3

A GLOBAL OVERVIEW OF SOCIOLOGICAL STUDIES ON AFRO-DESCENDANTS

Rocío Vera Santos

Black Studies

The first Department of Sociology was created in the United States in 1892 at the University of Chicago, while so-called Black Studies became institutionalized in American academia only in 1968, following the civil rights movement and the end of the Jim Crow racial segregation system (Brock et al. 2017). However, Black Studies had a long history before that, initiated by one of the founders of the Pan-Africanist movement, W.E.B. Du Bois. Du Bois is considered the founder of sociology in the United States and one of the most important sociologists of the twentieth century. Du Bois demonstrated empirically that racial hierarchies are based on relations of power, oppression, and discrimination, and not on presumed natural or inherited biological differences. His analysis anticipated what would later be understood as the social and historical construction of race (see Holt 1998). With his first text, The Philadelphia Negro (1899), Du Bois became a pioneer in the use of what are now known as triangulation techniques in data collection (Wright 2002). His analysis reveals racial dynamics and racist practices traversed by the “color line,” accounting for high levels of racial segregation, not as natural ecological processes, but as decisions made by economic elites to protect particular White interests (Hunter 2013). However, Du Bois’s work was ignored by the sociology of the time in the context of the rise of scientific racism, at a time of eugenics movements, lynchings, and White supremacy. In 1903, Du Bois published the work The Souls of Black Folk, where he argued that the twentieth century’s problem was the problem of the color line. “The color line” is understood as a social structure that divides and generates social inequality between groups. With that work, he developed the concept of “double consciousness,” which describes the duality and oppression experienced by Blacks because of an identity molded by their self-perception and the stereotypes and racial prejudices held by White society. Since then, the concept of “double consciousness” has been widely used in the social and human sciences (Morris 2015, 90). With his works, Du Bois laid the foundation for a modern sociology based on theory and empirical research methods.

Another classic work is The Negro Family in the United States (1930) by sociologist Edward Frazier. Frazier studied family structures and their functions, particularly the role of women (mothers and grandmothers) and men under the slave system and Jim Crow Laws. Frazier emphasized not the African heritage – as did the anthropologist Herskovits – but the processes of cultural adaptation of Black families in both urban and rural areas (Semmes 2001).
The end of World War II signaled a global discursive context of rupture and “abandonment” of biological discourses and racial hierarchies through consensus on the non-existence of races in the scientific mainstream, giving way to research studies that inquired into the effects of racism and stigmatization. The Canadian sociologist Erving Goffman can be considered the first contemporary social theorist to question raciality by incorporating the African–American population from the standpoint of dramaturgical theory since the 1960s and by considering racial discrimination when analyzing stigmatization processes (see Pineda 2016). In *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (1963), Goffman formulates a theory of stigma based on the discrepancies between social identity and personal identity, similar to the duality exposed by Du Bois. On the basis of stigmas, which may be based on bodily or psychological aspects and cultural marks such as “race,” various types of discrimination, dehumanization, and exclusion are practiced against individuals or groups considered “abnormal” or stigmatized by society. Sociologist Elijah Anderson also studied racial stigma. In his book *A Place on the Corner* (1978), an ethnographic research on the ghettos in Chicago South Side, he studies not only the social behavior of men “on the corner,” but also identity constructions, stigmas, and the symbolic importance of status (Shapiro 1979). Anderson is considered one of the leading urban ethnographers and cultural theorists in the United States. Later, French sociologist Loïc Wacquant also became a reference point in these studies. In his comparative research on ghettos in the United States, France, and Brazil, he demonstrates that state structures and policies play a determining role in the articulation of ethnoracial, class, and place of origin inequalities (see Wacquant 2007; 2010).

In the 1970s, with the so-called “linguistic turn,” discourse started to be considered an analytical tool and a theoretical construct. French sociologist Michael Foucault is considered not only the most influential social scientist of the twentieth century, but also the founder of discourse analysis and studies on power and knowledge relations. In his unfinished work *Genealogy of Racism*, containing essays read in 1975–1979 at the Collège de France, he highlights key concepts in social theory such as “biopolitics,” understood as the presence of state apparatuses to control the body and life of populations. “Racism, according to Foucault, emerges at the intersection of disciplinary technologies that target the body and biopolitical technologies that target the population” (Rasmussen 2011, 37).

