Chapter 4
Multiculturalism put to the test of post/decolonial epistemologies

Paola Rebughini
Università degli Studi di Milano
Department of Social and political Studies
paola.rebughini@unimi.it
ORCID https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5563-8202

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Abstract

Multiculturalism is connected to the colonial past in many ways, even though this connection is not necessarily immediate. On the one hand, it can be considered a legacy of 'colonial administration', with economic, infrastructural, political and administrative consequences for countries that subsequently became independent states. On the other hand, multiculturalism cannot be fully understood, in all its potential and current difficulties, without taking into account the cultural and symbolic heritage of colonial past. The chapter discusses the role that postcolonial and decolonial thought – and more specifically post- and decolonial epistemologies – can have in framing the meanings of multiculturalism today. Moreover, the post/decolonial gaze, by shedding light on the western, modern and colonial genealogy of the very idea of multiculturalism, carries out a more overarching reflection on the need for a pluralistic and perspectival stance in social sciences.

The historical background of multiculturalism(s)

Multiculturalism is often perceived as solely a contemporary matter for discussion; but it is deeply connected to the colonial past in a number of ways. In the first place, it can be considered a legacy of 'colonial administration' (Gilroy, 2004; Wekker, 2016) and a past of forced, sudden and poorly trained encounters with cultural diversity. European colonial empires were involved in tremendous demographic changes, unprecedented displacements of people, and consequently in an acceleration of inegalitarian encounters among differences.

Indeed, colonial rule was characterized by everyday racist practices, but also by the concerned and utilitarian pursuit of 'racial harmony' (Rich, 1986), including a specifically coded mode of discourse on race, with important local variations. Over time and space, this has produced a sort of 'political commentary' on living amid incommensurable differences produced by the encounter of codes of segregation, negotiations with local populations, first forms of mutual recognition and attempts at reparation, claims of sovereignty and identity recombination. Hence, historically, multiculturalism and cultural hybridity have not just been the result of local contingencies and policies. They cannot be separated from the history of colonialism and its sequalae in modern and national approaches to multiculturalism through the more recent history of migrations (Gilroy, 2004).

In this chapter, I will discuss the role that postcolonial and decolonial thought – and more specifically post- and decolonial epistemologies – can have in framing the meanings of multiculturalism today. I will skip the complex and rich debates on the definition, transformation and different types of multiculturalism to which other chapters of this book are devoted. For the purposes of the present discussion, suffice it to take into account that 'multiculturalism' has in recent decades become a sort of buzzword which comprises different meanings and refers to different social practices. It intercepts different academic disciplines, has a variety of analytical levels, ranging from that of national policies to that of the construction of categorizations and identifications (Baumann, 2008). Consequently, it would make more sense to use this polysemic term in the plural: there are different practical forms and different analytical dimension of multiculturalism*s* (Colombo, 2015; 2021).

Actually, the coexistence among cultural differences that we can currently observe in most of the countries around the world is acknowledged and named as 'multiculturalism', regardless of the positive or negative evaluation given to that situation – even though the use of the term 'multiculturalism' is normally associated with a positive image of cultural diversity as an opportunity (Back, Sinha, 2016; Baumann, 1999). Yet multiculturalism can also be associated with the demand for the recognition of difference and consequently with the denunciation of discrimination and racism. In this case, the focus is on the issue of minorities, on their suffering of social and economic inequalities, and on their claims for democratic participation. In this regard, multiculturalism assumes different facets and can be given a variety of interpretations.

The association of multicultural issues with migration studies is more frequent than that with postcolonial and decolonial perspectives. The connection of migrations with multicultural encounters is evident and taken for granted; in this case, the discussion often oscillates between a focus on everyday problems and experiences of coexistence and a more normative focus on policies, for example on the need for affirmative action in favor of people who have mostly an

immigrant origin. In this regard, the debate on multiculturalism also highlights that there are important differences between the USA and Europe. While in the former case, the debate focuses mainly on native people and cultural minorities, and the specific situation of African-American citizens, in the latter case the debate on multiculturalism more frequently concerns the immigrant inflows that started after the Second World War, but only in some national cases in explicit relation with the colonial past (Gilroy, 2000).

