

Time and Southern Theories

Relation, Consequences, and Debates

In Southern theories, time has remained little examined. This article uses the hypothesis that time is an epistemological aspect and central to the construction of sociological knowledge. If our hypothesis is established, it would make the adequacy of European theories unviable as a standard, as general, and as universal since these would be imbued with their temporal conceptions while other societies have their own approaches to time. So, there is a new dimension for Southern theories to explore. The article has three main parts: In the first part I present the hypothesis, a new approach to time (as an epistemological dimension) and its importance for Southern theories. In the second part, I review the ongoing debate about time in Southern theories, decolonial studies, and postcolonial approaches. In the third part, I return to the initial hypothesis thinking about the implications that it brings to epistemology, social sciences, and the debates that arise.

KEYWORDS: epistemology, Global South, Southern theories, time

INTRODUCTION

The increasing reflections that point to the relationship between knowledge production and colonial inheritance are known to us. The most significant critic made to the modern epistemology is that it has established itself as the only valid and universal perspective, denying other forms of apprehension in the world (Chakrabarty 2000; Mignolo 2003; Quijano 2005; Grosfoguel 2008). This perspective is inadequate because it (i) perpetuates epistemic oppression; (ii) serves as a tool to preserve the Eurocentric global imaginary (which supports the structure of colonial domination); (iii) hierarchizes knowledge and rejects otherness; and (iv) is unable to present a universally valid theory and embrace diversity. From this criticism and the finding of the inadequacy of modern European epistemology, different theoretical approaches were created—namely, postcolonial (Chakrabarty 2000), decolonial (Mignolo and Walsh 2018), epistemologies of the South (Santos 2014), and Southern theories (Connel 2007)—to challenge the relations with Western thought and to deconstruct the views and interpretations that defined colonial zones as sources of culture and ideology, and the West as the theoretical intellectual matrix of humanity.

Numerous criticisms have been made to challenge specific aspects of Northern theories, showing their inadequacy as a universal system of thought. The purpose of this article is to introduce the temporal aspect as central to this discussion, both critical and propositional, from an approximation with Southern theories and epistemologies. For this, the article starts from the following hypothesis: time is an epistemological aspect and is central for the construction of sociological knowledge. It means that the conception on time assumed by sociologists influence and shape the theory produced by them. Although time conception and its function seem controversial in sociological theory, we will work on it and discuss this idea in our first part.

Based on this hypothesis, I argue that it would make the adequacy of Northern theories (sociological theories produced by the Global North and used as universal and general) unviable as a standard, as general, and as universal for all societies and groups since these would be imbued with their temporal conceptions while other societies have their own approaches to time. This hypothesis can reinforce the idea present in the sociology of knowledge that “the social location of a group of thinkers is significant for the ideas

they produce” (Connel 2007, 1). As indicated by Connel, it is quite common that people recognize “the effects of class, gender, race, and generation. In terms of geopolitical location, however, the sociological theory has been unreflexive” (ibid). As such, Connel (2006) made a significant effort to show highly abstracted texts of general theory “where” it does matter.

The central argument of this paper is as follows: A specific conception of time marks Northern theories. It makes these theories insufficient and gives a new task for Southern theories. The idea is questioning the abstract universal of Eurocentric knowledge through the temporal aspect. To develop this argument, the second part reviews the ongoing debate about time in Southern theories, decolonial studies, and postcolonial approaches. The third part will then focus on Boaventura de Sousa Santos’s body of work and his contribution about time and Southern epistemology. Lastly, this paper (i) discusses the limits of Santos’s approach about time and Southern theories; (ii) proposes the epistemological debate of time in Southern theories; (iii) and opens the discussion to future investigations and research in the area, uniting time, epistemology, and social theory through a Southern perspective.

Santos is an interesting author for our approach because he points to the inadequacy of a Western and linear temporal presupposition that perceives societies and their histories through their lenses (Santos 2008). He also presents a significant theoretical and conceptual effort by inserting this perspective into his theoretical tripod (Santos 2008). However, as we shall see later, his critical and propositional approach presents some problems, especially in its propositional part, which only seems to redraw the issue to propose an outlet to the problem of linear Western time, corroborating previous problems and constructing an alternative as well as a Western and linear conception of time.

TIME AND EPISTEMOLOGY

As mentioned above, our interest is in time as an epistemological aspect, not ontological. We consider this emphasis necessary for two reasons: (i) by its approach to the subject, which brings a unique critique via time to the idea of a Northern, Western, universal, generalizing, and modern theory; (ii) and by its propositional character, since it brings new insights into what should be a Southern theory.