**Black Feminism**

British scholar Harriet Martineu is considered the first woman sociologist with a feminist perspective (Hill and Hoecker-Drysdale 2003). Martineu wrote three volumes on *Society in America* in 1837, in which she demonstrated the social inequality and oppression experienced by the enslaved, women, and workers in America. Women’s Studies and Feminist Studies have been part of US academia since the 1960s, in the context of the second wave of feminism, with a marked influence of poststructuralist perspectives, rejecting biological essentialism as an explanation of inequality between the sexes and emphasizing the power of discourse in the social construction of sexual differences and in maintaining those differences in social and institutional practices (Canning 2006). Unitary categories like “women” were also deconstructed, acknowledging the different types of women and the different experiences they live, making it clear that the “feminist dream of a common naming of experience” was unrealistic, totalizing, and racist (Haraway 1991, 173). Black Feminist Studies, on the other hand, developed in the late 1970s. In the movement and in the academy, figures such as bell hooks, who researched race and gender oppression from a historical perspective, stand out. In her book *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (1984), she states that sexist and racist systems of domination are institutionalized and mutually sustain each other. Other representative authors are the philosopher Angela Davis, who is considered a pioneer in studies on the gender, class, and race triad (Barnett 2003), and the lawyer Kimberlé Crenshaw, who first coined the concept of intersectionality in 1989. However, the concept of intersectionality gained scientific and political relevance only in the
twenty-first century, becoming the theoretical concept of reference to study the different forms of discrimination and inequality resulting from the intersection of social categories such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, social class, etc. The sociologist Patricia Hill Collins further developed the concept of intersectionality in her work *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (2000), first published in 1990. The work has become a classic of Black Feminist Studies, establishing a new epistemological paradigm in studies on Black women, rigorously examining the complexity of their experiences and their political posture. In this work, Collins makes use of intersectionality as a theoretical and analytical tool at both the micro and macro levels. In 2016, Collins, together with sociologist Sirma Bilge, published *Intersectionality*, examining studies from a global perspective, including case studies in Brazil related to the FIFA World Cup and the Black women’s movement. In order to describe power relations, the authors proposed the study of four interconnected levels of power domains: interpersonal, disciplinary, cultural, and structural (Collins and Bilge 2016, 7). The work also provides basic reference criteria for researching from the standpoint of intersectionality: social inequality (national and global social inequalities), power relations/domains of power, relationality across social divisions, social context (in terms of geographical space and historical time), social complexity, and social justice (Collins and Bilge 2016, 25–30).

### Black Studies in the UK

In 1960, Black Studies became institutionalized in academia in the UK with the establishment of African Studies Centers at several universities. The staff consisted mostly of European and US professors, who mainly followed the theoretical postulates of Herskovits to study African colonies (Branch 2018). Noteworthy among them, however, was C.R.L. James, a social theorist who migrated from Trinidad to London in 1933. In 1938, he wrote *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L’Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*, which became a classic of contemporary historiography. James is considered one of the first authors to recognize the importance of the African diaspora and its key role in the transatlantic economy (Walvin 2003). In his studies, he also constructed a non-reductionist theoretical matrix, in a context in which Marxist theory was hegemonic due to economism and colonialism (Martínez and Suárez 2015).

In British and European academia, research studies on the African diaspora, race, racism, and postcolonialism have been systematically undertaken since the late 1990s by leading figures and pioneers of cultural studies such as Stuart Hall, John Rex, and Paul Gilroy.