On the contrary, the connection between multiculturalism and postcolonialism is not necessarily immediate, especially when multiculturalism is considered to be a local, practical and contingent social fact rather than a phenomenon whose genealogy can be traced back through complex historical events. The branch of the debate on multiculturalism that first highlighted an explicit connection with postcolonial and decolonial studies refers to the claims of recognition by indigenous populations in countries with a colonial past and which today are part of the 'Global North', such as Canada, Australia and New Zealand. These are then closely followed by countries in Latin America and some parts of Asia. In this case, the acknowledgement of living in a multicultural society has been related to the rediscovery, and the public denunciation, of the violence suffered by the indigenous people of these countries in many cases until very recent times. For example, the marginal social position of indigenous and Aboriginal people in these countries is considered as part of the discussion on multiculturalism in a historical perspective (Povinelli, 1998). Indigenous and Aboriginal people have a more immediate relationship with the history of colonialism than do immigrants and their descendants, whose relations with the colonial past can be more subtle, repressed or reinterpreted, and in some case absent (Hall, 1996; Hage, 1998).

Therefore, this chapter explores to what extent, and with which kinds of insight, half a century of postcolonial and decolonial thought has had an impact on the ideas and conceptualizations of multiculturalism. This matter will be investigated by starting from the epistemological claims put forward by post/decolonial literature, and by a generation of scholars interested in situating the coexistence of cultures in a global and historical set of power relations (Bhambra, 2009; 2014).

Post/decolonial analytical challenges

The rise of studies on coloniality is temporally parallel, but not necessarily explicitly intertwined, with the rise of discussions on multiculturalism. Indeed, the focus of postcolonial and decolonial thought[2] has been on the genealogical

2 Hereafter, I will use the word 'post/decolonial', since it is a more appropriate term with which to underscore the differences internal to these bodies of study around the world. In

analysis of the western-centric epistemic monopoly of knowledge in all fields of research, but especially in history and humanities, philosophy and social sciences. The unveiling of histories and knowledge deliberately forgotten by western thought and academic disciplines goes hand in hand with the demands for the recognition of difference, and with the denunciation of a past of oppressions (Young, 2004; Spivak, 1999). In epistemological terms, the main concern of the post/decolonial set of approaches is to highlight how the understanding of the present is based on conceptual tools configured at a time when the only legitimated voice was the Western one (Bhambra, 2009).

This critical epistemological approach can be considered a sort of analytical precondition and premise for the claims of difference and equality advanced in current multicultural societies, but this relation is not necessarily explicit (Young, 2004). Indeed, while in post/decolonial epistemologies there is the clear aim to move beyond modern dualistic visions, for which there is an a-cultural, legitimated and alleged neutral 'gaze from nowhere' – that is, the western one – and a set of subaltern differences represented by the cultures and populations of previously colonized countries, in the case of multiculturalism this post-dualist aim is not always present. On the contrary, the local interpretations of culture in community life can be temporally flat and focused on contingent features and problems, and they may sometimes even adopt a dualistic perspective on social organization. Therefore, in its varieties of conceptualization, multiculturalism can be conceived also as convivial coexistence of differences that do not renounce dualistic relations with other differences but only claim equal recognition with them (Baumann, 1999). Consequently, it is necessary to understand the epistemological effort undertaken by post/decolonial approaches to dismantle such dualism, and then analyse the way in which this interacts with at least some interpretations of multiculturalism.