To assume this assumption and build a critique on Northern theories of time, this part of the paper will focus on the sociological theory and how some authors assumed time as a cultural and social aspect. Some authors even went further and considered time as an essential aspect of sociological knowledge construction. We will start with Emile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss ([1903] 1990) and classical sociology, then pass through Niklas Luhmann (1976, 1995), Norbert Elias ([1984] 1998), and Anthony Giddens (1984, 1990) with contemporary social theory. We will close with Jose Mauricio Domingues (1995, 2004) and the Latin American contribution.

Durkheim and Mauss ([1903] 1990) have shown through the “most primitive classification system” (namely, the totemic system of Australia) that the logical relations do not underlie social relations, but that the social relations provide our logical connections. It means that even our most universal, basic categories—such as space and time—are social. The authors called our attention to admit that the categories are not pure and universal as Immanuel Kant thought ([1781] 2012) but are sentimental constructions. Thus, these affective differences determine how people group together. Since it generates logical and rational consequences, it is not empty information, making implications on how we look at the world and create logical knowledge about it.

They were claiming something very unusual and ambitious for their time once they denied the Kantian universal categories and proposed an investigation about the source from which all the basic categories of understanding emanated (such as time, space, gender, cause, numbers, and origin). According to them, such categories originated from social life. At the same time, they moved away from prior assumptions of Kantian sensibility and pointed to the social character of these categories. Working specifically with the category of space and with the idea of classification, they stressed the importance of sociology as a tool to highlight the genesis of all the logical operations, showing the association between the classifications and the social constructions. They undoubtedly gave an attractive and essential contribution, but they lost a central element: Sociology is also social knowledge and therefore, also carries its affective load. This social influence also acts over sociology, so it is necessary to make a critical analysis of it and its assumptions.

When Niklas Luhmann formulated the systems theory, he also concluded that time is a social construct linked to the system and the individual. However, he put more complexity into his elaboration on

time. While a classical systems theory formulated by Talcott Parsons considered the structures *a priori* to functions, Luhmann inverted the order: the functions justify the structure. His starting point to think about his general theory was a difference between system and environment (Luhmann 1995).

In concepts such as operational closure (when the system depends only on its organization), structural coupling (long-term influences caused by the environment on the system), self-organization (construction of its structures), autopoiesis (determination of the following state from the previous limitation), operation and observer are central to Luhmann's general construction. However, the idea of time belongs to another level of categories because it permeates many aspects of social life.

Time enables us to observe the reality based on the difference between past and future. Each system exists only in the present. Past and future are points of departure or arrival, horizons of possibilities. However, as Emile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss ([1903] 1990) proposed, Luhmann (1995, 209–10) also assumes that time does not exist *a priori* and is a social construct. For Luhmann, the constitutive system of meaning (reality) presents itself as a difference between actuality and potentiality, between the present and the future. One way to make potentiality possible to the system is time.

There is a specific time related to the individual, the organization, and society (Luhmann 1976). Each observer has a different relationship with time, which varies according to the operation with which it is constituted. Thus, Luhmann (1976) states that time is a mere construct for the observer because when the observer starts the observation it drives time. Time, therefore, would arise with distinction, which emerges only through observation. In this movement, there is a contraction of the present. The present only becomes a limit between the future and the past; and time is not *a priori*, but something that arises from observation in society.

Despite the differences with the authors mentioned above, Norbert Elias also assumes and develops the idea that time is the result of a long process of learning and creation. Time is not natural, neither objective nor *a priori*, but the result of a long social and cultural process. However, Elias ([1984] 1998) went a little further, stating that time can make accessible many sociological problems. Time plays a decisive role in solving sociological problems because it is thought as a base category that influences the construction of knowledge. Time is a model concept that reflects the dynamics of

other concepts that are also central to social theory. Then, looking at it and relying on it brings the possibility of solving theoretical issues.

The individual cannot forge time. Likewise, time is not natural. Elias ([1984] 1989) formulated the idea of time as a “habitus,” as part of the civilizing process, which is assimilated by the child during his growth in society. As we know, we cannot create an individual habitus from the social. The alternative is the synthesis: individualization of the social fact (Elias 1989). It means that, although men are forced to familiarize themselves with time, it would be a mistake to assume that it implies reinforcing individual restrictions. Based on his idea of time, Elias suggested that this is another way of perceiving man, society, and nature. Time seems to be an epistemological aspect and is representative of the synthesis between nature, the individual, and the society, generating a vast theoretical formulation that responds to sociology’s demands (Elias [1984] 1998).

