



Dissonância

revista de teoria crítica

ISSN: 2594-5025

Instituto de Filosofia e Ciências Humanas

Universidade Estadual de Campinas

www.ifch.unicamp.br/ojs/index.php/teoriacritica

Título	Adorno's "Natural History" and Anti-Colonial Critique: Critical Theory and Afro-Caribbean Marxism
Autoria	Elizabeth Portella
Fonte	<i>Dissonância: Revista de Teoria Crítica</i> , v. 4, Dossiê Teoria Decolonial e Teoria Crítica, Campinas, 2020
Link	https://www.ifch.unicamp.br/ojs/index.php/teoriacritica/article/view/3963

Formato de citação sugerido:

PORTELLA, Elizabeth. "Adorno's "Natural History" and Anti-Colonial Critique: Critical Theory and Afro-Caribbean Marxism". *Dissonância: Revista de Teoria Crítica*, v. 4, Dossiê Teoria Decolonial e Teoria Crítica, Campinas, 2020, p. 162–202.

ADORNO'S "NATURAL HISTORY" AND ANTI-COLONIAL CRITIQUE

Critical Theory and Afro-Caribbean
Marxism

Elizabeth Portella*

ABSTRACT

In spite of the Frankfurt school's emphasis on the "consumer society" and its relative silence on questions of colonialism and imperialism, this paper aims to reconstruct critical resources for the critique of colonialism from the work of Theodor Adorno. Specifically, the paper demonstrates the immanent compatibility of his conception of "natural history" with the analytical focus of Afro-Caribbean Marxism, examining what is shared between this concept and the materialist analyses of anti-colonial critique in the 20th century. The paper distinguishes how "natural history" has, historically, functioned as an ideological rationalization of colonization and how, critically, it echoes some of the basic aspects of the critical work of Frantz Fanon, Walter Rodney, and C.L.R. James. Constructing a theoretical encounter between Adorno and thinkers of African and Caribbean decolonization, the paper advocates for a renewed critical conception of natural history which not only identifies the false naturalization of racial and geographical hierarchy, but also grasps the exploitation of natural resources in the colonies and the realities of global inequality and underdevelopment.

* PhD Candidate in Philosophy at the University of Oregon, U.S. (eportel2@uoregon.edu).

KEYWORDS

Critical Theory — Colonialism — Decolonization — Natural History

A “HISTÓRIA NATURAL” DE ADORNO E A CRÍTICA ANTI-COLONIAL

Teoria crítica e marxismo afro-caribenho

RESUMO

Apesar da ênfase da escola de Frankfurt na “sociedade de consumo” e seu relativo silêncio sobre as questões do colonialismo e do imperialismo, este texto visa reconstruir recursos críticos para a crítica do colonialismo a partir da obra de Theodor Adorno. Especificamente, o artigo demonstra a compatibilidade imanente da concepção adorni-ana de “história natural” com o foco analítico do marxismo afro-caribenho, examinando o que é compartilhado entre este conceito e as análises materialistas da crítica anticolonial no século XX. O artigo explora como o conceito de “história natural” funcionou, historicamente, como uma racionalização ideológica da colonização e como, criticamente, ecoa alguns dos aspectos básicos da obra crítica de Frantz Fanon, Walter Rodney e C.L.R. James. A partir de um encontro teórico entre Adorno e os pensadores da descolonização da África e do Caribe, o artigo defende uma concepção crítica renovada da história natural que não só identifique a falsa naturalização da hierarquia racial e geográfica, mas também que capte a exploração dos recursos naturais nas colônias e as realidades da desigualdade e do subdesenvolvimento global.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Teoria crítica — Colonialismo — Descolonização — História natural

Often the Frankfurt school, Adorno in particular, is most closely associated with critiques of Western "consumer societies" and such analyses are, disproportionately, the emphasis of critical the early Frankfurt School. In *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said notes that the Frankfurt School has, historically, been "stunningly silent on racist theory, anti-imperialist resistance, and oppositional practice in the empire" (Said 1993: 278). This criticism has more recently been reiterated in Amy Allen's *The End of Progress* (2017: 1).¹ Although Allen's analysis pertains primarily to the "third" generation of the Frankfurt School, her work has generated a much-needed theoretical investigation of how German critical theory has, historically, related to non-European contexts and critical traditions. While acknowledging lacunae in critical theory's purview concerning colonialism and imperialism, I nonetheless maintain that the broader methodology of the Frankfurt School is neither normatively Eurocentric nor portended by colonialist assumptions, as some critics have suggested. Indeed, it is often where critical theory has seemingly been most controversial that it proves most beneficial. One exemplary case of this is to be found in the concept of "natural history." In what follows, I work to clarify the concept of natural

¹ For Allen, a "return" to the early Frankfurt School is intended to ameliorate the Eurocentric perspective of the later generations of this tradition. In spirit, I fully accept that the "first generation" holds the greatest potential for a critical theory which is adequate to the colonial condition and to a globalized world. Though I do not concur with her attempt to reconcile this perspective with the Foucauldian, poststructuralist tradition, her intervention is akin to my own in the sense that she is concerned with the normative foundations of critical theory and their colonial implications. My aim in this paper, however, is less to demonstrate the feasibility of critical theory's foundations in general and more to demonstrate that the thought of the early Frankfurt School and the tradition of anti-colonial critique *already* share fundamental features.

history in its critical mode as it appears in the work of Adorno and, moreover, highlight a crucial continuity between this aspect of his thought and the anti-colonial critique of the Caribbean. I have chosen to focus specifically on a single dimension of its merits for a specifically anti-colonial, globally inclusive critical theory.² Although the critique of colonialism is certainly not the focus of Adorno's thought, I argue, this lack of focus does not determine the critical import of the concepts developed in his work toward those ends. On the contrary, I argue, Adorno's conception of natural history as a critical concept – defined by its contrasting relation with its classical conception – is especially productive for thinking about the complex nexus of purportedly “natural” justifications of domination, exploitation, and expropriation, the impetus to dominate nature, and the reified conception of nature that portends these violent rationalizations.

² A terminological distinction is in order: in this section the reader will encounter three related but distinct terms: postcolonial, decolonial, and anti-colonial. Some contemporary scholars have discussed the distinction between postcolonial theory (and the postcolonial condition) and decolonial thought, emphasizing both methodological and geographical variances. See, for example, the special issue of *Transmodernity* titled “Thinking through the Decolonial Turn: Post-Continental Interventions in Theory, Philosophy, and Critique.” See also Coronil (2013); Bhambra (2014). Less often, however, is the term “anti-colonial” explicated. For one notable exception, see Chakrabarty (2009). Although I have serious reservations about his characterization of the anti-colonial position in general, he sums up clearly one crucial aspect of the distinction that needs to be noted here: “If anti-colonialism spoke to the project of decolonisation, postcolonial writings have been an essential part of the struggle to make the liberal-capitalist (and, in the beginning, Anglo-American) Western democracies more democratic with respect to their immigrant, minority, and indigenous populations (though there have been tensions between these groups)” (Chakrabarty 2009). These tasks are equally important but distinct, though not often thoroughly distinguished. It is *anti-colonial critique* that is the focus here.

