



[Original articles]

Towards a phenomenology of marginalized bodies in decolonial epistemology

Por uma fenomenologia dos corpos marginalizados na epistemologia decolonial

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Abstract

How can phenomenology contribute to a decolonial epistemology that explains and legitimizes the knowledge of marginalized bodies, subverting the coloniality of knowledge and their historical silencing? The objective of this article is to construct a phenomenological framework that integrates vivid corporeality (*Leib*), permeated by power relations, as a primordial condition of subaltern experiences, highlighting the political, epistemological, and ontological dimensions of bodily marginalization. The hypothesis is that traditional phenomenology can be critically revised to include corporeality marked by coloniality, opening space for pluriversal epistemologies that challenge Eurocentric hegemony and its false scientific neutrality, pointing to a necessary dialogue between phenomenology and decolonial thought. This approach is further enriched by contemporary perspectives, which highlight the contingency and vulnerability of marginalized bodies as loci of resistance and subversion.

Keywords: Marginalized bodies; Decoloniality; Phenomenology; Epistemic injustice; Epistemic resistance.

Resumo

Como a fenomenologia pode contribuir para uma epistemologia decolonial que explique e legitime os saberes dos corpos marginalizados, subvertendo a colonialidade do saber e o silenciamento histórico destes? O objetivo deste artigo é construir um referencial fenomenológico que integre a corporeidade vivida (*Leib*), atravessada por relações de poder, como condição primordial das experiências subalternas, evidenciando a dimensão política, epistemológica e ontológica da marginalização corporal. Parte-se da hipótese de que a fenomenologia tradicional pode ser revisada criticamente para incluir a corporalidade marcada pela colonialidade, abrindo espaço para epistemologias pluriversais que desafiem a hegemonia eurocêntrica e sua falsa neutralidade científica, apontando para um diálogo necessário entre fenomenologia e pensamento decolonial. Esta abordagem é ainda enriquecida por perspectivas contemporâneas, que ressaltam a contingência e a vulnerabilidade dos corpos marginalizados como *locus* de resistência e subversão.

Palavras-chave: Corpos marginalizados; Decolonialidade; Fenomenologia; Injustiça epistêmica; Resistência epistêmica.



1. Introduction

The decolonial way of thinking is intrinsically Latin-American¹. This connection is not due solely to the fact that its theorists are from the region or that it focuses on Latin America. The main reason is that its fundamental project stems from a specific geopolitical perspective: the experience of living in a world shaped by the historical phenomenon of modernity/coloniality (Quijano, 2009; Mignolo, 2020).

To develop this analysis, an epistemological approach is needed that unravels the foundations (or the lack thereof) of this world order, elucidating the ontological, political, and epistemological bases that justify the way things appear in our context. At the same time, by emphasizing its own site of enunciation, decolonial thought exposes a fundamental omission in the hegemonic narratives of modernity in the Global North: the erasure of space and geopolitics in favor of concepts such as the Renaissance and humanism.

Consequently, decolonial thought calls on various fields of knowledge to reexamine their premises, viewing colonization as a decisive historical event and coloniality as a determining factor in the production of knowledge. In this context, dialogue with phenomenology is crucial, since many of its proponents rely on a critical reinterpretation of its concepts to legitimize and include perspectives from the periphery of the world-system in the debate with the European tradition.

Therefore, the guiding question of this study is: how can phenomenology contribute to a decolonial epistemology that explains and legitimizes the knowledge of marginalized bodies, subverting the coloniality of knowledge and the historical silencing of these bodies? In this sense, the objective of this article is to analyze how phenomenology can contribute to the understanding of epistemic injustice and to the development of a decolonial epistemology that values the embodied experiences of subjects marginalized by coloniality.

This article is based on a bibliographic review that explores the main ideas put forth by both Husserl and Butler, fostering a phenomenological dialogue that may

¹ It is important to note that decoloniality constitutes a dissident epistemology in relation to postcolonial studies; while the latter are often grounded in European poststructuralist theoretical legacies – both Anglo-Saxon and Francophone (Said, 2007; Bhabha, 1998), with a strong emphasis on literary criticism and poststructuralism – decoloniality breaks with this framework to focus on the persistence of colonial power structures that political independence has failed to eradicate, emphasizing political praxis and the specific history of the invasion of the Americas in 1492.



contribute to the consolidation of a phenomenology of marginalized bodies through Fricker. Based on an epistemological framework that articulates the concepts of “phenomenology,” “epistemic injustice,” and “coloniality,” this text analyzes the historical processes of subalternization². It is argued that the consolidation of Western scientific rationality was responsible both for the production of bodies and subjectivities considered less human and for the systematic devaluation and erasure of other forms of knowledge (Grosfoguel, 2016).