Anthony Giddens also highlighted time not just as a central and social aspect to think about society but as an essential point to the construction of knowledge. In his famous book *The Consequences of Modernity* (1990), he developed an institutional analysis of modernity with cultural and epistemological emphasis. Here he defined modernity as a lifestyle and social organization that emerged in European societies during the seventeenth century. According to him, we would not live in a post-modern society but a period in which the characteristics and consequences of modernity were radicalized and universalized (Giddens 1990, 11).

Giddens pointed out that all pre-modern cultures had ways to calculate time (time always linked to space). With the advance of modernity, a coincidence between time and space suffered an increasing rupture, and places became more and more ghostly. Such a separation (time and space), although intense and growing, is not linear but a modern tendency (Giddens 1990, 29). This modern tendency toward a separation of time and space is central to Giddens’s work, as it is a condition of the disengagement concept, in addition to providing a rationalized organization. As a consequence of this whole process, we have the displacement of social relations from local contexts of interaction, the restructuring, and the ideas of expert systems and symbolic tokens (Giddens 1990, 31–40).

Giddens seems to link the whole modern social organization to the theme of time and its separation from space. He further developed this idea in his theoretical systematic book *The Constitution of Society*

(1984) where he exposed the main concepts of structuration theory. As a starting point, he presented the difference between functionalism, structuralism, hermeneutics, and interpretive sociology. He argues that the problem with all of these concepts—involved and organized within the sociological dilemma between agency and structure—is that none of these think in terms of human action within the space-time context. Giddens proposed to consider both the experience of the individual actor and societal totality through the idea of social practices ordered in space-time.

In general, the structuration theory attempts to think of human action in a *durée*, a flow. For this reason, a space-time ontology becomes not only central but primary for the conception of structuration and for Giddens's attempt to bring light to sociological duality as one of the main exponents of the theoretical synthesis movement. Giddens clarifies that his interest is not time itself with all its complexity, discomfort, and banality. His interest is in overcoming the sociological dilemma through a discussion about the problem of order. However, he noticed that the problem of order demands an explanation about the limitations of individual presence and the extension of social relations in time and space.

Jose Mauricio Domingues, a Brazilian sociologist, was interested in the same theoretical dilemma and concerned in overcoming the sociological dichotomy between agency and structure. He formulated the concept of collective subjectivity and identified a specific phase of modern civilization. Domingues (1995) explored an idea of space-time in sociology in which the social systems are systems of action, whose intertwining causes of causal reciprocity is implicated in a space-time dimension. Domingues (2004) assumes that the actors are reflective, that they share borders of variable definition, and that they are linked to nature. Based on that, he analyzed sociology's contributions to time and space, revisited classic authors to think about the homogeneity of time, and presented his own conception of time.

Based on contemporary physics and Elias's heritage, Domingues concluded that time and space must be thought together since social space is the dimension that marks the limits of the social system. His main argument is to replace the traditional view of social systems as fixed and abstract coordinates to an idea of changing collectivities producing the fifth dimension of space-time (Domingues 1995). This space-time is not homogeneous but shaped by the movements of the collectives, which lend them form and rhythm. The author's goal is

to connect time, space, and action, complementing his formulation of collective subjectivity, which is presented by the author as an alternative to the theoretical dilemma between agency and structure.

In this sense, we can say that Domingues—when focusing on the theme of time—aimed to overcome the theoretical dilemma (like Giddens) and understood that the way to do so was to think about time not only as a social construction but as an epistemological aspect, central to the development of sociological knowledge. Therefore, the idea of time as a social construction is widely accepted in social theory, and the idea of time as epistemological has also been—although less directly—an object of social theory. The original point developed in this article is to use this assumption critically, thinking that if the conception of time (marked by culture and society) influences social theory, this would make the universal and generalist use of the Northern theories unfeasible.

TIME AND SOUTHERN THEORIES: THE ONGOING DEBATE

To discuss how they developed the idea of time, we will briefly point out differences between postcolonial, decolonial, and epistemologies of the South. To do so, we will focus on Dipesh Chakrabarty, Walter Mignolo, and Boaventura de Sousa Santos. After, we will deepen the discussion from Santos, since he dedicated part of his work to discuss the idea of time systematically.

Postcolonial and decolonial theories have common elements: both criticize the role of the “third world”; both were successful in challenging the insularity of European narratives; both demonstrated the parochial character of European arguments about the origin of modernity; and both suggested the need to consider the emergence of other theories that would explain the modern world in the light of colonialism, empire, and slavery (Bhambra 2014). However, there are differences between them. Postcolonial theories emerged as a consolidated intellectual movement developed around the ideas of Edward Said (1978), Homi Bhabha (1994), and Gayatri Spivak (1988). Despite addressing discussions directly about the material and economic field, these theories are focused on the realm of culture. Decolonial theories emerged from the discussion of Annibal Quijano (2007), Maria Lugones (2007), and Walter Mignolo (2000) who are heirs to both the Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School and the World System Theory. Therefore, they focus on the idea of power.