However, it is crucial to note that I am by no means the first to acknowledge that the Frankfurt School's insights have been brought to bear on the question of colonialism. Indeed, others have argued that the work of Adorno and Horkheimer partly constitutes the basis of what we now refer to as "decolonial thought." Walter Mignolo, in his introduction to *Globalization and the Decolonial Option*, recounts that, when examining "the differences between existing critical projects and de-colonization of knowledge," the modernity/coloniality group "decided to focus on Max Horkheimer's formulation of 'critical theory'" (Mignolo 2010: 1). The "difference", Mignolo concludes, is that "while de-coloniality names critical thoughts emerging in the colonies and ex-colonies, Jewish critical traditions in Europe [...] materialized as the internal responses to European formations of imperial nation-states" (Mignolo 2010: 1). However, I understand the relation between the Frankfurt School and anti-colonial critique (to say nothing of decolonial thought) rather differently. Mignolo depicts a relatively seamless continuum from the Frankfurt School to decolonial thought. Yet, this continuity situates the Frankfurt School as a kind of "internal" agitator from within imperial nation-states. Mignolo's characterization of the Frankfurt School's contribution to the critique of coloniality understands the sphere of European critique and the sphere of anti-colonial critique in the colonies as autonomous spheres, as distinct arenas of critical investigation. Mignolo's approach to this relation – which is exemplary of how much decolonial thought contends with it as well – presupposes fundamentally separable domains of critical inquiry. My approach, in contrast,

emerges out of a relational understanding of two distinct but ultimate reciprocally constituting, albeit unevenly, parts of a single global system – a conceit which Mignolo et al. would themselves likely accept, but which is not evident in their characterization of these critical traditions. This subtle difference is especially important if we have any interest in holding critical theory accountable for its historical failure to do even what it purports to: to analyze the social totality constituted by modern capitalism, a totality that has only grown more integrative and which has produced a thoroughly globalized world.

Another consequence of this approach is that decolonial thinkers have understood the Frankfurt School as its analogue in Europe but has left that tradition's concepts and methods largely unthought as resources *for critique beyond the boundary of Europe*. It is, in part, the emphasis on decoloniality rather than decolonization that leads thinkers like Mignolo to hold such a view, in the sense that, in spite of their emphasis on subjective distortion, ideology, and other such products of alienation, the Frankfurt School's deeper commitments to historical materialism make its critique more compatible with the critique of decolonization and with the anti-colonial tradition. With a shared heritage in the Marxist tradition – one which has been eschewed by many (though not all) decolonial thinkers – the Frankfurt School's method is, in fact, more compatible with anti-colonial critique, the thematic focus of its major thinkers' analyses notwithstanding. The continuity between critical theory and anti-colonialism is obscured by Mignolo's account of relatively autonomous critical spheres. Moreover, Mignolo's reading gen-

erates a greater sense of continuity between thinkers like Adorno and Horkheimer and the modernity/coloniality framework, a view which is troubled by the more materialist account I intend to offer here.³ Focusing specifically on Adorno's concept of natural history, we can more easily discern the continuity not yet explored in either the literature on critical theory nor decolonial thought, discerning how natural history has, historically, functioned as an ideological rationalization of colonization and how, critically, it echoes the critiques of thinkers such as Frantz Fanon, Walter Rodney, and C.L.R. James.

Natural History as Ideology⁴

Natural history, in its most conventional form, is a calcification and institutionalization of the traditional antithesis of nature and history.⁵ In its 19th century variety, natural history is exemplified in the cataloging, taxonomizing, and classification of

³ The modernity/coloniality group's reading of the Frankfurt School, contrary to my own, finds that school opposed to political economy (as exemplified by the work of Ramon Grosfoguel [2011; 2007]). This opposition has been contested but nonetheless remains somewhat underexplored. See, for example, Kellner (1975).

⁴ For the purposes of this paper, I am operating with Adorno's conception of "ideology" as *socially necessary semblance*. His conception is "negative" or critical, rather than neutral or positive (e.g., the Althusserian conception), thus it only refers to false ideas necessitated by social contradiction. Natural history (and, respectively, the categories of history and nature in isolation), following this formulation, functions ideologically if it obscures the material conditions of possibility of colonial domination and is epistemically ideological insofar as it is both in the interest of colonialists to maintain this obfuscation (*vis-à-vis* "social necessity" of colonial and imperial accumulation) and because it comprises a part of a larger ideologically distortive picture of capitalist social totality (Adorno 1966: 197; Adorno 2005: 106, 115; quoted in Cook 2006: 1).

natural artifacts and these processes' contextualization in a larger arc of development and alteration "internal" to natural objects purportedly "independent" of human interaction or impact. Phylogenetic, morphological, or adaptive changes and transformations are understood as "historical" in the same sense as "human history"; one can already see here the danger of surreptitiously naturalizing what is, in fact, historically contingent.

It is this most basic gesture which demonstrates that, even a disposition bent on taking the natural for *what it is* in its unmediated objective alterity permits instrumental reason to reduce objects to what is thoroughly graspable through human thought and perception. With complete coincidence between subject and object, the classical conception of natural history – even as it attempts to bring nature "closer" or make it more familiar and knowable to humankind – posits the observer and their vantage as the primary of the two. Where one might expect a kind of reciprocal relation, in this classical conception, one finds instead an imposition and, indeed, *domination*. It is thus unsurprising that the modern practice of naturalism is closely bound up with the exploitation and destruction of its object, since that object is rendered inert and pliable, reducible to human appearance as exploitable and expendable. A phrase that should have indicated the imbrication of nature and history

⁵ Though not explicitly in terms of ideology or even "natural history" per se, Aníbal Quijano (and his intellectual inheritors in decolonial thought) acknowledge the role of an oppositional understanding of history and nature as constitutive of colonial rationality (Quijano 2008: 203–4). His work, however, does not undertake a focused or sustained analysis of this particular division. Furthermore, it is beyond the scope of this paper to determine whether such an opposition is, in fact, overcome or ameliorated by the decolonial option.

instead became a forceful divider of the categories of history and nature. One is most properly a "natural historian" or "naturalist", in the classical sense, when one is notably apart from and externally observing (rather than dependent and always related to) the non-human natural world.

The history of the concept of natural history is robust and complex and, admittedly, too long to confront in all of its iterations here. However, it requires little recollection to warrant the problematization of "natural history" as the observation of that which is inhuman or "merely" nature. In the history of natural history, what is "human" and "inhuman", "observer" or "artifact" has been anything but clear to colonialists, slave holders, and the "passive" consumers of the metropole alike. If we recall such cruelties as those experienced by Sara Baartman, a Khoikhoi woman from the eastern cape of South Africa known through extensive exhibition in England and France as a "Hottentot Venus", the exoticization and display of "natural artifacts" can hardly be left uncriticized.⁶ It is this chasm between the status of "human" and the category of "natural" which concerns the remainder of this section. Fraught and troubled, I hope to demonstrate, is the tendency to *falsely naturalize* what is, in fact, social and historical. Equally troubled, but for rather different reasons, is the tendency to *evade any claim to natural facts*. From this classical antinomy and with the goal of overcoming it, we can distinguish *two tasks for a critical natural history*. The first, already having been well-developed by the aforementioned

⁶ For recent scholarship on the phenomena of the "hottentot" venus and the life of Sara Bartmann, see *Callaloo* (2009); Qureshi (2011); Hobson (2005).

thinkers of both postcolonial and decolonial thought, is to dereify or to reveal the contingency of supposedly (i.e., falsely naturalized) claims about the colonized and about colonial history. The second, less often discussed, is the mapping of how natural resources (made normatively significant by colonization) function in the project of colonization and, therefore, how they should appear in a critique of the colonial project and a globalized capitalism. In order to overcome the traditional opposition of history and nature – one which has operated widely in colonial rationalization as well as in the capitalist reification of nature and thus ecological crisis – we need both these tasks, though the fraught history of “nature” would seem to deter us.

