, global forces, trends and phenomena that shaped the previous century’s built environment. Each of the identified themes can be said to carry the marks of the colonial matrix of power, as shown below:

1. Rapid urbanization and the growth of large cities (control of economy).
2. Accelerated scientific and technological development (control of knowledge).
3. Mechanized and industrialized agriculture (appropriation of land and exploitation of labor).
4. World trade and global corporations (control of economy).
5. Transportation systems and mass communications (control of economy).
6. Internationalization, new nation-states, and human rights (control of authority).
7. Conserving the natural environment, buildings, and landscapes (appropriation of land).
8. Popular culture and tourism (control of economy and of knowledge).
9. Religious, educational, and cultural institutions (control of subjectivity).
10. War and aftermath (control of authority, control of subjectivity).

The authors of the historic thematic framework recognize upfront a Western bias to the discussions and terminology, encouraging readers to interpret the themes for specific regions and adapt them to their own histories. They presuppose that these multiple histories will fit the framework, based on the assumption that modernity is a universal destination with alternative paths of reaching it. Other destinations – alternatives *to* modernity – seem not to be considered.

ALTERNATIVES TO MODERNITY – DECOLONIAL DELINKING

Although modernity is not simply a European phenomenon and is inextricably entangled with the colonies, the rhetoric of modernity silenced or ignored dissenting non-European voices. Alternative modernities try to account for these overlooked perspectives but they remain rooted in the same principle of knowledge enacted in different locations. Alternatives *to* modernity cannot come from

the same space, for in this space the perspective is restricted to a particular discourse and values (Mignolo, 2007).

To look for alternatives constructed within the space of exteriority to modernity, Mignolo (2009) proposes a decolonial option of de-linking. This radical path rejects the imposed rhetoric of capitalist economy and questions the universality of the process of transformation designed to end with the status of being “modern”, in order to open space for imagining other possibilities, other destinations. By offering the possibility of discovering that “there are not only many roads to heaven but also many heavens” (Lall, 1992, p. 7), de-linking liberates the subject by allowing them to renounce the “aspiration to membership” and deciding on their destination in line with one’s system of values, ambitions and sense of well-being. Mignolo (2009) argues that, if knowledge-making is to serve well-being, it “shall come from local experiences and needs, rather than from local imperial experiences and needs projected to the globe” (Mignolo, 2009, p. 19), and proposes de-linking as a way of bringing to the fore local histories that defy global designs and the cultural homogeneity that is their product, aiming at forms of globality that arise out of cultures of transience. By questioning and renouncing the “imaginary construction” that modernity is, decolonial de-linking rejects the discourse of civilisation and globalization, which mainstreams the neoliberal world order, to claim the possibility of a multiplicity of social and economic orders. Accordingly, the view that modernity is the highest point in the linear progressive development trajectory from savagery becomes invalid, and the transformation of culture, marked by both continuity and change, becomes unbound from the restrictions of the unities of time and space. The artificial Western binary of tradition and modernity does not hold ground in this case either.

Decolonial de-linking breaks with the Euro-centered project of postmodernity and its alternative modernities, proposing instead an epistemic shift from both the rhetoric of modernity and the logic of coloniality (Mignolo, 2007). This shift enables other epistemologies and principles of knowledge as well as other ethics to exist side by side and to describe the histories and cosmologies of people in different parts of the world. De-linking moves us from the fallacy of universality of a European model rooted in the capital accumulated as a consequence of colonialism to the diversity of the knowledge of locality. The decolonial epistemic shift finally enables changing not just the content of the discourse – as Christianity’s theology of liberation or Marxism tried to do (Mignolo, 2007) – but the terms on which it is held, as it destroys the binary opposition of “primitiveness versus civilization, tradition versus modernity, lineage mode versus capitalist mode of production, underdevelopment versus development” (Mudimbe, 1988, p. 197). Delinking targets the colonial core on which modernity was built by reconstituting the discussion using epistemologies of the exteriority and of the borders – that is, the outside created by the rhetoric of modernity to define the inside – and reframing it using geo- and body politics of knowledge.

When the rhetoric of modernity is de-linked from the logic of coloniality, other forms and principles of knowledge that have been colonized, silenced, repressed, and denigrated by the different dimensions of modernity become possible. These forms have not existed outside of modernity but rather belong to its exteriority. The local narratives can connect through this

common experience of exteriority and use it as the basis for a new common logic of knowing called “border thinking” (Mignolo, 2007). Invented by the project of modernity, the exteriority lies in the border space, where

Western knowledge and subjectivity, control of land and labor, of authority, and ways of living gender and sexuality have been “contacting” other languages, memories, principles of knowledge and belief, forms of government and economic organization since 1500 (often in relation to domination, exploitation and conflict).
(Dussel, as cited in Mignolo, 2007, p. 497)

Through “border thinking” the manifold local cultures subjected to the colonial matrix of power can come together to engender an other-universality – a pluriversality – as a new form of globality. The forms born in the border space belong to the exteriority of both modern and postmodern; as such they can be deemed trans-modern. (Dussel, 2012)

