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### Reply by Wilson Trajano Filho

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*Réplica*

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## Reply by Wilson Trajano Filho

*Réplica*

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The comments my article received inspire a response that focuses on both the convergences and divergences between my colleagues' readings and my own. The broader convergence has to do with the timing of my critique of decolonization. For Macagno, such opportunity is basically due to the overall context of Brazilian Social Sciences, in which decolonization's conceptual package has gained an unusual (and I would say, uncritical) popularity. According to him, such package comes with a way of thinking that turns its back to anthropological knowledge. The opportunity thus has to do with the contradiction between the academic success of a not very anthropological way of thinking and the rise of a kind of anthropology that increasingly turns its eyes beyond Brazil, that is, to spaces that were until recently either part of the colonial world or direct heirs of it. Given this context, I can conclude that without a deeply critical look at the decolonization package itself, any anthropological endeavor to go beyond our borders would be a suicidal initiative, an anthropology of self-denial.

It seems to me that Macagno also acknowledges that there is something beyond the situational in the opportunity of my criticism. His reference to the 50th anniversary of the Portuguese "April 25th" clearly attests to this. However, it will be Ménard who directly notes that the appropriateness of the criticism does not have to do (solely) with my position in the disciplinary field, but also with the fact that decolonization and its correlates have become concepts that reveal and are at the root of important contradictions within the (Western) academic world. Her sports analogy, in which universities compete in a race in which those that are the most decolonial or the most post-colonial win, is quite insightful and her identification of the Global North as the main locus for the winning institutions is not subject to dispute, as long as the problem is framed using an ordinary framework, in which binary classifications predominate. In this regard, her reading of the situation differs from mine. The race to be the most decolonial institution mobilizes competitors from all corners of the world, as evidenced by the popularity of decolonial and post-colonial approaches in Brazil and South Africa. The disagreement intensifies when I bring the perspective of creolization, whose main objective is to do away with classifications based on binary oppositions and dichotomous thinking. I am aware that I am partially responsible for her reading insofar as I do use the term "Global South" six times and I employ the term "Global North" once in my original text, suggesting an opposition between them. This only highlights the difficulties of breaking with ordinary frameworks in textual construction. As much as we want to go beyond an established perspective, the basic tools for expressing thought, especially those crystallized in standardized linguistic formulae, seem to have a will of their own to take us back to the safe haven of that very state of things against which we rose up in the first place.<sup>1</sup> In my defense, I must note that at least once I was textually aware of the problem, dissolving the opposition between north and south through the usage of terms such as "peripheries of the center" and "centers of the periphery".

It must be established that the timeliness of my endeavor is related to the incompleteness of my article. I am aware that although it is long, it is incomplete. I did not directly detect this particular criticism in either of the two readings, but

1 In the case in question, I note the paradoxical relationship between the categories "Global South" and "Global North" and the idea of an established perspective. The latter insinuates the constancy of that which is established – something which is not consistent with the brief existence of the first two categories in sociological thought.

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I must acknowledge that problem, both in the part which focuses on the history of the concept's use as well as in my criticism of post-colonial and decolonial approaches. The authors-actors-agents-ideologues of the colonial world from the 1930s to the 1950s also deserved a more detailed analysis of their projects and inclinations. An even greater attention should be reserved for the analyzes and actions of anticolonial nationalists, who have been treated in a way that is not consistent with the density of their writings and the complexity of their actions. Even the most critical sections of the article are indeed marked by an unintentionally homogenizing approach. Macagno resents this when he mentions the links of the senior proponents of the decolonial current with political economy and Marxism, on one hand, senior thinkers of the decolonial strand and, on the other hand, political economy and Marxism, in contrast to the more junior scholars, who were enchanted by rhetoric discourses and the more extreme version of an individualist ideology. Quijano could certainly be counted among the former, having close ties with the thinkers associated with the theory of dependency and Marxism. Ménard is also critical of the homogenizing impoverishment brought upon by my thinking; she does so by drawing attention to the precious comeback of politics and economics seen in recent studies on decolonization, although she does acknowledge the fact that epistemology continues to be the main battlefield for decoloniality.

The context of Macagno's critique of homogenization has to do with my proposition that decolonial and, to a lesser extent, post-colonial thinking are both characterized by a juvenile and conservative rebelliousness. He disagrees with the term "juvenile" and proposes instead the idea of harmless rebellion. Despite this being an apparently secondary dimension of the analysis, I think it is important to insist on the original argument, as it has to do with the more general object of my criticism, which goes far beyond decolonization (see below). The proposition regarding the idea of a juvenile rebellion is based on two points: the diffuse nature of the "anti" perspective and its links with popular culture (seen in the centrality of the non-mathematical but rather cinematic idea of *Matrix*, the pluri and multiverses of the film *Interstellar*, the mystical Gaia that is closer to Asimov than to Lovelock, and the references that associate Bob Marley with *vincularidad*), understood as a dimension of life and thought that does not care about contradictions and ambiguities, letting them flow freely. I thought my point of view was well founded, but I take comfort in what Macagno says at another point in his reading on another subject: "it's not enough to be right, one has to be persuasive."