Here, we highlight the concept of coloniality of power developed by Quijano and Ennis (2000).

While the postcolonial effort aims to deconstruct the “essentialisms” and build a critical epistemology of dominant conceptions of modernity, deprovincializing the world and provincializing Europe (Chakrabarty 2000), the decolonial effort aims to further explore the idea of colonialism. Decolonial theory thinks of modern capitalism as a world-system that imposes a racial and ethnic classification of people as the basis of their power structures. These structures relate to the international division of labor in which, for example, Latin America is always in charge of exporting primary resources (Quijano and Ennis 2000). There is also a difference in the geographical origin and the timeline within which they work. While postcolonials are diasporic scholars from the Middle East and South Asia focused on the nineteenth and twentieth century, decolonials are diasporic scholars from South America going back to the earlier European incursions in the continent close to the fifteenth century (Bhambra 2014).

In this context, the epistemology of the South, a term created by Santos, claims to be the set of all these epistemological and political proposals that question the hegemonic centrality of the modern Eurocentric project based on social justice and cognitive justice (Santos 1995). The project is comprehensive, involves some specific theoretical pillars (as we will see), and understands the South not as a geographical place but as a metaphor for the unjust suffering promoted by the oppression of colonialism, capitalism, and heteropatriarchalism. In this sense, the South would be heterogeneous and include diverse places and knowledge (Santos 1995; Meneses 2008). Despite the relationship between the three theoretical approaches as established above, their differences and the emphasis given by them are notable (in the epistemological, political, and theoretical fields). These differences will become more evident throughout the section from the discussion of the three “representative” authors.

DIPESH CHAKRABARTY AND THE POSTCOLONIAL

Dipesh Chakrabarty pointed to the persistence of the colonial legacy visible through the terms and concepts used. Such terms always refer to European intellectual tradition and, according to Chakrabarty (2000), are insufficient to interpret the historical processes of

developing countries. His criticism lies in the fact that even today non-Western national histories are drawn up concerning political-theoretical categories that belong to a European intellectual tradition. The effect of this is that “Third World” historians feel the need to refer to works about European history (Chakrabarty 2003).

The opposite is not valid because despite any cultural difference, European intellectuals produce theories that embrace the totality of humanity, which are then adopted by historians and social scientists without any contextualization in their daily practices. Based on this idea, Chakrabarty (2000) proposed the concept of provincializing Europe provocatively and “deprovincializing” the world. The result is the naturalization of the idea that only European history has categories and concepts capable of producing theoretically knowable knowledge. Consequently, if this is true for theoretical and political concepts, it is also applicable to time. For when we think of the political configurations of South Asia from concepts relevant to the imaginary of European modernity, India is always defined—in terms of temporality—as a society in transition, legitimizing a notion of linear temporality whose end is Europe (Chakrabarty 2000).

One consequence of this is the recurrence of works by Indian historians pointing to the incompleteness of national dreams, the failure of the transition stages and national projects. It is possible to see in all this an idea of “not yet” quite present. This indicates a criterion of measuring cultural distances between the West and the rest of the world so that a compulsive imitation of the European civilizational model has become naturalized in all societies as the universal path of development (Chakrabarty 2015).

The author criticizes the indiscriminate use of Western social and political categories, arguing that they offer clear limitations on the conceptualization of political modernity in non-European life contexts. However, he does not want to (absolutely) reject all concepts and notions important to Northern social sciences or to break with the perspective of modernity (its liberal and rational values). What he proposes is a renewal of the global body of thought to make its relationship with the diversity of life forms more reliable (Chakrabarty 2000). Note that there is a clear difference here with the decolonial thinkers.

In the project of the Latin American group, among which we highlight Enrique Dussel, Edgardo Lander, Anibal Quijano, and Walter Mignolo, these authors aimed to reveal the hierarchical power structured by Europe in modernity and its consequences, which

include the epistemology but are not reduced to it, encompassing the production, the market, and the exportations in an international division of labor (Quijano and Ennis 2000).

WALTER MIGNOLO AND THE DECOLONIAL

Mignolo went back to the fifteenth century highlighting how America's newly colonized lands were incorporated into Europe, baptized as Western Indies, and then became part of the great West and the imaginary of the modern world. With the articulation of the global imaginary, the East was transformed into the other, the distant figure in opposition to which the West self-portrays itself and downplays everything that does not accommodate modern culture (Mignolo 2003). According to Mignolo, this would have suppressed local imagery, memories, and histories, subsuming everything to a single and universal perspective about what is politics, economics, subjectivity, religion, and knowledge. Quijano ([2000] 2010) called this the coloniality of power, defined by him as a hidden face of the global imagination full of exploitation and subordination of the other by Western projects.