Taken together, post/decolonial approaches have a common core of critical observations on how Western societies imposed their system of domination and their epistemological canon, recasting local knowledge and determining the construction of knowledge in all the disciplines – from medicine to engineering – according to their interests (Dussel, 1995; Connell, 2007; Go, 2013). As a matter of fact, colonialism was not just a form of exploitation and appropriation of the resources of others; it was also a form of symbolic violence that imposed the Western world view as the only 'true' and 'right' one. In this way, the western hegemonic knowledge system was built also by appropriating the bodies of knowledge of colonized peoples and turning them into elements useful for the success of the western modernization process (Said, 1979; Santos, 2016; Go,

this chapter, there is no room for even a rough introduction to the different stances adopted by post/decolonial approaches, to which I will refer mainly in terms of their shared features and their analytical relations with multiculturalism. For an introduction to of these different stances see Colombo & Rebughini 2022.

2020). Within the western world, this utilitarian use of knowledge reduced the potential of the plurality of voices revealed by the process of globalization, and it provoked the internal contradictions and binary visions that are still at the basis of current controversies on multiculturalism.

As Bhambra (2009) noted, key notions of modernity such as progress, development, science or emancipation were put at the service of the identity and interests of mostly just one social category, the male, white, Euro-American, bourgeois citizen. Other knowledges, with all their potential, were excluded from the logic of the Western epistemological domain if they could not be bent to the purposes of this project (Chakrabarty, 2000). In colonized countries until recent times this often produced – especially among local ruling classes – a sort of 'captive mind' (Alatas, 1974) uncritical and mimetic of western models (Nandy, 1983; Fanon, 1986). According to the critics of these social processes, these hegemonized subjectivities were unable to achieve autonomy and independence because they could only use the language and the concepts of the dominators. Yet this produced also resistance, pride and forms of grievance, as well as a capacity to translate western epistemologies into the local situation and pass this knowledge from generation to generation.

It is precisely this historical process that produced the contradictions and the misunderstandings at the basis of the current discussion on multiculturalism (Pasha, 2021). The identities of colonized people, most of whose descendants later became immigrants in western countries, were frequently forced to make a dualist choice between becoming what the dominant model would like – that is, culturally assimilated – or claiming, in turn, a superiority founded in local tradition and valuing their own diversity. This created new structural forms of dualism and separation which generated prejudices and social discrimination that still characterize current multicultural societies and their cultural construction of otherness. No wonder that the persistence of this dualism is a core component of post/decolonial epistemologies.

Even though post/decolonial approaches are not directly interested in multiculturalism, their efforts to overcome a binary mode of thought have evident implications for the debate on multiculturalism (Appadurai, 1996; Go, 2013). The dichotomies under discussion are all those involving the cultural pillars of modernity, and not only that of cultural difference; that is, nature/culture; modern/traditional; civilized/savages; Us/Them; the West/the Rest; global/local, and so on. Binarism is considered as a reductive approach in front of the complexity of cultural encounters that followed colonization, and as a result of the power relations associated with it. In the colonial world and in its legacy, the logic of dichotomous thought consists in reducing complexity and variability to a series of oppositions in which one side assumes a positive moral value, considered to be sacred and superior, while the other is residual, profane and inferior. This 'othering machine', working at full capacity over three centuries,

created powerful identities, forms of inclusion and justifications for exclusion. The boundary that defines the binary distinction tends to create a sense of homogeneity and unity for everything that lies within that boundary and increases the sense of difference, distance, and threat of what is excluded (Bhabha, 1994).

The dichotomous thinking that always identifies a valuable side and a negative one is opposed to the proposal of a connected epistemology by post/decolonial studies, for which it is essential to re-characterize global culture in terms of relations, pluralism, hybridity and intersectionality (Colombo & Rebughini, 2016; 2022). The overcoming of a dichotomic approach is important in order to highlight heterogeneity as a basic category of social reality, and to introduce contingency and uncertainty into what the epistemic monism of the Global North tends to represent as sovereign, uncontaminated, and stable on the basis of established categories (Santos, 2007). This means not only recognizing the fluidity and instability of boundaries created to define dichotomies but also acknowledging the effects of the domination, exclusion and inferiority that such dichotomies define.