The Opposition of History and Nature as Colonial Rationalization

It is among the most basic tenets of the critique of colonial discourse and practice to demonstrate the falsity of what, for the colonizer, is staked as natural “fact.” Since its earliest appearance in academic reflection, postcolonial theory has rejected the colonizers’ naturalistic arguments in favor of demonstrating that alleged “natural inferiority” is but a crassly duplicitous rationalization of historically contingent violence and domination. What is said of European superiority and of its inevitable ascendancy is revealed as a thinly veiled, but no less pervasive, justification of pillage and brutality. This dereification of colonial rationalization has been offered by thinkers such as Frantz Fanon, Edward

Said, Gayatri Spivak, C.J. Young, and Paul Gilroy.⁷ In the Latin American/Iberian context, the critique of naturalistic justification is evident as early as the 16th century, in the debate between Bartolome de las Casas and Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, now known as the "Valladolid debate".⁸ More recently, decolonial thinkers such as Aníbal Quijano and Walter Mignolo, and others of the modernity/coloniality group, have carried out a similar critique of the supposedly "natural" passivity and servility of indigenous, native, and colonized peoples. Suffice it to say the revelation that colonialism and colonial subjects are neither natural phenomena nor, moreover, justified by a natural hierarchy, has long been the starting point – both implicit and directly stated – of postcolonial theory and decolonial thought. Indeed, the reader will recall that, for Mignolo, the very "idea" of Latin America is not a natural concept but one generated by colonial geography.⁹ This critique is a continually necessary one, even as many colonial apologists have shifted their discourse from classical descriptions of natural inferiority to new discourses about the "autonomy" of nations, "ethnopluralism", and the safeguarding of the purportedly discrete and particular ethnic and cultural identities.¹⁰ Thus, the task of a critical natural history is to main-

⁷ Said (1978: 12, 29, 46–49); Spivak (1999: 12–13); Young (2001: xix, 32).

⁸ See Santana (2020).

⁹ See Mignolo (2005).

¹⁰ Here I allude to organizations such as Identity Europa, Génération Identitaire (France), Generation Identity (Germany), Identitarian Movement UK, Rise Above Movement (U.S.), American Identity Movement (U.S.), and others who have justified white nationalism on the basis of what is often called "ethnopluralism." The appropriation of identity politics and the apparently "isolationism" and "protectionism" of these groups takes the shape of rigid anti-immigration policy, "white pride", "heterosexual pride", and eugenic views of racialized reproduction. The discourse is not, overtly, con-

tain this dereifying and historicizing function in order to counter crystallized ideological frameworks.

Reflected in both concrete and philosophical history, the category of “nature” has long played a crucial role in the justification of European colonization. From the “exploratory” expeditions of James Cook, Louis Antoine de Bougainville, Jan van Riebeeck, Vasco da Gama and, most famously, Christopher Columbus, the “discovery” and classification of the natural world has been closely associated with colonial and imperial expansion.¹¹ During and after the so-called “Age of Discovery” these expeditions were christened by colonial powers as benefiting not only trade and the glory of empire but also for enriching humankind’s knowledge of “our” habitat. With each fleet and flotilla travelled a naturalist who, in the mind of colonialists, was poised to seize upon the opportunity to observe and record “never-before-seen” natural artifacts and, often but not always less explicitly, to plot the extraction and instrumentalization of natural resources. Their observation was far from neutral. It typically instrumentalized not only mineral and botanical resources but led, if not directly advocated for, the instrumentalization of native, indigenous, and enslaved peoples, whose labor (a natural resource belonging to all human beings) would be coerced or forcibly directed in extracting these resources. Given this, it is hardly surprising that postcolonial and decolonial thinkers have developed a suspicion of naturalistic claims, since such claims

cerning a natural hierarchy but rather “natural difference” which should be preserved and “celebrated” through tribalism and regional/national homogeneity.

¹¹ See for example: Said (1978: 119), where he identifies “classification” as the fourth basic element facilitating modern Orientalist thought.

have often been the basis of biological racism. In short, these thinkers have long rejected nature (and the concept of natural history) in its *ideological* form.

This *ideological naturalization* which postcolonial and decolonial thinkers have worked to reject and criticize appears in at least two forms. Firstly, as the establishment of a systematically organized racial and ethnic taxonomy (i.e., "biological" or "scientific racism"), the hierarchical description of "races" as part and parcel of the classical conception of "natural history" prior and into the 18th and 19th centuries. This taxonomy is developed in scientific and Christian varieties, which are often mutually supporting. This form of the naturalistic argument is further bifurcated into claims vis-à-vis paternalism (e.g., the "white man's burden" and the "white savior") and claims vis-à-vis "might makes right" (e.g., social Darwinism).¹² Second, the naturalistic justification takes form of imputing to the colonized a certain "proximity to nature", either on the basis of essentialism (i.e., natives are naturally "closer to nature") or cultural/historical specificity (i.e., modernization has yet to take place but could, with colonizers' "help"). The colonized, in this second case, are seen as more "natural" or "closer to nature" than their colonizers, either because of a cultural particularity or in their "failure" to reach modernity's benchmark of development. It should be noted that this is not always motivated by obvious pity or rebuke. The claim also inspires the fetishization of the suppos-

¹² See also Chatterjee (2012: 49): "The idea of slavery based on natural reasons would be easily transmuted later into one that claimed that the imperialist had to defend those who were incapable of defending themselves, or indeed of acting politically."

edly “primitive”, elevating it as a cure or alternative for the ills of modernity.¹³

It would be quite impossible to address the claim to natural hierarchy *and* the “proximity to nature” claim here. Moreover, for historical reasons, the latter of these is perhaps more pressing for us in the 21st century, as even many conservative colonial apologists would be unwilling to support the “unscientific” taxonomization of human “races”, if only because they fear appearing “out of fashion.” The second variety of the naturalistic argument cited here, on the other hand, often persists, even in the most well-meaning of conversations about colonialism. Whereas the first version of the claim would be subject to the yardstick of respectability politics and quickly dismissed (even if its presuppositions are sustained), the second variation of the claim has a still as yet ambiguous status both in the dominant discourse and in postcolonial theory itself. Many critics of colonial (and male-dominant) discourse, for example, appeal to the “proximity to nature” claim with a positive content, asserting the superiority of native and indigenous relations with nature.¹⁴ Thus, for our purposes, I will focus on the second version of the naturalistic justification of colonialism.