The contribution to decolonial epistemology through the phenomenology of marginalized bodies can be understood through an analysis of epistemic injustice, as developed by Miranda Fricker, which explores how social power and prejudice affect the experience and recognition of marginalized subjects in their epistemic practices. The phenomenology of marginalized bodies involves understanding how these bodies are socially experienced and perceived, especially in contexts of exclusion, oppression (Hernández, 2023), and devaluation.

The first part is devoted to establishing a conceptual foundation based on Husserl’s phenomenology, which posits the notion of Leib (the lived body) as the center of experience and the constitution of the world. Building on this, reflecting on the phenomenology of marginalized bodies allows us to broaden the discussion to include racialized, colonized, and subalternized bodily experiences, demonstrating how traditional phenomenology can be expanded to encompass these critical dimensions.

Building on the concepts of corporeality and lived experience, it is natural to move on to epistemic injustice, which involves the exclusion of the subject as a knower and the devaluation of their testimonies and knowledge. Phenomenology, by focusing on lived experience and the recognition of the Other, aids in understanding the lived experience of epistemic exclusion, showing how the marginalized subject suffers not only social injustice but also a fracture in their capacity to be recognized as a knowing subject.

Finally, discussing the phenomenology of marginalized bodies within decolonial epistemology broadens the debate to a more comprehensive critique of the coloniality of

² Although the concept of subalternity is a point of tension between postcolonial studies – based on the contributions of authors such as Spivak (2010) – and the decolonial perspective, it was initially used by Gramsci (2002) in “Prison Notebooks” (written between 1929 and 1935) to describe social groups excluded from the dominant hegemony, lacking an effective political voice.



knowledge, valuing embodied and subalternized forms of knowledge³. The phenomenology of marginalized bodies offers a method for giving voice and visibility to these experiences, articulating an epistemological critique that engages with the decolonization of knowledge.

2. Husserlian phenomenology

Edmund Husserl's phenomenology (2014a) proposes a radical return "to the things themselves" – that is, to a careful analysis of experience as it occurs, prior to any theoretical presuppositions. This approach is based on the idea that consciousness is always "intentional," directed toward something, such that every act of consciousness is consciousness of something, thereby establishing a fundamental distinction between subject and object, or between consciousness and the world (Ziles, 2007).

The central method of Husserlian phenomenology is "phenomenological reduction" (Epoché). Husserl (2014b) proposes the suspension (or "bracketing") of our preconceptions about the world so that we may analyze how objects themselves are given to consciousness. This means temporarily setting aside all the prejudices, judgments, theories, and assumptions we hold about the world in order to directly analyze phenomena as they present themselves to consciousness, seeking their pure essence without preconceived distortions. Reduction reveals the central role of the transcendental self – not as an empirical subject, but as a source of meaning, which constitutes the world through experience (Ziles, 2007).

In the process of constitution, Husserl (2012) distinguishes between the "transcendent" (the world, the things that appear to us) and the "transcendental" (consciousness as the condition of possibility for this appearing), and proposes that a philosophical understanding of the world requires an examination of the intentional operations of consciousness.

Within this framework, the body – in particular the German concept of Leib – occupies a fundamental place. Husserl (2012) thus distinguishes between the Körper, which is the body as an object in the world, subject to the laws of nature just like any

³ Mignolo (2020) develops the "geopolitics of knowledge," arguing that Western knowledge imposes a global hierarchy in which European epistemology is universalized, denying the coeval nature (historical simultaneity) of other forms of knowledge and promoting Eurocentrism as a privileged locus of enunciation.



other material thing. And the Leib, which is the lived body, experienced from the first-person perspective, as the seat of sensibility and action and as the condition of possibility for all experience.

The Leib is not merely an object among objects, but rather that through which we experience the world. It is the “starting point” of all orientation and perception, the center from which all objects gain their spatial orientation and practical-existential meaning. In the Leib, a kinesthetic experience manifests itself, such that it is through the lived body that we feel pain, movement, desire, will, and, above all, our capacity to act upon the world and be affected by it (Merleau-Ponty, 2018).