Transmodernity and the Question of Values

Europe’s hegemony (starting with the age of Enlightenment) lasted merely two centuries, which was too short a time to profoundly transform much more ancient and ideologically deeply rooted cultures of the Far East, India, Africa, Latin America, or the Islamic societies. While their economic and political systems were reconfigured to serve the colonizers, the “souls” of these cultures – their philosophical, axiological and cosmological roots – denigrated and deemed useless, were neglected, which in the end helped them “survive in silence, in the shadows, scorned by their own modernized and westernized elites” (Dussel, 2012, p. 42). These cultures of exteriority have been evolving in the face of modernity but have not been suppressed by its powers. With their diverse economic and political models, scientific and technological innovations, and social conditions, they represent an alterity with respect to European modernity. Being exterior to modernity, they cannot be deemed to be post-modern. They predate modernity, while being simultaneously contemporary to it. Future-oriented, they can be said to belong to transmodernity. Being free from the Western binary opposition of tradition versus modernity, they include “all of those aspects that are situated ‘beyond’ (and also ‘prior to’) the structures valorised by modern European/North American culture” (Dussel, 2012, p. 43).

Transmodernity is not the same as “cultural relativism”. The cultures of exteriority speak from the perspective of their own cultural experiences, generating ideas that could not have been imagined within the discourse and values of the “global” modern culture. A trans-modern culture, as theorized by decolonial scholars, is, however, not completely divorced from modern culture. Rather, it assumes the positive moments of modernity but, conscious of existing asymmetries, holds space for a rich pluriversality, which is the fruit of an authentic intercultural dialogue (Dussel, 2012). Dussel (2012) explains the steps that need to be taken within the transmodern project to arrive genuinely at this authentic intercultural dialogue. These include:

1. affirmation of the cultural experiences that have been devalued by the colonial system, and self-valorisation of the aspects of cultures that have existed or developed silently in the exteriority of modernity, away from the destructive universal modern culture;
2. self-examination, or internal critique, using the values that have been ignored by modernity in view of understanding and interpreting one's own culture from within;
3. engaging the critics positioned in the shared space between one's culture and modernity to engender critical thought.

At the end of this process comes a long period of cultural resistance, during which not only the elites of the dominant culture need to be confronted but the Eurocentrism of elites in the “peripheral” culture need to be challenged as well. The intercultural dialogue that ensues can be deemed *trans-modern*, because it is not born in or directed by the interior of modernity, but rather its exteriority. And the alterity of exteriority is defined not as a “negative category of the Same” (Mudimbe, 1988) but through “an affirmation of difference” (Deleuze [1968] 1997) rooted in an experience distinct from the modern.

TRANSMODERN HERITAGE AS A WAY OF AFFIRMING DIFFERENCE

Recognition of different axiologies and affirmation of difference is of utmost importance in the discussions on heritage, which constitutes the core of one's identity and way of being. Within the African context, Mbembe (*Modern Heritage of Africa*, 2021) argues, heritage is about loss but most of all it is about creation of new forms. It is not about conservation of old forms or returning to some primal scene, reiterating gestures from the past, but about creating new forms of life for the future. It is a way of inhabiting the world – worldliness – and in the process learning how to take care of one's own times, how to repair one's own times and the world; it is about care of that which is immeasurable, priceless, the life forms and forces. The transversal nature of this conceptualisation of heritage, which includes both past and present while looking into the future, clearly challenges modernity's disregard for historical continuity.

In her book *Indigenous Modernities. Negotiating architecture and urbanism*, Hosagrahar (2005) touches on the issue of continuities and ruptures informed by different values to question the tradition-modernity binary using the example of built environment in Delhi. She argues for the need to relocate discussions of modernity to “other” geographies “not merely to give voice to minority discourses and knowledges in order to include them in their subordinate positions into existing privileged accounts of modernity, but to question the very master narrative” (Hosagrahar, 2005, p. 6). Hosagrahar recognizes that modernity and colonialism are fundamentally connected, with the latter playing a key role in modernity's emergence as a global project, and calls out the normative models of modernism as an “imperialist fantasy”. Yet, she fails to address the principal master narrative underlying the rhetoric of modernity to expose the “imaginary construction” of the concept itself. While she critically examines the roots of normative ideals of modernity, trying to steer away from the dualities of “ruler” and “subject”, she arrives at the conclusion that “particular circumstances of modernity in a

place give rise to new (...) articulations that adapted the new and reconstituted the familiar” (Hosagrahar, 2005, p. 5). These new articulations represent for her plural forms of modernity and its localized interpretations produced in the process of indigenisation of modernity in places deemed by the Europeans as “primitive”. Accordingly, her “indigenous modernities” are “actualizations of universal agendas in a particular place (...) [that] negotiate the uniqueness of a region and its history with the ‘universals’ of science, reason and liberation” (Hosagrahar, 2005, p. 6). They are said to be simultaneous with the forms produced by Western modernity, and engendered in the process of negotiation with the European “model”. The breaks and discontinuities from the idealized forms of the metropole are said to prove the agency of the colonized people. Yet, since they are constructed through an interaction between the Western modernity and the local forms and meanings, they remain “minority discourses in a subordinate position”, defined as such a priori through the colonial matrix of power underlying their creation.