The classical conception of natural history, as a *socially necessary semblance* generated by and for societies reliant on domination and enslavement for their “prosperity” and their

¹³ E.g., for historical discussion of “negrophilia” in 20th century France, see Straw (2000). In the Latinx/Latin American context, see Mendible (2007); or, for a historical introduction to “primitivism” in European art and aesthetics, see Rubin (1984).

¹⁴ For critical scholarship on the stereotype of the “ecological Indian”, see Harkin & Lewis (2007); Rice (2014); Krech (1999); Gilio-Whitaker (2017).

"humanism", obfuscates some of the most fundamental contradictions of colonial society: duplicitous implementation of "spiritual improvement" by means of torture and murder, the cultivation of genteel colonial womanhood while simultaneously relying on the rape and enslavement of indigenous women, and claims of charity and good will which thinly veil practices of usurpation and irrevocable degradation of colonies' natural resources. The reproduction of colonial societies as colonial societies required the systematic extraction, enslavement, and domination of the colonized. This social necessity and its material conditions have profoundly shaped our understanding of the character and function of the categories of history and nature, typically conceived as an opposition.

Adorno's Natural History as Critique

The opposition of history and nature (exemplified, ironically, by the classical conception of natural history) has played not only a prominent role in the extraction of resources and the expropriation of native and colonized labor but also in shaping the uses for the amassed wealth accumulated through colonialism and imperialism. As Adorno and Horkheimer describe in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, the reification of nature, the subordination of the natural world to purely instrumental reason, and the perceived "inexhaustibility" of that world to those seeking to dominate it has resulted in more rather than less subjection to the forces of nature. In Europe and North America, the need for fossil fuels has increased astronomically in inverse proportion to

the efficiency of industrial development. This was perhaps not foremost in Adorno and Horkheimer's minds, as the climate crisis had not yet reached its most threatening proportions and was not yet well understood. However, their observations about the domination of nature demanded by the imperative of endless capital accumulation in the former industrial nations has only increased in prescience. The colonization of Latin America, Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean – and expropriation of natural resources therein – would forcibly provide the conditions of possibility for a way of life so voracious it threatens to consume the entire species (though certainly not all at once and not equally in the meantime). Thus, the category of natural history is making a kind of a return, as the category of nature – which for some time has been ignored or simply rejected by many social theorists – is being made ever more relevant in the struggle against climate change. Still, the concept is not without controversy and, even among Adorno scholars, occupies a peculiar and ill-understood role in the larger project of critical theory.

The category of “natural history” is controversial not only because of anti-naturalist or “anti-essentialist” criticisms, but also because it has not been well examined even among Adorno scholars.¹⁵ For many Adorno scholars, as Max Pensky writes,

¹⁵ Intellectual historians have since developed a wide vocabulary for the shift away from foundationalism, objectivity, etc. in Euro-Atlantic theory. Some have referred to it as “postmodern”, others “post-structural”, but I prefer the terminology that refers to the theoretical moves these larger trends have inspired: the “cultural turn”, the “linguistic turn”, and most recently the “epistemic turn” and “normative turn.” What virtually all of these “turns” share is a repudiation of natural claims, of material objectivity. The primacy of language, concepts, construction, and forms of knowing coupled with the tendency to eschew theoretical foundations, objectivity, universality, etc. have long since saturated the field of social theory. One need only think of the canoni-

"natural history" is "surely a candidate for the most troubling and resistant theoretical element of Theodor Adorno's intellectual legacy" (Pensky 2004: 227). More generally, as Tom Whyman notes, even though the concept is perhaps one of the most consistent throughout Adorno's corpus this is not well reflected in scholarship on his work and, moreover, has not established a scholarly consensus about its role and significance (Whyman 2016: 452). The recurrence of "natural history" to some of the Frankfurt School's critics, would seem to suggest that, indeed, the thinkers of this school have not seriously considered the exclusionary and oppressive uses to which categories such as "nature" have been put. For some, the appearance of a concept so thoroughly associated with the philosophical disposition of 19th century Europe complicates Adorno's status as a genuinely critical thinker of modern capitalist society. Indeed, a latent concern seems to be that the presence of any "natural" claims (about human nature or the natural world) in the discussion of colonialism amounts to a ceding ground to colonialist arguments.¹⁶

What many decolonial and postcolonial critiques lack is a framework for how to contend with *real* natural facts, facts which make formerly colonized regions and lands the objects of colonization. Understandably, these critiques divert energy away from naturalistic arguments in general in order to steer the con-

cal status of figures such as Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault and even Gayatri Spivak, especially in postcolonial theory. For a scholarly survey of this strain of influence, see Hiddleston (2010). For a critical evaluation of this conjuncture, see Parry (2004) and Lazarus (2011).

¹⁶ See, for example, Latour (2011). For a critical evaluation of this position, see Malm (2017: 124–125). See also Young (2011: 3, 35).

versation about colonialism away from dominant assumptions. As the task is to undermine pernicious naturalistic assumptions, the question of *natural resources* and their extraction, in many but not all accounts, is *deemphasized* or falls to the wayside. Furthermore, materialism as a methodological premise is thereby demoted to a “complicit” theory. Thus, contemporary decolonial critiques tend to reproduce the basic logic of the classical opposition of history and nature, if only by omission. For example, the thinkers of modernity/coloniality group rarely discuss the distribution, extraction, and exploitation of labor which drove the colonization of America; by their accounts, we are left without recourse to explain the motivations of the colonial project and are relegated to explaining only its symptoms and rationalizations. The colonial project appears primarily in the register of “coloniality” which refers not to these concrete and material practices but to their epistemic ramifications; likewise, decoloniality has since displaced the primacy of material and militant decolonization movements.¹⁷ To reiterate and clarify, decolonial and postcolonial critiques of the naturalistic justification of colonialism are very necessary. However, subsequently, this does not mean that *all claims about nature* have colonial implications. And, more importantly, without claims about the natural world, human beings’ dependency on it and role in it, we are left with a bewildering and arbitrary account of the systematic violence and destruction wrought by colonialism and imperialism. We cannot understand the colonial/imperial project without also grasping its material foundations, including its relation to nature.

¹⁷ See Quijano (2010). See also Mignolo (2010) and Castro-Gomez (2000).

On this score, Adorno's particular conception of ideology as both "true and false" is helpful. The imposed opposition of history and nature – like ideology more generally – is "both true and false." "It is true", Adorno writes, "when it expresses what happens to nature; it is false when it simply reinforces conceptually history's own concealment of its own natural growth" (Adorno 2006: 122).¹⁸ It is the "moment of truth" (i.e., the concrete occurrence) of the opposition that gives Adorno's modified conception of natural history its critical purchase. In both the naturalist and historicist responses to colonial discourses about history and nature, there was no place for the fact, arbitrary but made morally and politically loaded by colonial expansion, that natural resources, their geographical location, the need for labor to extract these resources, relate to a broader need for the reproduction of life which, distorted and subordinated to exchange-value and capital accumulation, is nonetheless latent in the practices of extraction and expropriation.