The relation with multiculturalism is brought to the fore precisely in the consequential post/decolonial reflection on identity conducted in post-dichotomic epistemological terms (Spivak, 1999). Outside a binary system and in a theoretical framework that recognizes connections and mutual influences, cultural identities are no longer an essentialized characteristic of subjectivity, but instead the mobile and continuously negotiated result of the ongoing relationships that are established with other subjects, other histories and other contexts. Identity becomes the unstable result of different forms of belonging and of the specific social position that is assumed in the temporary relationship (Gilroy, 2004). Post/decolonial thought highlights, of course, how identifications can be the result of oppression, but also of a subjective experience of hybridity, constant mixing, transformation as reactions to situations and contexts, to power relations and social positioning, genealogically rooted in the colonial history of cultural encounters.

The notion of hybridity has been a cornerstone of post/decolonial studies – especially in the interpretation of Homi Bhabha (1994) – and it is the notion that can more easily connect research around multiculturalism. The concept of 'hybrid' refers to specific social locations resulting from the intersections among different categorizations and identifications. But it also links the historical dynamic – the persistence of the past – with the spatial dimension. The hybridization process involves an encounter among different trajectories in a specific social space. Hybridity also enables a form of 'border thinking' (Mignolo, 2012): that is, the recognition and transformation of the hegemonic imaginary from the point of view of people in subordinate positions. Border thinking allows the adoption of an eccentric, oblique gaze that re-elaborates in

original terms – and from a subaltern standpoint – taken-for-granted notions, languages, rules, and hegemonic beliefs (Lugones, 2010).

All this means that post/decolonial theory is not built only upon debates about the illegitimacy of colonial power and its long-lasting consequences. Rather the subterranean tie between post/decoloniality and multiculturalism concerns the way in which past colonial administration, the moral justification of colonial expansion, eurocentrism, racialization and discrimination, dichotomic thinking and cultural habitus had an influence on the way in which the representation of the other – the immigrant, the native, the citizen of another colour – was intricately coded with consequences that have come down to us (Gilroy, 2004). Focusing on continental Europe, in the next section I explore how this influenced the approach to immigration and descendant of immigrants, particularly in regard to the idea of 'integration'.

Multiculturalism and coloniality across migration studies

Debates on multiculturalism are often normative and associated with national traditions; this happens because their implicit background refers to the notion of the 'integration' of immigrants in western countries. An interesting intersection between post/decolonial thought and reflections on multiculturalism concerns exactly this issue: the social integration of immigrants from postcolonial countries. Indeed, many perplexities about multiculturalism are due to a belief that social cohesion is being undermined. This exacerbates fears about the role that immigrants can have in this weakening of social stability and ultimately of social integration (Appadurai, 2006). It is accordingly believed that allowing minority groups to maintain their own cultures and identities can encourage ethnic separatism; but also acknowledged are the difficulties that all democracies face in providing ethnic minorities with concrete protection against discrimination and social inequalities (Joppke, 2004).

In Europe, France is certainly the country where such distrust has always been expressed most clearly, even in the years during which the discussion about multiculturalism was more optimistic, i.e. the 1980s and 1990s (Wieviorka, 1999). Later, and especially after 9/11, the voices underscoring the failure of multiculturalism policies to integrate immigrants became stronger in the USA and elsewhere. In different ways, and with different tones and effects, multiculturalist policies were accused of fostering separation, with parallel and self-referential communities, rather than social integration and equality (Benhabib, 2006; Alexander, 2013). These limitations were also associated with a danger for democracy and a risk that western societies might become balkanised. Again, France has been the main proponent of the thesis that the western values of freedom, democracy and universalism should be privileged with respect to preserving the traditions of single communities, and for which policies for their

integration into the host society should concern not only economic and political inclusion but also an individual commitment to a given national belonging (Touraine, 1997; Joppke, 2004). In order to be integrated, migrants must show their desire to be so; and they must accept the sacrifice of giving up aspects of their own culture in exchange for the universal rights and privileges of living in an accomplished democracy.