Leib’s notion reveals that there is no radical distance between the subject and the world, for experience is always embodied. The lived body is the fundamental medium through which the world is constituted, for it is the body that connects us to the spatial, temporal, and intersubjective elements of the lifeworld – *Lebenswelt* (Husserl, 2022). “The lifeworld (*Lebenswelt*) is given to the subject as a horizon of experience, centered on the self” (Ziles, 2007, p. 220).

Therefore, the fundamental experience of being-in-the-world implies that the world is not given as something absolutely external to consciousness, but always possesses a dimension of meaning produced through one’s own body. Spatiality, for example, is always relative to our own body as the center of reference. Perception, action, and feeling all occur from the Leib, thus enabling the constitution of objects as realities endowed with meaning (Merleau-Ponty, 2018). Merleau-Ponty (2018) emphasizes that the lived body is not merely one object among others in the world, but rather the primordial condition for our perception, action, and sensation. And it is through the lived body that the world acquires meaning for us.

From this perspective, the lived body is the condition of possibility for intersubjective experience. That is, it is through the recognition of other lived bodies that we can constitute the experience of the other as similar to ourselves, paving the way for intersubjectivity and a shared world.

Husserl’s (2014a; 2014b) phenomenological framework, centered on the lived body as the primordial condition of experience and the constitution of the world, can be expanded to address racialized, colonized, and subalternized bodily experiences by recognizing that this corporeality is not neutral but is traversed by power relations, such as racism and colonialism.



Contemporary critical phenomenologies, inspired by the Husserlian tradition, expand the concept of the lived body to include the historical, social, and political dimensions of bodily experience. For example, Frantz Fanon (2020) analyzed the colonized Black body, showing how it is altered and distorted by the oppressive gaze of the white colonizing Other, creating an “epidermal-racial schema” in which racism not only affects social treatment, but also alters the subject’s very experience of space, the body, and identity (Santos, 2021). This racialized phenomenology highlights that the lived body is different for racialized subjects, whose bodily experiences are marked by the symbolic and material violence of racism.

This critical approach expands upon traditional phenomenology by showing that the experience of the Leib is not simply a universal subjective experience, but is always mediated by contexts of inequality, discrimination, and exclusion. Corporeality, therefore, embodies the effects of racializing and colonizing power that reshape the subject’s perception, spatial orientation, and very sense of self in the world (Santos, 2021).

Furthermore, phenomenological studies on the lived experiences of Black Brazilian women, for example, highlight that racism impacts their relationship with themselves and their bodies from childhood onward, significantly affecting mental health and the process of bodily identification and self-acceptance, thereby demonstrating the need to incorporate social and cultural dimensions to understand bodily experiences in phenomenology (Santos et al., 2023).

Therefore, by incorporating these critiques and analyses, Husserlian phenomenology can be expanded to address the epistemological and political demands of subalternized experiences, recognizing that the lived body is always situated within a field of social and racial forces that shape the constitution of the world and the subject, challenging the idea of a purely neutral or natural corporeality (Santos et al., 2023).

3. Epistemic Injustice Against Marginalized Bodies

The anti-humanist critique developed throughout the 20th century presented aspects that were seen as a break from what has conventionally been called the Philosophy of the Subject. Kant was one of the main precursors of the evolution of this line of thought, which proposed a transcendental subject – capable of perceiving itself and the world –



embedded in a universal and moral context. The expansion of Western epistemology and its claim to absolute neutrality led to the production of these statements. Consequently, the true origin of the concept of “human” remained hidden, as it was a “Eurocentric” structure composed primarily of white, heterosexual, Western, and bourgeois men (Gómez, 2018).

In this context, Butler (2018a; 2018b) sought to articulate an ontology of bodies that transcends the binary opposition between constructivism and essentialism, and that incorporates the properties of vulnerability and precariousness. According to Butler (2018a; 2018b; 2022), the phenomenological theory of “acts” adopted by Husserl (2014a; 2014b) investigates the everyday process through which social reality is constituted. Consequently, it is argued that this construction occurs through the interactions of social agents, who use language, gestures, and all manner of symbolic signs to make sense of the world.