In this light, there are two arguments pertaining to modern heritage to be made based on the different master narratives around modernity that need to be dismantled. One addresses the concept of Western modernity and its local interpretations. With respect to modern heritage in the territories colonized by the West it can be presented as a difference between “modern heritage *in* . . .” and “modern heritage *of* . . .” Asia/Africa/Latin America (i.e. colonized world). This is the argument of the proponents of alternative/plural/indigenous/multiple/subaltern modernities, which constitute “offshoots” of Western modernity due to the underlying “dark side” that resides at their roots. Heritage of the “core” or the “center” that Europe became in the age of Enlightenment located within the territories of the colonized people can in this case be labeled “modern heritage *in* Africa/Asia/Latin America”, or “colonial heritage”, in line with the UNESCO (2003) framing document mentioned above. The regional experiences with Western modernity marked by specific socio-cultural contexts and influenced by local meanings can be considered local interpretations of modernity and called “modern heritage *of* Africa/Asia/Latin America”, the term suggesting that the colonized, through consensus or conflict, engaged with the “imperial fantasy” (Figure 1).

The second argument addresses the concept of modernity as a whole, thus interrogating the use of the term “modern” with respect to the heritage of the colonized. Just as alternative modernities remain a subcategory of Western modernity, which is considered a point of reference for their definition, one can arrive at the conclusion that modern heritage *of* the colonies is a subcategory of Western modern heritage *in* the colonies, the character of which has been defined in Europe and the “periphery” carries its marks. Neither of these perspectives accounts for the cultural experiences that have been denigrated by the colonial system, and which eventually survived in the exteriority of modernity. Can that depreciated heritage be deemed modern, if “modern heritage” as a manifestation of modernity is inherently constructed through coloniality? It is not enough to add “modern heritage from Asian, African or Latin American perspective” as an example of alternative modernities to make the category of “modern heritage” more inclusive. To account fully for the cultural expressions of the 19th and 20th centuries in the colonies, the category itself needs to be redefined in order to embrace cultural alterity of an Other as fully human.

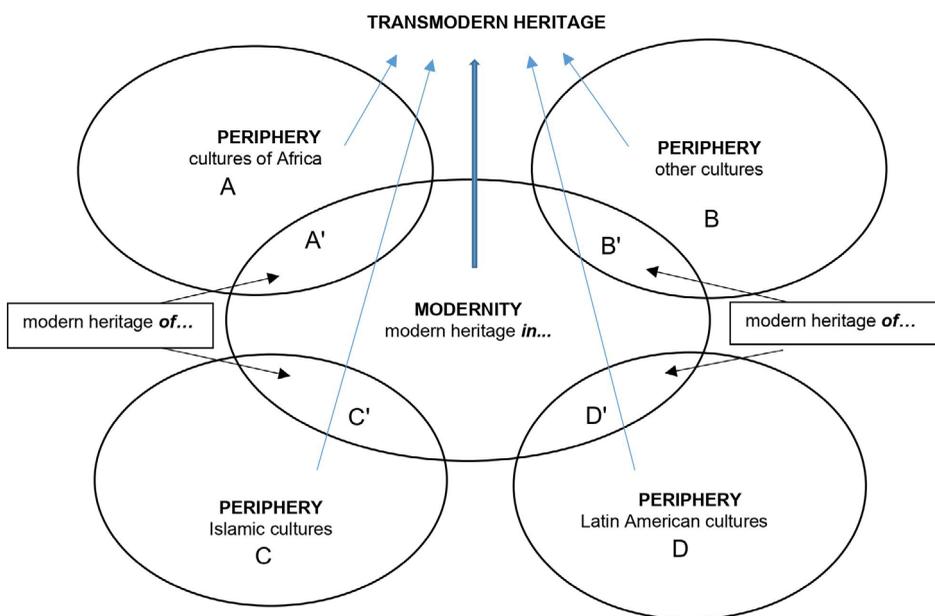


Figure 1. Model for understanding transmodern heritage (author, based on Dussel, 2012, p. 44).

“Transmodern heritage” offers a space devoid of pre-conditions. Having evolved in the face of modernity, it is simultaneously pre-modern and modern, free from tradition-modernity dichotomy. Defined through geopolitics of knowledge, it can account for differences between Western and non-Western concepts of heritage, and can contain different conceptualisations of time and space held by people.

The affirmation and growth of the cultural alterity of postcolonial communities (peoples), which subsumes within itself the best elements of Modernity, should not develop a cultural style that tends towards an undifferentiated or empty universal cultural identity, an abstract universality, but rather a trans-modern pluriversality, one which is pluricultural, and engaged in a critical intercultural dialogue.

(Dussel, 2012, p. 50)

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

This is a theoretical paper.

END

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