Even though the studies of many scholars have profoundly changed the meaning of integration, dissociating it from the idea of a straight-line process of acculturation, this notion continues to circulate, especially in quantitative studies, and as a sort of counterbalance of self-referential minority cultures (Lutz, 2020). In many ways – and in spite of the risks of eurocentrism and assimilationism (Back et al. 2012) – a systemic and functionalistic approach to social cohesion still characterize the debate on the 'integration' of immigrants. For example, during the 1990s a series of extensive, quantitative and qualitative, studies on the children of immigrants rediscovered and re-examined the notion of 'assimilation' (Gans, 1997; Portes, 2001) which they distinguished from the idea of 'acculturation'. While taking globalization and pluralism into account, the idea was to analyse 'integration' as a form of progressive participation in socio-economic life as a spontaneous and ordinary – and often unintentional – process. Yet, the cultural model into which the notion of integration is carried out continued not to be under discussion or under analysis in its genealogic origin.

Inevitably, also the focus on a binary opposition between assimilation and exclusion has become a paramount critical target of post/decolonial theory, whose epistemological core is at odds with a centralized idea of inclusion. In this respect, the post/decolonial approaches have many affinities with other perspectives, such as the *transnational* one, which has also challenged the methodological nationalism behind the reference to inclusion. It has done so by criticizing the foundational reference to the nation-state, and by focusing on actors in a context of 'everyday cultural mix' where they can circulate among plural references of belonging and transnational connections (Anthias, 1992; Schiller et al. 1992; Baubock, 2003). Yet the post/decolonial perspective extends the horizon beyond the western migration frame by claiming that inequalities inherited from coloniality can shape different accesses to 'transnational circulation'.

As a matter of fact, post/decolonial approaches, with their effort to deconstruct dualisms and monolithic approaches, have underscored the intrinsic internal pluralism of the apparently neutral process of integration, as well as its implicit systemic constraint. This has paved the way to a more attentive analysis of multicultural processes. By highlighting the non-existence of a neutral reference and the power relations behind taken-for-granted processes of integration, post/decolonial epistemologies offer stimulating analytical bases on which to discuss the multifaceted nature of multiculturalism.

But the role of post/decolonial studies in this debate is not always evident, especially because scholars of, and experts in, multiculturalism are not always familiar with post/decolonial studies, and vice-versa. Nonetheless, post/decolonial studies can furnish an epistemic insight into the issue of the integration of immigrants and on how it has been discussed in migration studies and multiculturalism studies. This is especially evident if we consider coloniality in a broader sense than the simply temporal one, and as a phenomenon not exclusively related to a more formalized colonial history.

Such critical discussions of the notion of 'integration' come from the starting point of post/decolonial studies as archive of critical investigations, for which decolonization is far from being over. Following this approach, we instead face a historical configuration where the legacy of colonialism persists in new forms in economic and international relations, wars, migrations, environment exploitation, as well as, more broadly, in epistemological approaches. As Spivak puts it, we live in a 'postcolonial neo-colonized world' (Spivak 1999). This approach is based on analysing the entanglements between the stories of 'subalterns' and 'rulers', without separating them, but focusing on what results from the relations among them. The result is an epistemological framework that deconstructs in a few steps the analytical premises of many common-sense approaches to multiculturalism and its alleged problems. This approach also takes account of the fact that new protagonists of forms of material and symbolic colonization have appeared on the global scene, complicating these relationships. The latter are no longer limited to the legacy of the classical colonial past but include new power relations among the new, non-western, actors of globalization.