The reader may worry that acknowledging *any* natural facts about how colonialism takes shape in historically and geographically specific ways is tantamount to conceding to colonial arguments. However, such a worry seems to itself concede much ground to colonialist arguments, since it presumes that from these arbitrary natural facts could emerge a justification for violent extraction and enslavement, a basic presupposition of the colonialist. Thus, to abandon any account of the configuration of the natural world does not allay the colonialist's claim to natural superiority and, moreover, inadvertently lends credit to the

¹⁸ See also Adorno (1966: 358).

capacity to derive political justification *immediately* from bare and arbitrary natural facts. Instead, we might make critical use of the concept of natural history to grasp the interrelated modes of the domination of nature, whereby the extension of this logic justifies the domination of those associated with the natural (i.e., the native, the colonized).

Natural history grasps the reciprocal mediation of history and nature in several registers. Firstly, the concept attends to Marx's most basic insight about the reproduction of life, the "metabolic" relation to nature, and its constitutive role in human history. Secondly, as it is formulated in Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, it tracks the historical trajectory of human beings' domination of nature and the "overcoming" of natural necessity. Thirdly, natural history reflects the ways that this natural necessity continues to shape human history's course as a distorted imperative which mediates a transhistorical fact. Fourthly, it helps to historicize reified conceptions of nature. Finally, the concept of natural history avoids the pitfalls of either a relativistic historicism or a positivist naturalism, offering a more rigorous framework for critically grasping history's colonial and imperial course.

In his early essay, "The Idea of Natural History", Adorno frames his elaboration of the concept of natural history as intending to "overcome the usual antithesis of history and nature" (Adorno 1984: 111). The aim of this conception is not to collapse the distinction or conflate these categories, but rather to "[push] these concepts to a point where they are mediated in their apparent difference" (Adorno 1984: 111). This means that,

in order to grasp the reciprocal mediation between nature and history, we must understand that each category has determinate properties and is therefore not reducible to its "opposite" but also that each's determinate properties are constituted in relation to that "opposite." The larger structure of the essay is composed both of a criticism of the "ontologization" of history (represented by Heidegger in his account) and the "bewitchment" of history, which would naturalize what is contingent into what is strictly necessary (Adorno 1984: 122). The mutual determination of history and nature, for Adorno, must avoid the tired opposition of radical contingency and unqualified "determinism", by way of *either* history or nature.

In this essay, Adorno also privileges the capacity of "natural history" to dereify and critique "second nature", drawing on Lukács's formulation of that concept.¹⁹ From the vantage point of "the perspective of philosophy of history", "the problem of natural history presents itself as the question of how it is possible to know and interpret this alienated, reified, dead world" (Adorno 1984: 118). The emphasis on the critique of "second nature" is further bolstered by his references to Benjamin, who airs also on the side of contingency. This emphasis, however, must be understood in the larger context of Adorno's intervention. Adorno concludes the essay as follows:

I wanted to speak about the relationship of these matters to historical materialism, but I have only time to say the following: it is not a question of completing one theory by another, but of the immanent interpretation of a

¹⁹ See also Adorno (1966: 357).

theory. I submit myself, so to speak, to the authority of the materialist dialectic. It could be demonstrated that what has been said here is only an interpretation of certain fundamental elements of the materialist dialectic (Adorno 1984: 124).

The critique of “second nature”, then, should be understood as not only as a critique of reification, but also as relating to the natural-historical basis of critical method itself. This aspect of his concept of natural history becomes more apparent in later formulations. In the *History and Freedom* lectures he clarifies that: “The concept of a second nature remains the negation of whatever might be thought of as first nature” (Adorno 2006: 120). That is, second nature attempts to supersede or destroy “first nature.” One could read this as a rejection of the category of first nature, but as Deborah Cook points out, “Adopting Marx’s critique of capitalism as second nature, Adorno also shares his interest in exploring the role of first nature in human history” (Cook 2014: 8).²⁰ Although, Cook writes, “we now inhabit an inverted world where nature has been socialized and the socio-historical world has been naturalized [...] there is a far less illusory sense in which human history is natural, and nature historical” (Cook 2014: 17). This “less illusory sense” revolves around the concept’s ability to “[disclose] the damage inflicted on natural things and processes owing to their entwinement with history” and it “not only casts light on the damage we have done to nature, but makes visible the unfreedom of individuals whenever they are led blindly [*sic*] and compulsively by instinct” (Cook 2014: 18).

²⁰ See, for example, Adorno (1966: 358); Adorno (2001: 122).

To Cook's formulation I would add that natural history, understood critically, casts light on the damage we have done to nature as fundamentally *entwined* with the damage done to colonized peoples. What the opposition of nature and history does, in the context of the critique of colonialism (as I attempted to broadly describe above in "Natural History as Ideology") is to sever natural necessity and social necessity at the level of critique. To further and deepen this analysis, we must take seriously the ways that arbitrary natural facts (*both* that human beings depend on nature and that natural resources are concentrated and distributed unevenly) are mediated and made normatively loaded by the social necessity of the reproduction of colonial and imperial power. Also, the concept of natural history must, as Cook's point more directly explains, understand colonial and capitalist social necessity in light of its mediation of the metabolic relation; that is, the social necessity of colonial domination is a severe distortion of the transhistorical fact of natural metabolism.

It is important to note that, although the critique of second nature, as a matter of emphasis, is inspired by historically specific processes of reification and ideological mystification, the broader function of natural history is transhistorical as a matter of natural necessity. That is, indexing the historical status of critique from the standpoint of natural history we might say that the critique of second nature is a historically specific subset (i.e., specific to irrational or contradictory societies, to specifically capitalist processes of obfuscation) of natural-historical critique. Natural-historical critique, more generally, is transhistorical

because it pertains to the human beings' relation which, however altered, cannot be definitively overcome (i.e., human beings cannot be extracted from their part in and relation to nature, regardless of the degree to which human social life is determined by "natural necessity" or the struggle for survival). Natural history is jointly historically specific and transhistorical. However, if either aspect is isolated (e.g., in anti-naturalism or crass naturalism), the vantage loses its critical force. To get a clearer sense of what a critical apprehension of nature's and history's "reciprocal mediation" looks like, we can maintain the focus on colonialism and turn to what, I argue, the critical role natural history not only *can have* but *has had* in the critique of colonialism in the 20th century.

Critical Natural History and Anti-Colonialism

Although the term "natural history" is not explicitly invoked in the context of anti-colonial thought and struggle, there is nonetheless considerable evidence that this critical conception grounds many classic critiques of racialized, gendered colonial discourse and practice. For example, in the work of Frantz Fanon and Walter Rodney. If their critique does not emphasize its natural-historical foundations as a first point of order, we can imagine this is at least in part because articulating the normative foundations of critique – a task which has been granted so much priority as to warrant its own "turn" in critical theory – is not a priority in the context of anti-colonial critique. Still, these critiques are firmly rooted in natural-historical claims

as part and parcel of their most fundamental materialist commitments. At the very least, a substantial part of post- and decolonial thinking is sensitive to the deleterious effects of the nature/culture opposition (which I take to be akin if not synonymous with the nature/history opposition), though they are reticent to advocate for any return of natural history, modified or not. To clarify the critical capacity of "natural history", we can consider some exemplary claims alluded to above.