The coloniality of power is the movement in which the “new historical identities produced around the foundation of the idea of race in the new global structure of the control of labour were associated with social roles and geohistorical places. In this way, both race and the division of labour remained structurally linked and mutually reinforcing, even though neither of them was necessarily dependent on the other to exist or change.” (Quijano and Ennis 2000, 536) The Latin American group (especially Mignolo) denounced that the body of Western theory situated the knowledge production of Europe—instituting European rationality—as a global epistemological model, denying local knowledge in the name of supposed neutrality of scientific knowledge and taking this as its only legitimate form of cognition (Mignolo 2003).

Mignolo denounced the geopolitics of knowledge to contextually situate the various knowledge and critiques of the universalist claims of hegemonic Western thought. Europe has established itself as a privileged locus of enunciation, defining itself as the legitimate producer of universal knowledge. This has led to the construction of a scientific division of labor with power asymmetries that conceive Europe as the theoretical subject of social sciences and making all other societies questions of historical research.

In this sense, the future came as a movement toward the completion of the incomplete project of modernity (in its Marxist or Habermasian versions), but it should be thought of in terms of the transmodernity of a world to which all existing rationalities could contribute (“border thinking”). According to Mignolo (2004, 677), the socialization of knowledge—that is the overcoming of epistemic totalitarianism—would imply that the overcoming of modern temporality and the myth of modernity is responsible for justifying scientific totalitarianism.

Mignolo aimed to break with the universalist claims of Western thought, making visible the geopolitics of knowledge and the epistemological violence of the homogenizing project of European modernity as well as time conception. He aimed to give voice to knowledge hidden and marginalized by its ideal of rational knowledge. He contributed to the decolonial theories by bringing a new concept of reason in response to the superiority of modern rationality over other forms of knowledge, namely, “subaltern reason” (Mignolo 2003).

Subaltern reason is the proposal of another locus of enunciation, not easily defined as an opposition to modern rationality but as spaces of the intersection of it with other forms of knowledge. His proposal to give voice to narratives reported from local historical experiences as a way of breaking from global projects is what Mignolo calls the “decolonial turn” (Mignolo 2003). The basis for this theoretical construction by Mignolo was his concept of border thinking. This concept first appeared in the work of Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) and was later developed by Mignolo (2013). It then became a central concept for decolonial thinking and the proposal for the epistemic transformation of modernity.

In general, we can define border thinking as an idea in which all theory and epistemology must have a living dimension. By living dimension, Mignolo understands the experience of those who were excluded from the production of knowledge by modernity. This border thinking is a response to modernity and is a real part of the struggle against the oppressive apparatus of the colonial power matrix (Mignolo 2013). “Border thinking is ‘the epistemology of the exteriority; that is, of the outside created for the inside’ (Mignolo and Tlostanova 2006, 6)” (Faria and Wanderley 2013, 5). The border is defined not only by epistemic difference but also by geographic distance, separating Mignolo from the epistemology of the South. Border thinking is also markedly from outside to inside and is found

in alternative forms of knowledge, such as different traditions and languages of expression (Mignolo 2013).

In addition to its propositional power, Mignolo's concept also has an explanatory and analytical character. It allows us to theorize about modernity and about how and why researchers do not engage with subordinate knowledge and do not move toward a pluriversalism that dialogues with both sides of the border (Mignolo 2013). It can give us hints about how to think about the idea of time. There would be a concept of time within recognized and leading European theories, and there would be multiple alternative temporalities spread across different languages, cultures, religions, and philosophies. The lack of dialogue, however, does not allow an exchange between the inside and outside of borders. Mignolo's response to the dominant Western temporality would, therefore, be an opening to border thinking.

As we can see, there is a discourse within the postcolonial and decolonial theories about time, but it mainly sticks to the ideas of history and narrative present in modernizing theories, complaining and denouncing the way the West, as a rule, justifies its differences with other societies across phases in time, and how it unfairly triggers past, present, and future categories, epistemically speaking.

BOAVENTURA DE SOUSA SANTOS AND THE EPISTEMOLOGY OF THE SOUTH

About the epistemology of the South, it is crucial to highlight Santos's effort to systematically and purposefully deal with the issue of time and temporality, giving a new interpretation and alternative to this epistemological and narrative "problem." Boaventura de Sousa Santos proposed a postmodern critical theory that would take up hope for the exercise of translating and communicating local alternatives to unprecedented globalization that expresses the strength of resistances and their experiences of good living. His starting point is that the errors of victorious modernity were never unwanted and unintended perverse effects but rather their intrinsic elements.