Therefore, the theory of “acts” is based on the notion that consciousness is always intentional: it is always directed toward something, constituting the meaning of objects and social realities through acts (thinking, perceiving, desiring, judging). These acts form the basis of the subjective experience of the world and, ultimately, make the constitution of social reality itself possible, since everything that appears as “reality” is only such to the extent that it is constituted by conscious subjects through their active operations of signification.

Although phenomenology may at times presuppose a pre-discursive constitutive agent, endowed with free will and using language as a tool, there is a critical strand that subverts this premise. Butler (2018a), for example, draws on the doctrine of constitution to demonstrate that the social agent is, in fact, the effect – not the cause – of the constitutive acts that shape reality.

Judith Butler (2018a) revisits this notion and expands upon it in the field of language and social practices, drawing primarily on speech act theory – as in Austin (1990) – and introducing the concept of performativity. For Butler (2018), social agents do not simply “express” a preexisting identity or gender, but rather specify their own identity and social reality through repeated discursive and bodily acts that establish and give meaning to social signs and roles.

Butler (2018a; 2018b) argues that language and social signs do not merely describe the world, but bring it into being: by naming, categorizing, and reiterating norms



and gestures, they construct what we call “social reality”. The subject is constituted through discursive practices and citational acts; thus, “to name is to make” – that is, the linguistic act produces the social existence of what is named, from baptism to the classification of bodies and genders. The body itself is signified and socialized through these repetitive practices.

Butler’s (2018a; 2018b) central idea is that gender is not an inner or natural essence to be expressed, but rather the effect of a series of recurring performative acts. Rather than being an “expression” of a fixed identity, gender always emerges on a social surface, resulting from stylized repetitions of gestures, speech, norms, and cultural conventions. The “effect of gender,” far from being determined by a universal “feminine nature,” is continuously produced through the stylization of the body in social spaces.

Performativity implies that there is no “true” gender hidden behind these acts, since there is no universal, transhistorical, or timeless femininity (or masculinity) (Butler, 2018a). Gender is personal, yet deeply social and political, shaped by historical and cultural contexts and by power relations – mechanisms that are both inclusive and exclusive, as evidenced by critiques of the idea of a universal “woman” within feminist movements themselves.

The idea that gender is a performative act is based on the phenomenological assumption that we intuit “femininity” through our experience of individual instances of “femininity” (Butler, 2018a). What Butler (2018a) is saying is that there is no universal femininity. Precisely because it is the result of repetitions, gender is mutable and subject to transformation. What is understood as a “woman’s body” and “femininity” varies according to cultural, historical, and political contexts, and never presents itself in the same way to all people or groups. In this sense, performativity opens the door to subversion, the challenging of norms, and the multiplicity of gender subjectivities: by repeating or parodying (as in drag performances), gender norms can be questioned, displaced, and transformed.

Therefore, gender is merely a performative act. As a socially and personally constructed way of acting, it lies within the human capacity to change. Thus, the old notions that women belong in the home are not based on some universal essence linked to biology or on some abstract “femininity,” but on historical practices, some of which stem from patriarchal domination of gender concepts. One way to legitimately liberate



women (and men, too) is to recognize that gender is a performance and that gender is not an expression of some abstract or universal notion.

In phenomenology, there are perceptual properties and abstractions. In Butler's analysis (2018a; 2018b), the idea of gender is constructed from acts and from how others perceive those acts (properties), rather than from something universal and abstract. Gender is, therefore, a dynamic and ever-changing concept.

By denaturalizing gender and revealing it as a performance, Butler opens the door to a broader critique of the categories that have historically defined what it means to be "human," especially those rooted in patriarchal and Eurocentric notions that universalized particular experiences (Silva, 2025). Butler (2021) delves deeper into this issue by questioning the "myth of the social contract" as the foundation of humanity⁴. According to the author, the liberal conception of the person as an autonomous and self-sufficient individual ignores our interdependence⁵ constitutive, serving as a philosophical framework that determines which lives are worthy of mourning and which are considered "less human" because they do not conform to this ideal of individual sovereignty.