In his now-classic *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon holds together the two dialectically related tasks of denaturalizing the claims of the colonizer and accounting for the natural features of colonial lands and territories in shaping colonial practice. Rather than reject any claims about the natural world, Fanon instead navigates the classical opposition to meet the needs of his anti-colonial critique. On the one hand, as demonstrated by the following passages, Fanon highlights the manipulation of the category of human nature to dehumanize and "naturalize" the native:

The Algerians, the women dressed in haiks, the palm groves, and the camels form a landscape, the *natural* backdrop for the French presence. A hostile, ungovernable, and fundamentally rebellious Nature is in fact synonymous in the colonies with the bush, the mosquitoes, the natives, and disease. Colonization has succeeded once this untamed Nature has been brought under control. Cutting railroads through the bush, draining swamps, and ignoring the political and economic existence of the native population are in fact one and the same thing (Fanon 2005: 182).

Moreover, Fanon clearly relates colonial practice to the wider framework of the domination of nature, referring to degradation of natural resources and indifference to native life and interests as “one and the same thing.” Such a claim would not be possible without first accepting the reciprocal determination of nature and history; it would not be possible to use one of these categories exclusively to address the structural aspects of colonial domination. Theorizing the position of postcolonial states, Fanon also writes:

The country finds itself under new management, but in actual fact everything has to be started over from scratch, everything has to be rethought. The colonial system, in fact, was only interested in certain riches, certain natural resources, to be exact those that fueled its industries. Up till now no reliable survey has been made of the soil or the subsoil. As a result, the young independent nation is obliged to keep the economic channels established by the colonial regime [...] The colonial regime has hammered its channels into place and the risk of not maintaining them would be catastrophic (Fanon 2005: 56).

Rather than neglecting the natural (if arbitrary) fact of the uneven concentration and distribution of specific natural resources, Fanon acknowledges this as a causal dimension of colonial domination without suggesting that these facts themselves justify that domination. Furthermore, the account Fanon gives of the geopolitical position of the postcolonial state, often still in a dependent relation to the colonizer and always still within the context of global capitalist imperialism, speaks to the “second nature” or historically (but not naturally) necessary

shaping of global relations and practices even after formal decolonization.²¹ The "second nature" configuration of postcolonial economies entails exploitative extraction, unequal import and export, and a merely instrumental mapping of natural resources in the former colonies. Such a "second nature" is only necessary because in order to ensure the reproduction of life for the native ("first nature") such needs must be met under coerced conditions in a world still controlled by the colonizer.

In short, this brief example, though it does not explicitly campaign for a revisiting of the concept of natural history, exemplifies the indispensability of both categories, understood as reciprocally mediating, in giving an account of colonial practice and discourse and, more importantly, for clarifying the conditions in which the colonized have the greatest opportunity for resisting these practices, if only by negation.²² Reflections on the natural world are not the primary focus of *The Wretched of the Earth*, or Fanon's thought more generally, but the aspects of critique which I have described here as "natural history" are essential to his critique of colonialism.

²¹ See also Coulthard (2014: 32–38).

²² Still speaking of the complex position of the postcolonial state, Fanon writes: "The Third World today is facing Europe as one colossal mass whose project must be to try and solve the problems this Europe was incapable of finding the answers to. But what matters is not the question of profitability, not a question of increased productivity, not a question of production rates. No, it is not a question of back to nature. It is the very basic question of not dragging man [*sic*] in directions which mutilate him [*sic*]...The notion of catching up must not be used as a pretext to brutalize man [*sic*], to tear him from himself and his inner consciousness, to break him, to kill him [*sic*]" (Fanon 2005: 238). Critiquing both narratives of Euro-normative developmentalism and the fetishization of productivity, Fanon *neither* capitulates to these narratives and to the historical conditions which produce them *nor* does he endorse the ideological naturalism mentioned above (e.g., by advocating for a "back to nature" nativism).

In not so many words, these reflections are predated by C.L.R. James, in his 1938 *The Black Jacobins*. “Prosperity”, James writes, “is not a moral question and the justification of San Domingo was its prosperity” (James 1989: 45). James offers a detailed analysis of the role cotton, sugar, and indigo played in the colonization and relentless European expropriation of present day Haiti and the Dominican Republic:

Cotton grew naturally, even without care, in stony ground and in the crevices of the rocks. Indigo also grew spontaneously. Tobacco has a larger leaf there than in any other part of the Americas and sometimes equaled in quality the produce of Havana. The kernel of San Domingo cocoa was more acidulated than that of Venezuela [...] If on no earthly spot was so much misery concentrated as on a slave-ship, then on no portion of the globe did its surface in proportion to its dimensions yield so much wealth as the colony of San Domingo (James 1989: 45–46).

With a fluent, expansive knowledge of colonial industry and export in colonies across the Caribbean, Latin America, and Africa, James’s classic recasting of the Haitian Revolution is replete with references to the wealth of natural resources (and their theft and degradation) as crucial features of mapping the history of colonialism. And, although his descriptions of San Domingo cannot help but attest to “the natural exuberance of the tropics”, his account never broaches an idyllic vision (James 1989: 28). Indeed, he is keen to highlight that the initial “enchantment” with San Domingo’s natural beauty had a profound impact on the colonialist: “The traveler from Europe was enchanted at his first glimpse of this paradise, in which the

ordered beauty of agriculture and the prodigality of Nature compete equally for his surprise and admiration" (James 1989: 28).

As an account of the political strategy of Toussaint Louverture, James notes that Louverture's claims for Haitian liberation, freedom from slavery and servitude, and the right to self-determination are made on the assumption that such things are deserved according to "Natural liberty which nature has given to every one to dispose of himself [*sic*] according to his [*sic*] will" (James 1989: 25). Thus, the grounding role of the category of nature is not strictly negative – i.e., necessitated by the violent pursuit of resources as in the colonial project – but also serves a positive function, grounding the claims of emancipation in natural equality and freedom as a natural condition of human life. Exposing the duplicity of European invocations of "natural rights" where the end of slavery and the violence of colonization were not acknowledged, Louverture demands that the antinomies of such invocation be rectified, not by eschewing universalist or naturalist principles, but by demanding their actualization in Haiti. Whether one reads this as a strategic maneuvering within European discourses, a radical transformation of them, or somehow a fundamental break with the European tradition – a hermeneutical debate which abounds in scholarship on *The Black Jacobins* – James's account of the Haitian Revolution demonstrates the political significance of natural-historical claims in the struggle for decolonization. The dialectical operations of a concept like natural history are thus not merely matter of theoretical clarification, but also of enacting practical transformation.

The import of natural history continues to function implicitly in more contemporary accounts of colonial, neocolonial, and imperial relations as well. In *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, Rodney offers an even more clearly natural-historical theoretical account of colonialism as he describes the “paradox of underdevelopment”:

In a way, underdevelopment is a paradox. Many parts of the world that are naturally rich are actually poor and parts that are not so well off in wealth of soil and sub-soil are enjoying the highest standards of living. When the capitalists from the developed parts of the world try to explain this paradox, they often make it sound as though there is something ‘God-given’ about the situation (Rodney 1981: 20).