Stuart Hall, of Jamaican origin, migrated to England in 1952 and studied at Oxford, becoming one of the central figures of the group of intellectuals of the New Left at the time. He is considered the founder of Cultural Studies in British academia in the 1960s and 1970s. Since the 1990s, his works have become a reference for studies on identity, ethnicity, representation, and the African diaspora around the world (Procter 2004). In his work *Questions on Cultural Identity* (1996), he proposes a non-reductionist conceptual relationship between ethnic and class identities, postulating the concept of “articulation of identities.” Identity is understood as a point of articulation between discursive formations and practices that attempt to question subjects, speak to them, or place them in a social location, on the one hand, and the construction of subjectivities – that is, the subject’s capacity for agency and politics to position him or herself, on the other hand (Hall and Du Gay 1996, 7). This articulation demonstrates the subject’s ability to position him or herself by assuming a certain identity at a given time; it therefore establishes that identities are not determined *a priori*, but are constructed in the face of discursive formations and are historical, multiple, contingent, and contextual. This anti-essentialist conception of the construction of identities has become a reference in cultural and sociological studies and in a wide range of humanities and social sciences.

John Rex, of South African origin, migrated to Great Britain in 1948, earned a PhD in Sociology at the University of Leeds in the late 1950s, and was also a member of the New Left together with Hall. His works have made important contributions to sociological studies on race,
ethnicity, social conflict, and multiculturalism. In particular, his work *After Key Problems* (1961) is considered the first British sociological contribution to the general social theory. Meanwhile, *Race, Community and Conflict: A Study of Sparkbrook* (1967), written together with Robert Moore, became a classic study of relations between English locals and Irish, Afro-Caribbean, and South Asian immigrants, the role of voluntary associations and religion, and an exploration of the generational change in immigrant communities. Rex's books were very positively received in Latin American academia in the 1970s and 1980s, especially in Mexico, where he asserted the political usefulness of sociological knowledge in the fight against inequality and injustice (Velasco and Contreras 2006, 82).

Paul Gilroy, a British scholar—son of a Guyanese mother and an English father—earned his PhD from the University of Birmingham under the supervision of Stuart Hall in 1986. He is an intellectual who has worked in an interdisciplinary manner on issues of race, racism, nation, and the African diaspora. He is a leading researcher of the counter-history of modernity, as well as the relationship between modernity, overdevelopment, and underdevelopment. His book *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993) is considered a pioneering work on the transnational research of cultural dynamics and practices produced by the transatlantic slave trade and the colonial slave system and beyond, in a transregional space denominated the Black Atlantic, overcoming Afrocentrism and Black nationalism, where what matters is not the African origin but the material and symbolic dynamics between the continents. In that work, Gilroy extends Du Bois's concept of “double consciousness” to include the entire African diaspora both within and outside the modern Western world (Williams 2013). His works are characterized by challenging racialized thinking and proposing new alternative models of coexistence, overcoming nationalistic, Eurocentric, ethnocentric, and multiculturalist paradigms. These new postulates on the “African diaspora” leave behind the theories of cultural relativism and the essentialism instilled by Herskovits's school on the African heritage, which had a very strong influence on studies on the Afro-descendant population in Latin America in the 1930s and early 1940s (Aguirre 1972 [1946], 10).

**Black Studies in Latin America**

In Latin America, the social sciences were incorporated into academia at the end of World War II, strongly influenced by a Eurocentric current of thought. Sociology was the last discipline to be institutionalized, and it was only in the 1970s that it began to have a more significant impact on Latin American social thought (Quijano 1996), influenced by Marxist currents and theories of dependency and internal colonialism.

The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), founded in 1948 with the objective of contributing to the economic and social development of the countries in the region, produced research that broke with the conventional economic thinking of the time. While many Western economists believed that the expansion of capitalism would result in the spontaneous development of underdeveloped countries, ECLAC’s reflections implied that there is not a spontaneous tendency toward industrialization; on the contrary, it is a deliberate act. The dependency theory maintains that the underdevelopment of (peripheral) countries is directly linked to the expansion of industrialized (central) countries; basically, the main initial contribution of ECLAC’s thinking resides in its development of an economic theory on the relationship of exchange prices, where surplus is effectively extracted in favor of the industrialized countries. Dependency in this sense is not limited to relations between countries, but also creates internal structures in societies (Blomström and Hettne 1990). With their research at ECLAC, Brazilian sociologist Fernando Cardoso and Chilean sociologist Enzo Faletto also observed that plantations, mining, serfdom, slavery, and the subsequent structure of land tenure produced poverty in Latin American societies (Spicer et al. 2009, 281).
Afro studies began in 1920 based on anthropological and ethnographic approaches (García 2002). At the time, in Mexico and in the Andean countries, the ideology of the construction of a mestizo Indigenous-Spanish nation, and later the indigenismo current, became a movement that encompassed the production of the social sciences, art, literature, and architecture (Aguirre 1972 [1946], 8), rendering the Afro-descendant population invisible (Wade 1997; Walsh 2010) and marginalizing the epistemological production of Afro-descendant authors throughout the region to this day (see Da Silva and Pinheiro 2020).