In this context of deconstructing fixed categories, the idea that something can return without reverting to its original state is central to the distinction Butler makes – according to Gómez (2016) – between the "return of the human" and the "return to the human". In this sense, the "human" that returns is not the same. As Nascimento and Monteiro (2021) explain, its return is a strategic imperative that forces it to reappear differently ("other") and in a new setting ("another place"). The return of the "human" requires passing through the "non-human," and this passage is crucial so that the "human" who returns is a contingent, vulnerable, exposed, and precarious human body – and no longer a stable and universal category.

Vulnerability, for Butler (2015; 2018b; 2022), is the condition by which bodies are exposed to risks and harm, yet which simultaneously reveals the existential interdependence among individuals. This precariousness of life appears as an ontological condition that challenges the view of the body as autonomous and self-contained,

⁴ This analysis emerges in the transition from individualism to ethical-political bonds, where nonviolence resists the systemic violence rooted in the social contract. Butler (2021) argues that the social contract, inherited from Hobbes and Rousseau, replaces the "natural law" of violence with an order that legitimizes the state's use of force against those who "break the contract," thereby perpetuating hierarchies and necropolitics. She views it as individualistic, ignoring social interdependencies and precarious lives, and proposes instead a collective and egalitarian nonviolent ethic.

⁵ The social contract assumes that individuals are "born ready," ignoring all the care and social support necessary for life to exist (Butler, 2021).



presenting it in a relational and ethical dimension in which the vulnerable Other compels us to rethink politics and social recognition.

In this sense, the normative construction of “humanity” consequently produces a realm of non-humanity or abjection – what Fanon (2020) called “zones of being and non-being”. Thus, the discussion regarding the frameworks of intelligibility emerges as a:

[...] a kind of moral and epistemological frame through which the boundaries between what is thinkable and what is unthinkable are defined. Based on an artistic representation observed on a canvas, the frame can be conceived as the circumscription of what on the canvas should be looked at/seen/perceived/captured/considered. It would serve to delimit the field of observation (Nascimento; Monteiro, 2021, p. 273)⁶.

If there is a return of the human in Judith Butler (2015), there will certainly be something that will never return – unless it is from the realm of her theory. Given that the human as a universal category would, in reality, be hidden within the heterosexual white male – the “man” as the paradigm of the human – but also the human that is simply a stable, timeless, and historical category.

From an epistemological standpoint, the emergence of a “different human” is understood through the analysis of “frames of intelligibility”. These function as frameworks that condition our cognitive activities (thinking, imagining, conceiving), preventing them from being free or natural. In fact, they are interventions in the world that are already delimited by prior categorical schemes, which define the very boundaries of what is or is not thinkable.

These frameworks – as moral and normative instances of life – enforce the “simultaneous production of a domain of abject beings, those who are not yet ‘subjects,’ but who form the constitutive exterior of the subject’s domain” (Butler, 2019, p. 18). The deconstruction of the universal notion of the human and the emergence of a vulnerable and contingent human, therefore, depend directly on the questioning and subversion of these frameworks that have historically defined and limited the very conception of humanity, producing non-humanity as its constitutive counterpoint.

Epistemic privilege and epistemic inferiority are interdependent effects of the same structure: epistemic racism/sexism (Grosfoguel, 2012). In this dynamic, the

⁶ Translated from the original text in Portuguese: “[...] espécie de moldura moral e epistemológica, por meio da qual se delimitam as fronteiras entre o que é pensável e não pensável. A partir de uma representação artística observada numa tela, a moldura pode ser concebida como a circunscrição do que na tela deve ser olhado/visto/apreendido/captado/considerado. Ela atuaria no sentido de delimitar o campo de observação (Nascimento; Monteiro, 2021, p. 273).



supposed superiority of one group can only exist through the imposition of inferiority upon the other. From a perspective that diverges from anthropocentric individualism, it is possible to recognize the importance of the environment in which one lives and, thus, prevent the destruction of the conditions for livability – making life worth living (Butler, 2022; Silva, 2025).

To this end, Butler (2022) argues that it is necessary to decentralize the human in relation to the earth⁷. In her view, the persistence of behaviors that lead to the destruction of the earth culminates in the creation of an uninhabitable world, thereby generating a world that is not livable. Even life's negative experiences must be bearable for an individual to be able to continue living (Silva, 2025).