Bruno Latour (1994) postulated that modern rationality created specialties and hyper-specialties, impoverishing the complexity of reality. One of his aims was to disrupt the modern way of conceiving the world in binary pairs and dichotomies and bringing hybridity to the center of the formulation. Rather than thinking of modern rationality as a tree with roots and foundations followed by the

notion of a single junction unfolded in branches from the common trunk, Latour thought of a rhizome (Deleuze and Guattari 1977). The idea with the rhizome is that the structures can be underground or on it and nourish each other, constituting not as hierarchized specializations or sub-specializations coming from the same trunk but as separate knowledge that interact and communicate (Latour 1994).

Santos (2004) uses the same tree figure to build his critique. According to him, the idea of a tree—in force for a long time—made reality invisible and produced nonexistence, since some logics incompatible with the tree were ignored. Ignorance of the ways of living, knowing, and being that do not fit the particular modern logic make explicit the severe indolence and laziness of the modern reason for doing what one would expect: thinking. Ignorance eventually became an established science paradox (Santos 2004, 779–80). He further points out that the arrogant modern reason that diffuses unquestionable certainties is flashforward because it creates the fanciful idea of a pre-defined future that surpasses the present. According to Santos (2013), it is necessary to be born with a pluralist and a cosmopolitan type of reasoning capable of doubting Western linear time and the concepts derived from it—such as progress, revolution, evolution, modernization, and development—because such concepts hinder the perception of intertwined modernities, such as shared histories.

The epistemological challenge would, therefore, be to interact with worlds that have secularly denied their real existence. To this end, it formulates the ideas of the sociology of absences and sociology of emergencies capable of dilating the present and contracting the future so that it emphasizes immediate reality, latencies, possibilities, and trends. Within this new perspective, the reality would not only be formed by what exists and what does not exist, but by what is not yet existing but is nevertheless real in general. The sociology of absences proposed by Santos (2002) studies the “not yet.” This elaboration, especially concerning the theme of time, became more explicit in one of Santos’s works entitled *A Gramática do Tempo: para uma nova cultura política* (The Grammar of Time) published in 2008. This was meant to lay the foundations of a new political culture that allows a rethinking and creates a desire for the emancipatory transformation. Here, Santos develops the theory of emancipation and seeks to present the reader with something more purposeful but still grounded in earlier and critical diagnoses of time (Santos 2013).

Making a diagnosis of time, Santos (2013) builds a structure-action map composed of six forms of space-time. Space-time is a form of sociability that implies places but also temporalities, durations, rhythms. The six highlighted by him are the domestic space-time (dominated by the patriarchy's form of power); the space-time of production (whose mark is exploitation); the space-time of the community (endowed with unequal differentiation between who belongs and who does not); market space-time (marked by commodity fetishism); the space-time of citizenship (public space, *par excellence*); and world space-time. From this diagnosis emerges a theory of emancipation outlined below.

According to Santos (2006), it is necessary to reinvent social emancipation because there is no modern solution. Alternatively, he proposes a postmodern critical theory also called epistemology of the South. Its fundamental principle is that there is no global social justice without global epistemological justice among knowledge because there is inexhaustible diversity in the world and there is no general European theory that can organize this reality. If there is no general theory that can organize this reality, what does he propose to do? He sets out to make a general theory that talks about the impossibility of a general theory. From this, he articulates his theory of emancipation that is based on the following three pillars: sociology of absences, sociology of emergencies, and translation.

The key to the dominant social science position is the critique of lazy reason that manifests itself in two ways: a metonymic reason and a proleptic reason. The metonymic reason is a rationality that takes part of the whole with a concept of totality made of homogeneous parts. In opposition to it, that is, in opposition to an experience provided by metonymic reason, Santos (2010) proposes a sociology of absences. This sociology of absences aims to expand the present and to include in it more reality and more experience. The sociology of absences is the procedure by which what does not yet exist is conceived as the actual result of a given social process. If metonymic reason produces absences through monocultures—knowledge, scientific rigor, linear time, the naturalization of differences, and capitalism—we must counteract them with a sociology of absences, whose foundations are the ecology of knowledge, temporalities, recognition, and productivity (Santos 2010).