Some extra thoughts on the nature of incompleteness: as I already pointed out in the first note of the article, the idea of writing this text was born out of an invitation from Jacqueline Knörr to write a joint work that would look at the phenomenon of decolonization through the lens of creolization. This relationship, although seemingly unusual, had already been outlined by me in a paper on the Social Sciences in the contemporary world. In it, I took "colonialism as a relatively recent historical event within the broader process of creolization triggered by intersocietal encounters that brought Europeans of varied origins in regular interactions with Africans, also of diverse origins (Trajano Filho 2011: 297)". Thus, colonialism

and decolonization, which is one of its possible developments, are taken as part of something broader, which is the process of creolization resulting from the process of European expansion from the 15th century onwards. While examining the pertinent literature, I became aware of the need to develop a severe critical look at the studies so much in vogue on the subject, which slip into the field of epistemology, and of the importance of knowing the history of the term's usage, before introducing the notion of creolization. At this point, the effort to demarcate the key points about the history of such usage and to criticize the preponderance of the ideational dimensions of colonialism and decolonization, with their strong emphasis on epistemology and academic institutions, had grown substantially and gained a life of its own. On the one hand, I began to envision a larger text, a book, which would cover everything I found pertinent about this conceptual package. On the other hand, a feeling of urgency due to the notoriety of the topic and the consequent banality with which it has been treated, as well as the certainty that the criticism should have the harsher tone that it ended up having, impelled me to publish a text that is still incomplete in terms of its content, but definitely complete with regards to its formal and substantive structure. That much said, readers can expect, in the near future, a book with a more serene tone, a less homogenizing discussion and a more detailed coverage - plus the aforementioned joint article in which the theme of creolization deserves a better developed approach, in theoretical and conceptual terms.

The importance given to creolization for understanding both colonialism and decolonization was probably the subject of the most explicit criticism in the two readings my text received. Macagno makes his reservations clear about a supposed optimism regarding the power of creolization; he points to the ambiguities inherent in this heuristic device, draws attention to the rise of xenophobic discourses and practices in the contemporary world, and argues that my emphasis on creolization does not exempt me from using the notion of culture, which continues to operate, surreptitiously, in the analysis. And, finally, he claims that the culturalist agency of the "natives" invariably challenges the anti-essentialist categories that I want to introduce with its usage. Ménard is less critical of the idea of creolization, but has reservations about combining it with anthropophagy, pointing to a problematic lack of differentiation between the latter and the idea of appropriation.

Firstly, I must say that I introduce the notion of creolization in order to understand the changes that have taken place during the decolonization processes and to overcome the difficulties related to the very idea of cultures as a self-contained and self-sufficient entities, separated from each other by objective distinctive features and with implications of purity and authenticity. Likewise, I also aim to surpass the usual way of framing colonialism as a dichotomous tug-of-war between the colonized and the colonizers. When approaching a phenomenon such as decolonization from this perspective, the two lines of thought criticized in my work face enormous difficulties in explaining intersocietal encounters, syntheses, mixtures and flows of sociocultural practices and forms. And, by proposing, as decolonialists do, a delinking and distancing of the colonial world from what they would call the metropolitan world, they show themselves to be bound by problematic alternatives:

namely, a distressing search for primordial purity and authenticity supposedly lost during colonization (which can only be achieved by radical detachment), or a painful struggle to avoid the conclusion that the human world of mixtures, syntheses, flows, loans, and the permission to let oneself be affected is residual, a remnant of colonial domination that must be avoided. The introduction of the idea of creolization to get a better understanding of decolonization and its correlates was aimed at showing that, as a program of action mixture, engagement, synthesis, copy, parody, appropriation and theft are better and more productive than delinking and disconnecting. Furthermore, it also provides a more appropriate framework than the old notion of discrete cultures that are supposed to be impermeable to each other.