Embodied life requires a space of comfort and safety, which is why there is a need for shelter or a home. When we bring the ontological dimension into perspective in Butler's studies, the existence of vulnerability as a consequence of human corporeality becomes evident. Whether due to anatomical and physiological factors or to relational aspects with other beings – human or otherwise – there are limitations to human corporeality. Consequently, it has become evident how the subject depends on social and economic infrastructures external to them, calling into question the supremacy of a paradigm of self-sufficiency in relation to the conception of the human person.

In Husserl's (2022) phenomenological approach, discrimination affects the perception of the body by altering the individual's lived experience and bodily consciousness. Husserl understands the body not merely as a physical object, but as the lived body, which is fundamental to the constitution of the subject's meaning and identity in the world.

When a body is discriminated against – for example, on the basis of race, disability, or other characteristics that deviate from socially normalized standards – this experience of exclusion and stigmatization directly interferes with how the subject perceives their own body and is perceived by others. Discrimination imposes a social gaze that labels, defines, and limits the body, affecting its expression, its autonomy, and the

⁷ However, to further this critique, we must distinguish between “(E)arth” – as a biophysical entity and a planet – object of capitalist exploitation – and “(e)arth”, understood as a worldview and territory of life by Nêgo Bispo (Santos, 2023). While the former is often treated by Western rationality as a resource external to humans, the latter – central to traditional and Quilombola communities – is the space where relationships of belonging and ancestry are woven. In his view, the persistence of behaviors that lead to the destruction of this ecosystem culminates in the creation of an uninhabitable world, thereby generating a world that is unlivable (Santos, 2023).



way the individual relates to the world. This can lead to an experience of the body as fragmented, infantilized, or devalued, as in the case of people with disabilities, whose bodies are often viewed as incapable or asexual, denying them desires and autonomy (Butler, 2018b).

Therefore, phenomenology – as a philosophical tradition that studies conscious experience and the way the world presents itself to the subject – can be used to understand and identify instances of epistemic injustice, especially in legal contexts. The phenomenological approach emphasizes the recognition of the Other and the importance of guaranteeing each individual an epistemic space for action – that is, an environment in which their experiences and knowledge can be expressed and valued.

In the context of epistemic injustice (Fricker, 2023), phenomenology helps describe how the lived experience of exclusion or silencing affects a person as a knowing subject, revealing the direct impact of these injustices on their self-perception and their interaction with society (Hernández, 2023). This perspective contributes to a deeper understanding of the subjective and intersubjective dimensions of epistemic injustice, broadening the view beyond social and institutional structures to the level of individual experience and interpersonal relationships.

4. A Phenomenological Proposal for Decolonial Epistemology

Despite the independence movements in (Latin) America, the Global South has not experienced a true liberation or decolonization of minds, bodies, or social and economic structures. This reality is particularly evident in the way knowledge was – and still is – understood.

During the colonial period, knowledge was not viewed as something dynamic, capable of circulating, intermingling, and transforming through contact with different societies. On the contrary, it was understood as a unidirectional transfer from the metropolis to the colonial territories (Mignolo, 2020). Even when knowledge was produced locally, its validation depended on the reproduction of epistemological norms originating in the North. This restrictive definition of knowledge, unfortunately, has not undergone significant changes since independence.



This persistence of colonial logic in the realm of knowledge is directly linked to the perception of the self and the Other. The fundamental distinction between what is mine and what presents itself as the Other is a product of an experience that differentiates and classifies. However, a more emancipatory and truly decolonized approach values the perspective of the situated subject and of the Other in its otherness, recognizing the richness and validity of multiple epistemologies and experiences that are still frequently subjugated by the hegemony of Western thought.

Against this backdrop, epistemic exclusion occurs when certain groups or individuals have their capacity to produce, share, or be recognized as bearers of knowledge systematically silenced or devalued (Hernández, 2023). Institutional or cultural mechanisms (such as prejudice, racism, or sexism) disqualify experiences and forms of knowledge that deviate from the dominant norm, depriving marginalized individuals or communities of the status of legitimate knowledge holders (Hernández, 2023).

By placing the lived experience and intersubjectivity at the center – that is, the way we relate to one another and recognize the Other as a subject of experience and knowledge – phenomenology challenges the social and epistemic structures that render certain voices inaudible. Recognition of the Other is essential for the subject to be acknowledged as an epistemic agent; without this recognition, their experience is deemed “alienated” or “excluded,” and their knowledge remains on the margins of institutional discourses of truth.