In Brazil and the Caribbean, the miscegenation discourse included the Afro-descendant population as a “third root,” while promoting the discourse of “racial democracy” in the Brazilian case. In all of Latin America, however, miscegenation had a racist, exclusionary character and a tendency to whiten the population (Góngora et al. 2019). In this context, it is important to mention that Brazilian sociologist Gilberto Freyre’s work on miscegenation, *Casa grande & senzala* (1933), broke with the Brazilian ideological establishment of the time, strongly marked by racism and the ideal of biological and cultural whitening of the 1930s (Guimarães 2002, 309). Brazilian sociologist Florestan Fernandes, considered the founder of critical and militant sociology, also became an important reference in the critical approach to the racial problematic in Brazil with his work *A integração do negro na sociedade de classes* (1964), especially for questioning the false idea of a racial democracy by unveiling inequality from a social and racial standpoint (Da Silva and Pinheiro 2020, 353). In 1972, Fernandes continued researching racial inequalities in Brazil, arguing that these were the result of a past of slavery and that, with time, they would tend to disappear. As we now know, however, this did not happen; on the contrary, inequalities have increased over the years (Da Silva and Pinheiro 2020, 353). Along those lines, Brazilian sociologist Alberto Guerreiro Ramos – considered one of the founders of critical sociology in Brazil (Lynch 2015) – promoted a theoretical production that allows “using social science as an instrument for the organization of Brazilian society” (Ramos 1960, cited in Lynch 2015, 29). In his study on Brazilian society, Ramos examined the specificity of the peripheral condition and questioned the ethnocentrism of European theory and cultural essentialism, in order to produce knowledge committed to strengthening Brazilian nationality (Lynch 2015, 36). His research also included racial studies and the place of Black men in Brazilian society. The author also stated that the so-called “Black problem” was not of an ethnic or biological nature, but a cultural problem typical of the semi-colonial phase of development, which could be overcome in the near future (see Ramos 1954, cited in Lynch 2015, 37). In turn, Brazilian sociologist Clôvis Moura, in his work *Sociologia do negro Brasileiro* (1988), examines the influence of scientific racism on the intellectual production of authors such as Euclides da Cunha, Raimundo Nina Rodrigues, Silvio Romero, and Oliveira Viana (Moura 1988, cited in Da Silva and Pinheiro 2020, 369). According to the author, there is a colonial and whitening ideological subordination that persists to these days when approaching the so-called “Black problem” in Brazilian society. Other approaches focused on demonstrating the religious syncretism with cultures of African origin in Brazil and its relations with African societies; authors such as the French sociologist Roger Bastide stand out in this line of research (see Capone 2007).

At the time, sociological studies on inequality focused on class issues due to the influence of historical materialism in academia (Quijano 1996), which postulated the thesis that social inequality had purely economic origins and that skin color had no relevance (Cottrol 2005). Indeed, other forms of discrimination were not considered, also due in part to the influence of the discourses of miscegenation and the myth of “racial democracy,” which were even considered models of coexistence to be followed in the context of the experiences lived during World War II, the Holocaust of the Jews, racial segregation in the United States, and the establishment of Apartheid in South Africa. Thus, UNESCO financed several studies on race relations in Brazil. Those studies, however, demonstrated a strong correlation between skin color, race, and socioeconomic status, calling into question the myth of “racial democracy” (Maio 2000, 116). In this context, the work of Roger Bastide and Florestan Fernandes stood out, while the work of Brazilian sociologist Virginia Leone Bicudo, the first woman to research ethnoracial relations in Latin America, was ignored (see Da Silva and Pinheiro 2020). Through her
research with Black people of the Brazilian Black Front, Bicudo demonstrated that, although Black people rose economically, they were not free from experiencing racial prejudice, nor was the social distance between White and Black people eliminated; on the contrary, both of them increased (Da Silva and Pinheiro 2020, 364).