A first epistemological step is based on the deconstruction of the monolithic and western-centric idea of migration, with its ongoing classical methodological nationalism: that is, its approach focused on the nation-state (Beck, 2007). Most of the postcolonial positions recall that the notion of 'migrant' is the result of a Hobbesian vision of the state that started with western modernity, and for which a community of interest and identity can be achieved only by identifying a naturalized externality (Mbembe, 2000; 2013). Coloniality has been the fundamental cornerstone of this political construction of the modern othering-machine (Spivak, 1999).

It was with the industrial and colonial era that the nation-state developed its capacity of governing 'principles of mobility': to control mobile bodies, immigrant workers, arrival of population in the towns, as well as differentiated access to modernity in terms of gender, class and colour. This seems still evident today, in a historical moment of crisis of globalization and 'return of the state' in terms of self-referential defence in a context of geopolitical tensions. In a variety of ways, post/decolonial approaches have shed light on the traces of coloniality within this self-referential vision of the state, as well as in classical

concepts and categorizations of migration such as the notion of integration, and the idea of a teleological process of integration into a given and unchanging national area (Chatterjee, 1993; 2012).

Secondly, with its genealogical perspective on the history of globalization processes, the post/decolonial gaze has supported a superseding of the classical 'spatial' and 'temporal' dualistic dynamics of migration studies, such as those of a place of provenance and a place of arrival, a culture of origin and a culture of adoption, as well as the one-way stages of integration. This has complexified the classical and abstract representation of the migrant who crosses nation-state borders in a movement from the 'less developed' areas to the 'richest ones' (Bhambra, 2014; Dussel, 2000). All this highlights that there is not just 'one kind' of migration, but instead very different structural conditions in which migration occurs, and that migrations are often gendered, racialized, and sexualized, producing specific social locations and hierarchies. Because global connections were forged through colonialism, and continue to operate through forms of methodological nationalism, the ways in which migrants are described in political and social life can still incorporate colonial language and habitus.

Moreover, the post/decolonial perspective has also brought to the fore evidence of migrations that have happened (in the past and today) outside the Global North, and that are often important internal migrations provoked by power relations among regions in unequal conditions. In this case, the postcolonial analysis points out that the nation-state as a 'political entity' – imposed around the world after decolonization – tends to work with the same logic everywhere, for example in areas of the world where people were accustomed to circulating among regions that are now different nation-states (Chatterjee, 2012). Hence, while the 'coloniality of power' originated in the West, as a societal frame of inequality, it is nowadays present also in non-western countries, fostering local forms of racialization beyond the 'white/other' dichotomy (Quijano, 2007).

Thirdly, the post/decolonial perspective also offers tools with which to approach a more subjective side of the tension between pluralism and integration. In this case, the post/decolonial dimension is mainly symbolic: it is a reference to frame the everyday experience of one's own difference and subalternity precisely because the 'postcolonial subject' is mainly a subject of othering processes. Even though this happens from very different social positions and experiences – such as those of asylum seekers, indigenous subjects, descendants of immigrants, or descendants of enslaved people – recognizing oneself in a frame of 'postcolonial condition' can be a way to give a collective and share meaning to a subjective experience of oppression and to acknowledge that one's own stories are missing from mainstream social narratives. This fosters the capacity to develop a voice in the public space and in research itself. Thereby, the migrant, the descendant of migrants or of native people – as a

postcolonial subject – becomes an 'active historical subject' (Mignolo, 2000), and expresses a contextualized form of embodied critical knowledge (Connell, 2007). Indeed, for a long time, the agency of the postcolonial/immigrant subject has been overshadowed by research focused mainly on issues like integration and assimilation, whose theoretical origin is clearly situated in a functionalist and deterministic vision of society.