“Decolonial epistemological critique rebels against this universalist pretension of modern science by asserting that all knowledge is situated in a body, in a time, and in a space, and that it cannot extricate itself from this immanence” (Oliveira; Gomes, 2021, p. 650)⁸. Decolonial thought emerges as an essentially critical topological framework that problematizes the historical and structural reality of the colonial/modern world, seeking to denaturalize and question the apparent unity and foundations of this world order. It does so by deconstructing its ontological, political, and epistemological foundations, revealing how these foundations sustain and reproduce the colonality of power, knowledge, and being.

⁸ Translated from the original text in Portuguese: “A crítica epistemológica decolonial se insurge contra essa pretensão universalista da ciência moderna ao preconizar que todo conhecimento é situado em um corpo, em um tempo e em um espaço e que não pode se desvencilhar dessa imanência” (Oliveira; Gomes, 2021, p. 650).



Ontologically, decolonial thought challenges the Eurocentric and universalist notion of human existence that underlies modernity, which establishes a hierarchy among human beings by assigning categories of racial and cultural superiority and inferiority. This logic of coloniality of being, as Maldonado-Torres (2022) points out, involves the invention of the other as inferior, subhuman, or non-human, nullifying the ontological diversity of subalternized worlds and disregarding other modes of existence and being in the world. Being is thus permeated by a colonial logic that dehumanizes and renders other ontologies invisible.

In the political sphere, decolonial thought highlights that the modern/colonial world is sustained by a coloniality of power (Quijano, 2009) that is not limited to mere formal territorial domination, but manifests itself in global relations of labor, authority, and race, radiated by global capitalism, which produce and reproduce profound structural inequalities between centers and peripheries, dominators and the dominated (Mignolo, 2020). This political dimension of coloniality implies a direct critique of the forms of power and domination that permeate modern state, economic, and social institutions, calling into question the liberating narrative of modernity.

Epistemologically, decolonial thought challenges the coloniality of knowledge – that is, the Eurocentric hegemony that has universalized a single, fragmented form of knowledge, thereby discrediting other forms of knowledge, cosmologies, and epistemes produced in colonized contexts (Mignolo, 2020). This critique highlights the need to recover and legitimize the ways of knowing of subaltern populations – which have historically been devalued and silenced – by proposing a pluriversal epistemology that recognizes the diversity and equality of forms of knowledge. Thus, decolonial thought challenges the false neutrality and objectivity of modern science as something universal.

The topological framework implies that decolonial thought not only analyzes the colonial/modern as a chronological historical fact, but also as a spatial and relational one, recognizing the multiple layers and sites where coloniality manifests itself. It problematizes the emergence of colonial modernity as an incomplete, open, and contradictory process that lacks a solid and universal foundation but is sustained through systemic exclusions and ongoing processes of marginalization and resistance.

“The process of naming is an attempt to erase one memory so that another can be constructed” (Santos, 2023, p. 12). The subordination of knowledge in the modern world system seems to be creating the conditions for “something different from an



epistemology”⁹ through diverse articulations and liminal thinking at its outer and inner boundaries. In his work “A terra dá, a terra quer” (The Earth Gives, the Earth Wants) (2023), Antônio Bispo dos Santos – known as “Nêgo Bispo” – proposes a mode of knowledge that emerges from the quilombo experience, linked to ancestral wisdom, oral tradition, and a deep connection to the land and natural cycles, in contrast to European colonialist logic.

Bispo (2023) denounces the imposition of colonial knowledge, which undermines local cosmologies and ways of life by deterritorializing them. This means that subalternized peoples are stripped of their own forms of knowledge and identity in order to import a hegemonic, colonizing form of knowledge. In this context, while Mignolo refers to the “epistemology of borders”, Bispo uses the term “countercolonization”. This concept denotes a way of life that predates colonization, representing an ontological and epistemological resistance that values the diversity of ecosystems, languages, forms of knowledge, and ways of being – which are often ignored or rejected by the dominant epistemology. As Santos (2023, p. 13) explains, “To counter colonialism. This is what we call the war of denominations: the strategy of countering colonial words as a way to weaken them”.¹⁰

All these keywords – including “imposition of colonial knowledge”, “deterritorialization”, “epistemology of borders” and “countercolonization” – are part of a similar epistemological project, linked by their critique of the epistemic coloniality of power. It is essential to note that, as Mignolo (2020) points out, all of them can also be associated by their irreducible difference in relation to critical forms of knowledge that emerge from the internal perspective of modernity itself.