In the Colombian case, it was only in the late 1970s that studies on Afro-descendant communities became a significant topic (Wabgou 2008, 323). In Ecuador, the invisibility of things Afro in academia has been even greater than in Colombia (Walsh 2005, 2). In Mexico, on the contrary, studies on Afro-descendants date back to 1940 (see Díaz and Velázquez 2017), with anthropologist Aguirre Beltrán playing a key role in the discussion surrounding the historiographic and anthropological oblivion regarding the history of the Black population in Mexico (see Da Silva and Pinheiro 2020). Most studies on Afro-descendants have focused on rural areas (Agudelo 2004) and on culture, especially Afrodiasporic musical traditions, in particular those of the Caribbean. The period from 1950 to 1970 witnessed a gradual transition from descriptive studies or a facile discussion of the tripartite racial heritage to topics related to minority groups and their music, the migration of populations within and beyond Latin America, and the effects of such movements on their cultural forms (Moore 2019, 488).

In the context of Black Culture Congresses held in the 1970s and 1980s, academic and activist discourses linked race and class to account for social inequalities and discrimination (see Vera Santos 2015). Studies on Afro-descendant populations in the region increased significantly as of 1990 with the turn to multiculturalism, the recognition of collective rights for Afro-descendant populations, and later with the 2001 World Conference against Racism in Durban (see Wade 2017; Dzidzienyo 2003; Lechini 2008). Beginning in 2000, sociological studies on Afro-descendants became a subject of rigorous research, thus leading to a new paradigm shift whereby “racial democracy” is demystified and miscegenation is deconstructed; inequality, racism, and its articulation with class, sex, and gender are studied; and anti-racism and the agency of social movements are examined based on comparative and transnational perspectives (Steinitz 2014; Jelin 2014; Dixon 2006).

Research by sociologists Peggy Lovell and Charles Wood (1998) demonstrate the persistence of disparities between the quality of life of White people and Afro-Brazilians, leading to the conclusion that position and income level cannot be reduced to differences in human capital, as was argued in the research of the 1950s and 1970s. In subsequent research, Lovell argues that, if one measures the gap between predictable wages according to schooling and work experience and the wages actually received by women, gender discrimination is more powerful than racial discrimination (see Lovell 2000; 2006).

In the study of race relations in Cartagena, Colombia, conducted by French sociologist Elizabeth Cunin (2003), the term “mestizo competence” was coined to account for the role played in social relations and how these can be traversed, nuanced, negotiated, and mediated by economic, social, political, and self-perception factors. The author accounts for the importance given by people to physical appearance, this being a racial rather than an ethnic issue, and recommends considering this phenomenon in studies on racism, avoiding the current tendency to diagnose “racism without race” or “cultural racism” (Da Silva 2008, 47). In turn, in her study on racism in Mexico, Mexican sociologist Mónica Figueroa points out that everyday comments regarding the “preoccupation” with improving one’s appearance and obtaining a lighter skin color are an example of a series of racist practices without an explicit connection to notions of “race,” and are reproduced by erasing the connection with the historical process of the formation of racism itself (Figueroa 2010, 2). For the author, it is important to differentiate between the notions of “race” and the practices of racism, since in Mexico they are often disconnected, at the same time as the existence of racism is denied by official discourse and the majority of the mestizo population. Following Goldberg’s notion of “de-racialization,” the author argues that the effectiveness of racist practices in Mexico is based on their ability to normalize certain social conditions, as well as ways of thinking and acting (Figueroa 2010, 23).
In his study of the racial structure in Quito, Ecuador, Ecuadorian sociologist Carlos de la Torre (2002) shows how stigmatization processes based on prejudices and stereotypes have given rise to social and spatial exclusion of Afro-descendant residents of Quito. Regarding studies on racism in Latin America, the author observes that racial discrimination increases with the social mobility of the racially dominated sectors, or when the sectors constructed as racially inferior enter, as potentially equal, into the spaces from which they were formerly excluded (de la Torre 2007, 157). In the Brazilian context, similar situations had already been observed regarding mobility, race, and education. Argentinean sociologist Hasenbalg observes in his study that “there is good reason to believe that the higher the educational level reached by a person of color, the greater the discrimination he or she will experience in the labor market” (Hasenbalg 1979, 181; see also Hasenbalg et al. 1999).