Hence, the convergence among migration studies and post/decolonial studies can help to deconstruct ontological categorizations and to de-essentialise the notion of integration and of immigration itself. It can shed light on the danger of a parochial approach to migration research that reproduces the standpoint of the western societies, assessing phenomena in terms of costs and benefits, assimilation and exclusion, demography and fertility, by fostering – on the contrary – an encounter between private experiences and public claims, individual standpoints and collective policies. Looking at migration studies, and at the related issue of multiculturalism, from this perspective is a way to consider them as not only an area of empirical descriptive research, and to include them in a wider frame of 'global social thought': that is, in the debate conducted by post/decolonial theory in regard to the western origins of mainstream theoretical references, and to their intertwining with coloniality. Particularly, this can furnish insights into both the 'local situatedness' of categorizations and the 'historical and extra-territorialized' dimension deriving from the legacy of the colonial construction of knowledge and consequently of categorizations and identifications.

To sum up, in their epistemological approach to cultural difference, post/decolonial approaches introduce *perspectivism*, rather than *relativism*. This explains that it is not possible to assume knowability from the same 'objective' standpoint, in search of a totalizing, abstract, trans-societal theory of who is included to a given model. Such totality fails to acknowledge the socially-situated (and always incomplete) character of all knowledge, categorization and self-representation. Globalization, migration and displacement have highlighted that social knowledge does not come from nowhere. It is always socially situated; and it is shaped by specific social contexts. Overcoming this dualistic vision means overcoming the idea that the West – or any other geo-cultural point of view – is always *culturlessness* and so is the agency of its subjects, while the 'other' represents a 'difference'. This standpoint can foster the de-essentialization of the 'othering machine' with which the representation of the other is produced in current multicultural societies.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the way in which the common epistemic focuses of the range of post/decolonial approaches can highlight some of the

controversies concerning multiculturalism, such as that of integration and the recognition of plural differences. It has been noted that the analytical starting point of post/decolonial studies and multiculturalism is different. The former have a genealogical and epistemological perspective focused on the construction of knowledge about cultural diversity; the latter focuses mainly on the management of cultural diversity within the framework of migration flows, diasporas, and everyday life among different cultural communities in given local and national contexts. At the same time, 'strong' or 'weak' ideas of multiculturalism often depend upon the kind of colonial past of a given country – besides the historical elaboration and public discussion of that past – and upon the connected historicized forms of reification of difference (Colombo & Rebughini, 2012). By studying the dynamic of the approaches to multiculturalism – the way in which it is named, the normative features, the political and public discussion – it is possible to highlight a connection within the legacy of colonialism, and the expression of its legacy in new forms: for example, the way in which immigrants and their offspring are present in economic, political and everyday life; the way in which they are categorized; the extent to which they are perceived in a dualistic way in terms of 'us' and 'them', or the extent to which it is possible to produce hybrid identifications.

Post/decolonial approaches with their effort to overcome methodological-nationalism can furnish epistemological tools of critical reflection with which to deal with the controversies internal to multiculturalist studies, such as the effort to overcome the idea of the immigrant as a naturalized externality and a result of a long-lasting othering-machine, or the idea of integration as the only alternative to social balkanization. Moreover, the question of 'Who is speaking for the colonial past?' (Chakrabarty, 2000) can highlight the genealogy of the construction of the categorizations of cultural diversity, fostering a non-essentialist approach to them; this can shed new light on the management of such cultural diversity in the local policies of multiculturalism. As we have seen, distrust of multiculturalism is related to the way in which knowledge about cultural difference has been produced over time, to questions about who is entitled to produce such knowledge, who counts as a 'legitimated *knower*' and the extent to which the knowledge produced is a tool of hegemony. This typical post/decolonial reflection can help to overcome positivistic visions of integration and social cohesion and to give more tools for analysis of the challenges that current democracies have to face. In sum, the post/decolonial gaze, by shedding light on the western, modern and colonial genealogy of the very idea of multiculturalism, carries out a more overarching reflection on the need for a pluralistic and perspectival stance in social sciences.

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