This distinction becomes even more evident when we consider Santos's remarks (2023, p. 49):

Politics is a Euro-Christian monotheistic construct, and cosmopolitics is also a Euro-Christian invention. We Quilombolas¹¹, however, do not have politics; we have ways of life. We do not hold assemblies to resolve our issues; we

⁹ Translated from the original text in Portuguese: “O processo de denominação é uma tentativa de apagamento de uma memória para que a outra possa ser composta” (Santos, 2023, p. 12).

¹⁰ Translated from the original text in Portuguese: “Para contrariar o colonialismo. É o que chamamos de *guerra das denominações*: o jogo de contrariar as palavras coloniais como modo de enfraquecê-las”.

¹¹ The author also refers to “Quilombolas”, which are descendants of Afro-Brazilian communities – known as “quilombos” (Santos, 2023, p. 49).



have discussions in which we argue until we reach an understanding. Afterward, we drink cachaça¹² to celebrate.¹³

This Quilombola perspective exemplifies the realization of decolonization and epistemic resistance. By asserting that “we don’t have politics; we have ways of life”¹⁴, Santos (2023) emphasizes the rejection of an imposed governance structure. This reflects a distinct worldview, in which the resolution of impasses and celebration (“we drink cachaça to celebrate”¹⁵) are intrinsically linked to rituals and practices that defy hegemonic rationality.

This approach not only contradicts colonial discourse, as Santos (2023, p. 13) suggests, but also represents a deterritorialization of the very concept of “politics”, reaffirming the power of local knowledge and ways of being in the face of the imposition of hegemonic colonial knowledge. In this sense, discrimination – inherent in the imposition of colonial knowledge – affects the perception of the body by altering the individual’s lived experience and bodily awareness.

The deterritorialization of ways of life and the importation of hegemonic knowledge, as denounced by Bispo, can generate an experience of devaluation and alienation from one’s own lived body among subalternized peoples. In turn, the defense of ways of life is deeply intertwined with the notion that embodied life requires a space of comfort and security, which points to the need for shelter or a home; this constitutes epistemic resistance, which, ontologically, is the existence of a vulnerability stemming from human corporeality.

5. Conclusion

This article proposes a phenomenological framework for a decolonial epistemology, seeking to legitimize the knowledge of marginalized bodies and to subvert the colonality of knowledge and historical silencing. Traditional phenomenology, with its focus on lived

¹² The author also refers to 'cachaça', a typical Brazilian brandy (Santos, 2023, p. 49).

¹³ Translated from the original text in Portuguese: “A política é eurocristã monoteísta e a cosmopolítica também é uma invenção eurocristã. Nós quilombolas, porém, não temos política, temos modos de vida. Não fazemos assembleias para resolver nossas questões, temos discussões nas quais brigamos até nos entendermos. Depois, bebemos cachaça para comemorar” (Santos, 2023, p. 49).

¹⁴ Translated from the original text in Portuguese: “não temos política, temos modos de vida” (Santos, 2023).

¹⁵ Translated from the original text in Portuguese: “bebemos cachaça para comemorar” (Santos, 2023).



corporeality as a primordial condition of experience, can be critically revised to include corporeality marked by coloniality. This opens space for pluriversal epistemologies that challenge Eurocentric hegemony and its false scientific neutrality, pointing toward a dialogue between the phenomenology of marginalized bodies and decolonial thought.

By analyzing the performativity of gender – arguing that language and social signs not only describe the world but construct it through repeated discursive and bodily acts – we imply that gender is not an innate essence but an effect of bodily repetitions and stylizations within social spaces. This deconstruction of gender opens the door to a broader critique of the categories that have historically defined what it means to be “human,” especially those rooted in patriarchal and Eurocentric notions. This makes it possible to understand that the vulnerability and precariousness of marginalized bodies are a locus of resistance and subversion.

By integrating these perspectives, this article sought to contribute to a deeper understanding of epistemic injustice and to the development of an epistemology that values the embodied experiences of subjects marginalized by coloniality. The phenomenology of marginalized bodies offers a method for giving voice and visibility to these experiences, articulating an epistemological critique that engages with the decolonization of knowledge.

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