In terms of transnational comparative studies, the book by US sociologist Edward Telles, *Race in Another America: The Significance of Skin Color in Brazil* (2004), stands out, with a study of racial relations in Brazil compared to those of the United States and South Africa, based on sociological and demographic approaches. The study shows that race relations in Brazil are characterized by exclusion, and that light-skinned Brazilians remain privileged and have a disproportionate share of wealth and power. Telles argues that the myth that Brazil has harmonious racial relations compared to the United States encouraged the government to do almost nothing to address its shortcomings. In 2014, the author published the results of the Project on Ethnicity and Race in Latin America (PERLA), which demonstrate the existence of inequalities, injustices, and prejudices based on ethnoracial differences, and how these determine the life opportunities of people in Brazil, Colombia, Mexico, and Peru. The study was based on surveys using various forms of ethnoracial classification and elements to measure inequalities. Perceptions of discrimination, public opinion, ethnoracial minorities, politics, and social movements were addressed.

In 2007, Brazilian sociologist Sérgio Costa published *Vom Nordatlantik zum “Black Atlantic”: Postkoloniale Konfigurationen und Paradoxien transnationaler Politik*. The work studies transnational interactions; that is, discourses and connections of the anti-racist movements in Brazil and the United States and their transnational politics. The author undertakes a critique of Eurocentric and theological conceptions of modernity, postulating a postcolonial sociology that allows for the deconstruction of essentialisms in discourses on nationalism and miscegenation in Brazil. He therefore draws on postcolonial authors such as Hall and Gilroy. Through well-grounded empirical work and precise theoretical critique, the study elaborates a decentered sociological perspective against the “mainstream,” in which the global social order is revealed beyond epistemological Eurocentrism.

In 2019, Colombian jurist Manuel Góngora, Ecuadorian sociologist Rocío Vera Santos, and Sérgio Costa published *Entre el Atlántico y el Pacífico negro: Afrodescendencia y regímenes de desigualdad en Sudamérica*. The authors study the construction of the inequality experienced by the Afro-descendant population using the concept of “regimes of inequality,” analyzing the logic of stratification of societies, the discourses that have constructed racialized otherness, public policies, national and international legislation, as well as the modes of coexistence in Colombia, Ecuador, and Brazil. From a diachronic, postcolonial, and transnational perspective, the book offers a genealogy of “intertwined inequalities” throughout five centuries of history, divided into three regimes of inequality: the racial slave regime (fifteenth to nineteenth centuries), the nationalist racist regime (1930s to 1980s), and the compensatory multiculturalist regime (from the 1990s to the present). The transregional diachronic perspective allows the authors to explore the extent to which present inequalities are linked to past inequalities and which inequality-producing mechanisms of the past continue to operate in the present, albeit under different discourses. In the prologue, Colombian anthropologist John Antón notes that the work marks a break or a turning point for Black or Afro-descendant studies in Latin America. Among John Antón’s outstanding contributions is the radical ontological proposal of deconstructing the signifier “Black” and substituting it with “Afro-descendant” – a concept that currently includes not only the descendants of people enslaved through the transatlantic slave trade, but also the African diaspora around the world (see Antón and Wong 2014). This allowed for moving forward toward
Rocío Vera Santos

to the legal recognition as a people with collective rights, by means of international instruments such as ILO Convention 169 of 1989 and Recommendation 34 of 2011 of the United Nations’ International Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD), in order to achieve Afro-descendants’ recognition as a people in the context of the International Decade for People of African Descent, this also being an act of reparation and a path to overcome poverty and gain access to equal citizenship (Antón 2018).