What does this mean in practice? According to Santos (2010), the metonymic reason contracts the present; proleptic reason, founded on a conception of linear time, expands the future. The Western

reason, therefore, as essentially proleptic—in the sense that it already knows about the future and is endowed with strong conceptions of progress and development—further expands the future and contracts the present. This expansion of the future and contraction of the present have visible signs: predictability and the assumption that we already know what will happen in the future. Santos wants to combat this notion. Against this proleptic reason, he proposes the sociology of emergencies. In it, we would proceed to a symbolic expansion of knowledge, practices, and agents to identify in them the future trends (those not yet) that can act to maximize the probability of hope concerning the probability of frustration (Santos 2013).

Instead of expanding the future, one must contract the future to prepare it better. Through the sociology of emergencies, this notion has the following objective: to expand the present, clues, latencies, and possibilities that exist in the present and are signs of the future. Without romanticism, Santos (2010) claims that the multiplication and diversification of experiences arising from the phenomenon of modernity generated the problems of the fragmentation of reality and the impossibility of giving meaning to it. If metonymic and proleptic reasons solved these problems through the concept of wholeness, which takes part of the whole, and by a linear conception of time, which gives history a sense and direction, it was at the cost of wasting experiences. Its diversity and breadth cannot be contemplated by such a conception of reality, abstract universalism, and a general theory of time (Santos 2013).

As an alternative, he proposes translation, intending to open up the possibility of new ways of thinking about these wholes and new processes of achieving ethical and political convergence. This translation is understood as an intercultural and intersocial process of translating knowledge into other knowledge, translating practices and subjects from one another, and seeking intelligibility without cannibalization and homogenization (Santos 2002).

As an alternative to Western temporality responsible for contracting the present and expanding the future, creating an environment of predictability and homogenous interpretation of reality from concepts such as progress and development, Santos (2013) proposes a sociology of absences and emergencies. This is focused on contracting that future and expanding the present. It is committed to translation to create intelligibility without destroying diversity, a fundamental principle of Southern epistemologies (Santos 2013).

WITH AND AGAINST BOAVENTURA DE SOUSA SANTOS

As we saw above, Boaventura de Sousa Santos gave significant attention to systematically discuss the theme of time. As such, we have made more consideration about his work and his theoretical and intellectual project in the last section. In this part, we will focus on systematizing Santos's discussion, pointing out what we call diagnostic and solution mistakes.

First, however, it must be acknowledged that Santos noticed the relationship between Western temporality and epistemic oppression. He seems to have left clues, albeit unsystematically, that there was a clear relationship between the universalization of a specific temporality and epistemic violence (Santos 2006). In addition, he makes a very accurate and interesting diagnosis and reading of modern Western time, relating proleptic and metonymic logics with the shortening of the present and the future project of development and achievement (Santos 2006). For any Southern citizen, it is possible to see how much this Western temporal logic is present in our minds and in the commonsense imaginary as highlighted by Chakrabarty (2000) through the ideas of development, progress, predictability of the future, and completion of the world.

Santos's theoretical effort is also a significant contribution because he moves away from the descriptive level, generalizing ideas from reality and outlining a rich conceptual theoretical framework. This brings at least part of the complexity of the unfair situation and epistemic violence experienced by the South for so many centuries (Santos 2002). I also highlight Santos's purposeful effort. It is a recurrent criticism of postcolonial studies that they are very critical, very vindicatory, but not very purposeful. After criticizing a universalizing Western temporality, the author's endeavor—to propose a solution to the problem through the sociologies of emergency and absence, and through the design of translations—is important and commendable (Santos 2002, 2006). However, it is necessary to point out some problems with the formulation of Santos, both in its diagnosis and in its proposed solution. This critique of Santos is done in light of the idea that permeates the whole article namely, that time is an epistemological aspect of social theory.

The first criticism that we make concerning its diagnosis is that the author, despite sketching a relationship between temporality and epistemological injustice (Santos 2006), does not clarify how

this relation is established and is therefore not very systematic in his diagnosis. While bringing a critique of Western temporality and realizing that it is at the heart of the epistemic oppression of the north, it does not sufficiently identify the problem. This prevents it from taking a more general view and from perceiving the problem as intrinsic to all theoretical compositions.

Thinking of time as epistemological would help in his diagnosis because it would make his diagnosis more systematic and precise: There would be a relationship between temporality and epistemic injustice because every theory carries with it in its foundation the conception of time that its authors brought, which makes the theory, *par excellence*, a specific theoretical construct limited to a particular reality. When we force a specific theory to embrace a more extensive scope by universalizing its concepts, we try to homogenize cultural and possibly theoretical diversity by committing unjust and epistemic violence. If Santos thought in these terms, he would realize that the problem, perhaps, is not Western temporality and reason itself, but the way it has been universalized to different cultural realities.