For Rodney, underdevelopment is paradoxical in part because any “straightforward” account of the correspondence between resources and wealth is blatantly contradicted by the fact of underdevelopment. On his account, colonization is, in large part, traceable to the presence of natural resources lacking in imperial territories and the need for cheap (or enslaved) labor to extract such resources and, more broadly, to process and produce goods to meet market demands in Europe and the settlers of the “New World.” The global division of labor emergent from the extractive labor assigned to colonies continues into the present, long after the end of formal colonization for many colonial territories. Retroactively, Rodney argues, colonialists justified this division of labor as a matter of “natural differences” rather than understanding it as the violent exploitation of arbitrary natural facts and the practical needs of accumulation:

Those who justify the colonial division of labour suggest that it was 'natural' and respected the relative capacities for specialisation of the metropolises and colonies. Europe, North America and Japan were capable of specialising in industry and Africa in agriculture. Therefore, it was to the 'comparative advantage' of one part of the world to manufacture machines while another part engaged in simple hoe-culture of the soil (Rodney 1981: 234).

Rodney's analysis of the colonial division of labor *both* denaturalizes those qualities which have been closely associated with essential "difference" along racial, ethnic, and gendered lines *and* clearly grasps the division as one which has its origin in the extractive practices of colonial expansion. The two aspects, far from being mutually exclusive, function jointly to simultaneously undermine false naturalization and nonetheless acknowledge the role of the natural in diagnosing colonial domination.

Rodney's formulation of the paradox of underdevelopment coincides with Adorno's claim that "the traditional antithesis of nature and history is both true and false" (Adorno 2006: 122). "It is true when it expresses what happens to nature; it is false when it simply reinforces conceptually history's own concealment of its own natural growth" (Adorno 2006: 122). Adorno's formulation, however, needs to be modified. It is perhaps better expressed, in the context of colonialism, as follows: the antithesis of nature and history is true when it expresses what happens to nature and *what happens to those associated with the "natural"* (reified into "second nature") as well as *what happens when colo-*

nized peoples are dispossessed of natural resources, extending to the expropriation of their labor (i.e., enslavement, bondage).

It is, thus, false, when it covers over these conditions and creates the appearance of colonial domination as natural *and* when it obscures the role of extraction from an account of colonial history. That is, the opposition is both true and false in that it is actually violently imposed and practiced and because those practices are neither naturally necessary nor morally “true.” This “truth” (i.e., this reflection of concrete, if contrived, conditions) is expressed poignantly by Rodney when he writes:

Attention must be drawn to one of the most important consequences of colonialism on African development, and that is the stunting effect on Africans as a physical species. Colonialism created conditions which led not just to periodic famine, but to chronic undernourishment, malnutrition and deterioration in the physique of the African people. If such a statement sounds wildly extravagant, it is only because bourgeois propaganda has conditioned even Africans to believe that malnutrition and starvation were the natural lot of Africans from time immemorial (Rodney 1981: 236).

Rodney’s visceral description of the depreciated bodily life of the colonized adds an important dimension to Adorno’s more abstract formulation. The “truth” of the opposition of nature and history follows not from the logical fact that nature and history have distinct properties, but from the fact that the colonized peoples of Africa (and Latin America and Asia and the native peoples of Western-held territories) experience material deprivation which has long term physical, social, political, and ecological consequences. Moreover, the contemporary geopolitical

framework must not only deny the particular histories of these peoples but deny them a self-determinative, much less globally determinative, role in the organization of global politics, in the shaping of history in that sense. This is not the same as Hegel's now infamous claim about the Africa's being "outside of history." On the contrary, what Rodney's account tells us is that Africa and other colonized regions are enmeshed in a colonial history which forces some to live at the whims of natural necessity (i.e., famine, natural disaster, epidemics) for entirely *unnatural* reasons and amplified by the social necessity of colonial and capital accumulation. Contrary to the Eurocentric account of historical development, the resources begot by colonial extraction and the labor coerced and stolen from colonized peoples are *part and parcel* of "history" understood as the development of so-called liberal societies, but that has directly correlated to the exclusion of colonized peoples from their rightful place in the determination of history's present and future course.

When Rodney considers this historically specific division in relation to a larger historical trajectory, he describes the exploitation of other human beings as stemming from but not immediately necessitated by what Marx called the "metabolic relation" to nature. Without naturalizing the fact of colonialism, Rodney astutely indexes it as a distorted outgrowth of the fact of human beings' dependency on nature:

Man [*sic*] has always exploited his natural environment in order to make a living. At a certain point in time, there also arose the exploitation of man by man [*sic*], in that a few people grew rich and lived well through the labour of others. Then a stage was reached by which

people in one community called a nation exploited the natural resources and the labour of another nation and its people (Rodney 2018: 37).

Interestingly, this trajectory resonates with that of Adorno and Horkheimer in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, wherein the domination of nature and the resentment of natural necessity is increasingly intensified and robust, widening to include not only a reified, “inert” natural world but “half-subjects” and “non-persons” understood in closer proximity to that reified sphere.

For Rodney, as for Adorno and Horkheimer, this trajectory is not a strictly necessary one; that is, tracking the struggle for self-preservation and the exploitation of nature in the history of human domination does not amount to accepting that domination as natural. Rather, their attention to the historically specific means of distorting the pursuit of survival and the increasing instrumentalization of nature is a crucial account of historical necessity *qua* necessity, but also how social forms (e.g., class societies) perpetuate this “second nature” in their most basic processes of social reproduction. Not to be confused with the anti-humanism of deep ecology, Rodney (as well as Adorno and Horkheimer) are *not repudiating any and all* instrumentalization of nature, but rather its systematic exploitation to the point of self-undermining or even self-annihilating consequences. Reflecting on postcolonial agriculture, Rodney writes:

There was nothing ‘natural’ about monoculture. It was a consequence of imperialist requirements and machinations, extending into areas that were politically independent in name. Monoculture was a characteristic of regions falling under imperialist domination. Certain

countries in Latin America such as Costa Rica and Guatemala were forced by United States capitalist firms to concentrate so heavily on growing bananas that they were contemptuously known as 'banana republics'. In Africa, this concentration on one or two cash-crops for sale abroad had many harmful effects. Sometimes, cash-crops were grown to the exclusion of staple foods – thus causing famines (Rodney 2018: 285).

Rodney's analysis in our present situation is perhaps even prescient as monoculture and the larger frame of agricultural production of which it is a part now threatens to accelerate catastrophic climate change. In this passage, Rodney highlights the unnatural mediation of human beings' natural dependency on nature, echoing what Adorno writes concerning "first" and "second" nature. Second nature, when it is contradictory or ideological, attempts to "negate" first nature (Adorno 2006: 120). By "first nature" I mean only the material fact of human beings need to reproduce their lives in relation with and as part of the natural world. As the recent climate crisis and, in longer view, the ecological destruction wrought in the colonies demonstrates, the violent cleavage of nature and history is anything but metaphorical. This "conceptual" opposition, which a critical natural history overcomes, reflects material practices of dispossession, expropriation, and extraction.