Currently, the inequality and racism experienced by Afro-descendant populations are being studied from postcolonial and decolonial perspectives, fostering a theoretical discourse and a political program based on a critique of Eurocentrism. Postcolonialism is based on the principle that colonialism is the foundation and context of the emergence of modern society, and is therefore deeply inscribed in modernity. In that sense, understanding colonial power is essential in order to understand modern societies, and the author who most extensively studied that problematic is the Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano (Meinhof 2020, 413). Quijano breaks with the Eurocentric paradigm of social theories based on social class to explain social categories, and includes different systems of power and control by race, sexuality, labor, and knowledge production in his theory of the “coloniality of power” (Lugones 2008, 2). In his article “Colonialidad del poder, cultura y conocimiento en América Latina” (1999), Quijano observes that the first characteristic of the “coloniality of power” is the notion of races, which constitutes the basis of the colonizers’ pattern of domination. From this pattern of power imposed through colonial domination, which encompassed all spheres of social existence, a historical-structural dependency was created on a modern/colonial world system ruled by Eurocentric principles. This system disintegrated other ways of being (coloniality of being), of producing knowledge and subjectivities (coloniality of knowledge), maintaining systems of colonial domination by gender (coloniality of gender) and a division between nature/knowledges and society (coloniality of nature). “Coloniality of being” is a concept elaborated by Puerto Rican philosopher Nelson Maldonado Torres, which refers to the effects of coloniality not only in the lived experience of “colonial subalterns,” but also of the dominant sectors (Restrepo and Rojas 2010, 158). “Coloniality of knowledge” has to do with the subalternization, folklorization, or invisibilization of a multitude of knowledges that do not respond to Western modes of knowledge production (Restrepo and Rojas 2010, 136). For the US militant intellectual Walsh (2007, 104), the “coloniality of knowledge” established Eurocentrism as the sole and universal perspective of knowledge, denying the production and intellectual capacity of the Indigenous and Afro-descendant populations. This author also coined the term “coloniality of nature” (Walsh 2007, 106) to describe how the coloniality of knowledge has also discarded the cosmology of nature and its territories held by Indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples. Along these lines, Portuguese sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2010) proposed the concept “ecology of knowledges” to question power relations between knowledges, advocating instead for the recognition of epistemological diversity in the world, promoting the values of justice, democracy, and cognitive solidarity (Aguiló 2011, 146). Likewise, Venezuelan educator and activist Jesús “Chucho” García postulated the concepts of “Afroepistemology,” based on African philosophy, and “maroon pedagogy,” as an epistemic, methodological, and political proposal to modify the educational systems that continue to reproduce Eurocentric and racist views on Africa and the history of Afro-descendants in Latin America and the Caribbean (see García 2018). “Gender coloniality” in turn is a concept coined by Argentine philosopher Lugones (2008; 2011) to refer to “the modern/colonial gender system” (2008, 1), combining the theory of intersectionality with the theory of the coloniality of power to understand how gender oppression operates in contexts of coloniality. The author proposes a “critique of racialized, colonial and capitalist, and heterosexualist gender oppression as a lived transformation of the social realm” (Lugones 2011, 110). She further observes that heterosexuality as a political institution is rooted not only in patriarchy, but also in capitalism and colonialism. In other words, she demonstrates that heterosexuality as a political regime is imposed by colonialism and is functional to capitalism (Oyhantcabal 2021, 112). The author also proposes resistance to multiple oppressions, based on the collective identity of decolonial feminism (see Lugones...
Along the same lines, authors such as the Dominican anthropologist Ochy Curiel, the Colombian anthropologist Mara Viveros, the Dominican philosopher Yuderkys Espinosa, as well as Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and feminist intellectuals and organizational and community processes in Abya Yala, propose a “critical, counterhegemonic, and decolonial feminism” in order to contribute to the analysis of coloniality and racism — no longer as a phenomenon, but as intrinsic to modernity — and their relation to gender coloniality (Espinosa 2014, 12). It is a feminism that allows us to “understand the complicities between neoliberal capitalism, racism, and patriarchal systems in global coloniality, as well as the complex roles that women accept, negotiate, and/or resist in that context” (Medina Martín 2013, 58). The Brazilian intellectual, activist, and philosopher Lélia Gonzalez also made significant contributions to Afro-Latin American feminism based on transnational, decolonial, intersectional, and Lacanian psychoanalytic perspectives. The author analyzed the sophisticated nature of Latin American racism resulting from the imposition of the whitening ideology that defines and imposes a social place for Black and Indigenous peoples (Da Silva and Pinheiro 2020). Gonzalez coined the term *amefricanidad* (“amefricanity”) as a political and cultural category that, in her opinion, overcomes territorial, linguistic, and ideological barriers, while it permits a deeper understanding of the American continent as a whole — including the historical denial of the pluricultural and multiracial reality of the region — in order to promote social change based on feminist epistemology and activism (Ríos et al. 2020, 20).