In this sense, it would be simpler to make his argument that the existence of a general theory is impracticable through this approximation. Santos states that his effort is to create a theory that spells out the inadequacy of general theories. However, the argument is unclear; at times, the impression we have is that Santos is proposing a general “old fashioned” critical theory.

Arguing that the sociologist’s conception of time shapes and influences the way he builds his theory—because time is social and is a basic category, thus conforming to an epistemological aspect—makes it easy to argue that, therefore, one cannot think in terms of a general theory, as they would always be imbued with a specific conception of time (as well as space, gender, cause, consequence, among other elements) that should not be universalized with a risk of becoming oppressive and violent, subsuming cultural diversity. Moreover, making this argument—of time as an epistemological aspect—would still preserve the place of speech of each group and society to compose their explanatory theories of their realities from their temporalities, which would also make their suggestion of a solution.

His diagnostic problem causes his solution problem. When he assumes that the problem is not the universal presupposition of temporalities in theoretical constructs but Western temporality, he inevitably moves toward the attempt to overthrow a Western

temporality and attempts the implementation of another temporality, which would value the present and contradict the future (Santos 2006). The problem is that this temporality also runs the risk of becoming oppressive. Instead of stating the diversity of temporal conceptions, Santos tries to resignify the roles given to the past, present, and future. In this attempt, he only redraws Western temporality in a different way.

He leaves the past where it is, empties the future, contracts it, expands the present, makes it the field of things that are not yet, and values trends and beginnings. However, it does not question the present, past, and future structure, which is quite Western by itself and does not question the linearity of these three categories. It does not challenge these three elements, but only gives different weights to the same components.

Lastly, as a final solution, he commits himself to translation as an alternative that opens the possibility of new ways of thinking about wholeness and new processes (Santos 2002). For him, translation as an intercultural process would be vital because it would translate knowledge and translate each other's practices without homogenization. In this regard, I give voice to Spivak (2010) who would tell Santos that many untranslatable silences will never be audible if one does not abandon the pretense of a spokesman of the other and, instead, effectively engages in subversion the subalternation structures that keep entire populations muted.

CONCLUSION

This article started from a present (but not systematized) assumption in the social theory that time is an epistemological aspect—that is, that time is an essential and influential aspect in the construction of social theory. From this, we propose the use of this assumption as an argument for the inadequacy of the generalization of theories from the North to the Global South.

We first analyzed some authors and the way they dealt with this assumption concerning time. We did this through Durkheim and Mauss ([1903] 1990), Luhmann (1976; 1995), Elias ([1984] 1998), Giddens (1984, 1990) and Domingues (1995, 2004). The main conclusions of the section were: (i) there is a consensus in social theory about the elementary concept of time; (ii) there is only an outline (with little systematization) about the idea that time is

an epistemological aspect of social theory; (iii) there is no critical reading of the Northern theories based on this assumption.

In the second part, after some theoretical-conceptual differentiation, we investigated how the idea of time was analyzed in the postcolonial, decolonial, and epistemologies of the South. We did this through the analysis of the works of Chakrabarty, Mignolo, and Santos. We noticed that despite precise diagnosis, the first authors did not focus on this theme. Santos was the one who gave more attention to the problem of time, for this, we also focused more on his analysis.

We identified two problems in Santos: one about the diagnosis and one about the solution. In the diagnosis, Santos correctly noted the relationship between temporality and epistemic injustice and brought a precise critique of Western temporality (Santos 2006). However, he did not realize that the problem of temporality is intrinsic to all theoretical conceptions.

As an alternative, the article proposed the diagnosis of time as an epistemological aspect. Thinking in these terms would help because Santos would see the cause of the problem, which is not just Western temporality. Instead, every theory carries with it (in its foundation) the author's conception of time, which definitely makes them limited to particular realities.

Santos's diagnosis leads him to a solution (which this paper also disagrees with): to try to overcome the Western temporality by implementing another temporality that would value the present and contradict the future (Santos 2006). The problem pointed out by the article is that this temporality also runs the risk of becoming oppressive, since it carries the perspective of Santos, who only redraws Western temporality.

As proposed by the article, the alternative solution to Santos is to respect the particularities and give voice to the different authors from different places and perspectives. Since time is something that intrinsically influences the construction of social theory, this would make the general and universal theory always inappropriate and insufficient. The proposed alternative and the argument elaborated in this article open new horizons of research and reinforce the criticisms already made by the Southern theories to the universalization of the Northern theories from a temporal bias. Provocatively, we extend the question to other aspects: If time is an epistemological aspect that makes Northern theories unsuitable for universalization and generalization, what about the other categories, such as gender, space,

cause, consequence, among others? Are there also epistemological aspects? Can they be used for critically thinking about theories of time? If not, what makes time a different elaboration?

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