Conclusion

In an attempt to demonstrate the critical import of Adorno's concept of natural history I have drawn his conceptualization into an encounter which never took place. Certainly,

attenuating critical theory's "silence" on the question of colonialism requires more than I have done and, moreover, this constructed encounter does not take the place of a more profound comparative analysis of Adorno's thought with that of Fanon, Rodney, or James (an analysis which would surely reveal differences that require careful navigation). Rather, what I have tried to show is that critical theory's inattention does not preclude its coming to the aid of anti-colonial critique. Indeed, I insisted that important aspects of Adorno's thinking, specifically on the categories of history and nature, are already at work in pivotal critiques of colonialism in the 20th century.

Adorno's concept of natural history is perhaps especially timely and necessary given two problems which I can only allude to, but which warrant mention: first, the threat of catastrophic climate changes and, second, the "cultural" or "linguistic turn" in contemporary theory. Precisely at the historical moment when the status of human beings' relation to nature demands that we question the classical opposition of history and nature, contemporary theory remains reticent to critically analyze the role natural resources in colonial domination, for fear of mirroring or even reproducing naturalistic claims about the justification of colonialism or even claims about the nature of the colonized. Not without merit, this "anti-naturalism" has also eclipsed crucial discussions which confront us with renewed urgency, in the face of imperial expansion, global accumulation, and their role in the precipitation of climate change. Adorno's methodological materialism (one aspect of which is apparent in his concept of natural history) and the analyses of figures such

as Fanon, Rodney, and James together provide a systematic account of some of the most salient critical questions facing critical theory today. Thinking between the traditions of Frankfurt School critical theory and anti-colonial critique in the 20th century, the critical theorist arrives better equipped to diagnose and subvert this critique's own colonial conditions of possibility.

Received on 09/01/2020

Approved on 12/02/2021

References

- ADORNO, T.W. *Negative Dialectics*. New York: Routledge, 1966.
- . "The Idea of Natural History". *Telos* 60, p. 97–124, 1984.
- . *History and Freedom: Lectures 1964-1965*. Trans. R. Tiedemann. New York: Polity Press, 2006 [2001].
- ALLEN, A. *The End of Progress: Decolonizing the Normative Foundations of Critical Theory*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2017.
- BHAMBRA, G.K. "Postcolonial and Decolonial Dialogues". *Postcolonial Studies* 17 (2), p. 115–121, 2014.
- CALLALOO. "A Barbara Chase-Riboud Special Issue", *Callaloo: Journal of the Johns Hopkins University Press* 32 (3), 2009.
- CASTRO-GOMEZ, S. "Traditional and Critical Theories of Culture". *Nepantla: Views from the South* 1 (3), p. 503–518, 2000.

- CHAKRABARTY, D. “An Anti-Colonial History of the Post-colonial Turn: An Essay in Memory of Greg Dening”. *Melbourne Historical Journal* 37, p. 1–23, 2009.
- CHATTERJEE, P. *The Black Hole of Empire*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012.
- COOK, D. *Adorno on Nature*. New York: Routledge, 2014.
- . “Adorno’s Critical Materialism”. *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 32 (6), p. 719–737, 2006.
- COULTHARD, G. *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014.
- CORONIL, F. “Latin American Postcolonial Studies and Global Decolonization”. *Worlds & Knowledges Otherwise*, 2013.
- FANON, F. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Trans. R. Philcox. New York: Grove Press, 2004 [1961].
- GILIO-WHITAKER, D. “The Problem with the Ecological Indian Stereotype”. *KCET*, 2017. Available at: <https://www.kcet.org/shows/tending-the-wild/the-problem-with-the-ecological-indian-stereotype>. Last access: 09.04.2021.
- HARKIN M., LEWIS, D. *Native Americans and the Environment: Perspectives on the Ecological Indian*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007.
- HIDDLESTON, J. *Poststructuralism and Postcoloniality: The Anxiety of Theory*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010.
- HOBSON, J. *Venus in the Dark: Blackness and Beauty in Popular Culture*. New York: Routledge, 2005.

- JAMES, C.L.R. *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*. New York: Vintage Books, 1989 [1963].
- KELLNER, D. "Review: The Frankfurt School Revisited: A Critique of Martin Jay's *The Dialectical Imagination*". *New German Critique* 4, p. 131–152, 1975.
- KRECH, S. *The Ecological Indian: Myth and History*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1999.
- LATOUR, B. "Politics of Nature: East and West Perspectives". *Ethics & Global Politics* 4 (1), p. 71–80, 2011.
- LAZARUS, N. *The Postcolonial Unconscious*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.
- MALM, A. *The Progress of This Storm*. New York: Verso Books, 2017.
- MENDIBLE, M. (ed.). *From Bananas to Buttocks: The Latina Body in Popular Film and Culture*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007.
- MIGNOLO, D. *The Idea of Latin America*. Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2005.
- . "Epistemic Disobedience, Independent Thought and Decolonial Freedom". *Theory, Culture, & Society* 26 (7-8), p. 159–181, 2010.
- MIGNOLO, D., ESCOBAR, A. (eds.). *Globalization and the Decolonial Option*. New York: Routledge, 2013 [2010].
- PARRY, B. *Postcolonial Studies: A Materialist Critique*. London: Routledge, 2004.
- PENSKY, M. "Natural History: The Life and Afterlife of a Concept in Adorno". *Critical Horizons* 5 (1), p. 227–258, 2004.

- QUIJANO, A. “Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Social Classification”. In: M. Moraña, E. Dussel, E. C. Jáuregui. M. Moraña (eds.). *Coloniality at Large: Latin America and the Postcolonial Debate*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2008, p. 181–224.
- . “Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality”. In: W. Mignolo, A. Escobar (eds.) *Globalization and the Decolonial Option*. New York: Routledge, 2010.
- QURESHI, S. *Peoples on Parade: Exhibitions, Empire and Anthropology in Nineteenth-Century Britain*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011.
- RICE, J. “Beyond ‘The Ecological Indian’ and ‘Virgin Soil Epidemics’: New Perspectives on Native Americans and the Environment”. *History Compass* 12 (9), p. 745–757, 2014.
- RODNEY, W. *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. New York: Verso, 2018 [1972].
- RUBIN, W. (ed.) *Primitivism in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern*. New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1984.
- SANTANA, A. “‘The Indian Problem’: Conquest and the Valladolid Debate”. In: R. E. Sanchez Jr (ed.). *Latin American and Latinx Philosophy: A Collaborative Introduction*. New York: Routledge, 2020.
- SAID, E. *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Vintage Books, 1994.
- . *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1978.
- SPIVAK, G. *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999.

STRAW, P.A. *Negrophilia: Avant-Garde Paris and Black Culture in the 1920s*. New York: Thames & Hudson, 2000.

WHYMAN, T. "Understanding Adorno on 'Natural-History'". *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 24 (4), p. 452–472, 2016.

YOUNG, I.M. *Justice and the Politics of Difference*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011 [1990].

YOUNG, J.C. *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*. London: Blackwell Publishing, 2001.