A number of authors have made use of the coloniality of power to develop new decolonial theories, among them Wallerstein, Mignolo, Grosfoguel, and Laó-Montes.

The sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein is considered the founder of the World Systems Theory, which allows us to analyze capitalism as a world system, overcoming methodological nationalism and incorporating a long-term perspective centered on the capitalist world-economy (see Wallerstein 1983). Later, Walter Mignolo postulated the concept of the “modern/colonial world system,” whereby coloniality is understood as constitutive of modernity (Mignolo 2003, 34). The author also postulated the concept of “colonial difference” to refer to the place and experiences of those who were subjected to inferiorization by those who, in the context of the colonial enterprise, positioned themselves as superior (Restrepo and Rojas 2010, 132). Along those lines, Puerto Rican sociologist Ramón Grosfoguel includes in the “colonial difference” not only Indigenous or Afro-descendant people, but also workers, women, racialized/colonial subjects, homosexuals and lesbians, and anti-systemic movements in the process of knowledge production (Grosfoguel 2006, 38). In this sense, Grosfoguel observes that, differently from the Eurocentric standpoint, race, racism, gender, sexuality, spirituality, and epistemology are not added elements to the economic and political structures of the capitalist world system, but an integral, constitutive part of the “modern European/colonial capitalist/patriarchal world system” (Grosfoguel 2006, 19).

Regarding research on the African diaspora, Afro-Latinos, race, and ethnicity in contexts of migration, the work of Puerto Rican sociologist Agustín Laó-Montes stands out. The author proposes the concept of “subaltern modernity” to refer to the translocal network of resistances and hopes of emancipation sparked by the Haitian Revolution, which inspired a wave of struggles throughout the Americas, constituting an alternative cosmopolitanism from below (Laó-Montes 2009, 213), forged in direct relation with the “modern/colonial capitalist world system” (Laó-Montes 2009, 214). These resistances must be incorporated into a re-mapping of the African diaspora, including the plurality of articulated histories and projects and the world-historical imbrication of multiple genealogies of diasporic formation (the African, South Asian, and East Asian diasporas that compose the space of the Caribbean diaspora), as well as the transdiasporic character of the populations of the world’s cities (working classes and new immigrants); to that end, the author coined the term “intertwined diasporas” (Laó-Montes 2007, 63). “Intertwined diasporas” refers to African-American subjects and populations that are intertwined by history, ethnicity, cultural expressions, and political projects (Laó-Montes 2007, 69). In his most recent work, *Contrapuntes diasópicos: Cartografías políticas de nuestra Afroamérica* (2020), the author creates a historical cartography of politics and the political regarding...
Afro-Latin America diasporas, where the Afro is triply located historically as “alternative modernity,” “counterculture of modernity,” and “alternative to modernity.” The author undertakes an analysis whereby the political is not reduced to the modes of organization and participation in the formal spheres of citizenship, the state, and political parties, but extends to all power struggles. The work has a radical, critical character and shows a commitment to decoloniality and liberation, thus making important contributions to Afro-Latin American epistemological production.

Bibliography


Antón, John, and Laura Wong. 2014. La población afrodescendiente e indígena en América Latina: Puntos de reflexión para el debate sobre el Cairo +20. Belo Horizonte: ALAP.


A Global Overview of Sociological Studies on Afro-descendants