The fact that contemporary societies and cultures are in a permanent state of flux, engaged in exchanges and appropriations of things and ideas, and carrying out creative syntheses is not controversial at all. This is the natural state of the social. The Social Sciences have employed various concepts (most often analogies) to deal with this world in flux: hybridism, miscegenation, syncretism, and creolization, among others. My choice for the latter, which was not properly explained in the original text<sup>2</sup>, is due to the fact that it is the one that best explains the paths which lead to changes, mixtures and flows. And, as a bonus, it is more efficient than rival concepts in dealing with the emergence of new things - what I called creative synthesis. My use of the notion of social and cultural creolization has a clear source of inspiration in linguistics and is based on an analogy between language and culture. I am aware of the limits of such an analogy and I explain this in the article. Its ambiguities, however, should not prevent us from testing its fecundity.

Macagno argues that, despite having introduced the notion of creolization, I cannot do away with culture, which remains alive in substantive analyses; he even goes so far as to suggest a research agenda so as to make sense of a creole essentialism that would be averse to cultural porosities and reinventions. The way I think of creolization, inspired as it is by the idea of a post-creole continuum (in situations of decreolization), seems to me to give a good account of these cases. The notion of culture remains very much alive in this conceptual apparatus, but it has a non-discrete, intersystemic, continuous and, perhaps, implicational nature. Depending on the degree to which a society becomes decreolized, the barriers will be more or less fixed, and the flows more or less fluid, just as the openness to what comes from the outside will be greater or lesser. I had the opportunity to address this when I analyzed the contrasting perspectives on cultural borrowings and the openness to being influenced in two creole universes (Trajano Filho 2018).

On the exaggerated optimism about a world in an advanced stage of creolization detected by Macagno, I must say that the passage he mentioned was deliberately written as such on purpose, including the reference to Hannerz. He is right in saying that the anthropology of transnational connections has become dated: it refers to a world that no longer exists and that, after September 11, what we see most are threats to cosmopolitanism, the re-emergence of walls and a growing exclusivism. None of this stopped me from glimpsing the “dawn of a multipolar human world”. By this I did not mean to refer to the promised globalized world of the 1990s, in which

2 This will have to wait for a paper in which creolization will receive a more conceptually refined approach. In reality, such an approach has already been advanced, in its main lines, in the works of Knörr (2022a, 2022b, 2022c), which motivated the writing of my article. A joint text should come to light in the future.

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multiculturalism prevailed (an ideology that values the multiplication of monads, each living in great isolation). When I referred to a world in an advanced stage of creolization, I was rather thinking of a truly creolized world; I was pointing to the obvious decline of the empire and the withering away of the hegemonic culture within it; I was suggesting (with a dose of positive naivety) a configuration of multiple creative syntheses in which new geopolitical actors are gaining an active voice.

I am not blind to the obstacles that temper my optimism; I just do not see them as elements that deny or make creolization unfeasible. The key expression here is “human world”, the world as it is. At the end of the original article, I called attention to not being seduced by idealizations, and I argue that the roadmap for action must be realistic, and that analysis must take on an attitude whose best promise is not the end of inequalities, but merely less suffocating asymmetries. In all this I concede that the introduction of creolization into my analytical framework, as it has been done, has more of a pragmatic than a theoretical dimension. As it stands, creolization would be better understood as a program of action that inspires us to appropriate what belongs to others and to incorporate it or to make it our own. Therefore, I complement creolization with anthropophagy. A modernist idea that provocatively wished to grasp the modernist Brazil of mixtures and flows, anthropophagy is less a concept and more a devouring attitude - one which appropriates and incorporates. For the purposes of this analysis, the anthropophagic cuisine carries out both activities without the need to establish the difference between them (as Ménard would prefer).

To conclude this already long reply, I would like to note that if there is any theoretical ambition in my article, it has nothing to do with my complete distaste for the decolonial and post-colonial fever. My theoretical intention in writing this rhapsodic essay was to take the case of decolonization to show the paths taken by theoretical elaboration and conceptual construction within contemporary Social Sciences. I tried to show how decolonization and its correlates have become obese, carrying conflicting meanings. Conceptual obesity is the name I give to this, and I note that this *malaise* has afflicted important concepts in social theory. Identity, resistance, gender, mimesis, populism and decolonization are some of them. However, the concept of culture is the one that has suffered the most from this malady, and the one that affects us the most.. Here lies the second theoretical ambition of this essay. The text's intention was not so much to criticize the concept of culture, which has been understood through simplifying dichotomies and binarisms. This criticism has been made by countless anthropologists during the last 50 years and seems to have reached true unanimity among my peers. However, when it comes to carry out substantive analyses, what happens most often is that we slip back into the good old versions of culture that we criticize so much. In Macagno's view, my analysis may have fallen victim to this illusion, but I hope to have shown (in the article and in this reply) that, when seen from the perspective of the world in creolization, the concept is operative without slipping into the problems I have pointed out. In any case, as always, “it's not enough to be right, one has to be persuasive”.

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