

FORUM: DECOLONIZING HISTORIES IN THEORY AND PRACTICE

9.

MOVING FROM, AND BEYOND, INVENTED CATEGORIES:
AFTERWORDS

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ABSTRACT

The decentering of narratives is no longer sufficient for bringing the past into sharper focus. As a discipline, we must contend with the continued power imbalance in the production and circulation of histories. It is necessary to give equal valence to histories produced by embracing a range of historical methods, many of which the essays in this forum explore. Doing so expands understandings of what counts as theory in our histories and their obligations in society.

Keywords: plural histories, knowledge production, decolonizing history[as one], indigenous knowledge, production of history, theory

Reconceiving our pasts' communal relationships with nature, nonhumans, the planet, and the universe necessitates fresh theoretical frameworks, different methodologies, and new descriptors that go beyond ill-fitting protocols forged in imperial academic settings. Yet this increasingly inclusive approach to history "raise[s] serious questions of legitimacy" for some scholars who view it as less critical and objective than *History* proper.² In short, who gets to narrate our histories continues to be a battleground. On one side are scholars who seek to build structurally sound yet different (perhaps wider) bridges to our past that are usable in the present. On the other side are those whose varying degrees of unease increase as the discipline looks increasingly less familiar and, in their eyes, less sturdy, leading to a sense that epistemological borders must be patrolled. Is it possible to have "a radically plural world as historical objective," as Brazilian-Argentine scholar Rita Laura Segato proposes?³

The decentering of narratives is no longer sufficient for bringing the past into sharper focus. Rather, we need to give equal valence to histories that address

1. I am grateful to Pablo Gomez, Phil Deloria, Miranda Johnson, Warwick Anderson, and Laura Stark, as well as an anonymous reader, for their incisive comments on an earlier version.

2. David J. Silverman, "Living with the Past: Thoughts on Community Collaboration and Difficult History in Native American and Indigenous Studies," *American Historical Review* 125, no. 2 (2020), 519-527.

3. Rita Laura Segato, "The Virtues of Disobedience," Buenos Aires International Book Fair, April 25, 2019, Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, transl. Liz Mason-Deese, July 2019, <https://www.rosalux.de/en/publication/id/40778/the-virtues-of-disobedience/>.

the forces that make a mountain sacred and those that are predicated on belief in astronomers' abilities to render the first image of a black hole. The articles in this forum underscore how present-day water and land struggles, nonhuman animal rights, and Indigenous world views (to name just a few concerns) are entwined with the production of history. Indeed, their methodologies, which are rooted in a conscious choice to build links with communities beyond academia, expand our understanding of what counts as theory in our histories and what our obligations are to society. As Michelle Murphy explains in her work on Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee land and the petrochemical industry, "it is a request to work as anti-colonial co-theorizers, rather than simply as explicators."⁴

As historians, can we dismiss present obligations? Frantz Fanon wrote in *Black Skin, White Masks*, "I should be very happy to know that a correspondence had flourished between some Negro philosopher and Plato. But I can absolutely not see how this fact would change anything in the lives of the eight-year-old children who labor in the cane fields of Martinique or Guadeloupe."⁵ Argentinian decolonial scholar Karina Bidaseca, examining the limits of conventional theory, argued that the "Salvationist Rhetoric" of academia had its limits in the real-life experience of the courts.⁶ Indeed, what resonance do decolonial theories have when legal systems continue to enforce versions of justice that are rooted in colonial and racialized understandings of society and land, as described by Anja Kanngieser and Zoe Todd and Tom Özden-Schilling in this forum?⁷ Historians working with marginalized groups *must* contend with applicability because these pasts remain *too present* to ignore. Yet as Juno Salazar Parreñas discusses here, in Southeast Asia decoloniality reaches the limits of its applicability—in particular when we acknowledge that colonial violence was felt by a broad spectrum of living beings, not just humans.⁸ During the last decades of the twentieth century, anthropologists reflected on their roles in various communities' struggles for political, social, racial, and economic inclusion. "Critical engagement" as a practice became a preferred tool for activist researchers, especially when exploring political and racial tensions.⁹ How, then, is the larger practice of history impacted by writing decolonized histories?

In 1995, Haitian scholar Michel-Rolph Trouillot revisited Sans Souci and argued convincingly that what history is "changes with time and place or, better

4. Michelle Murphy, "Some Keywords toward Decolonial Methods: Studying Settler Colonial Histories and Environmental Violence from Tkaronto," *History and Theory* 59, no. 3 (2020), 383.

5. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 230.

6. Karina Bidaseca, "'Mujeres blancas buscando salvar a mujeres color café': desigualdad, colonialismo jurídico y feminismo postcolonial," *Andamios* 8, no. 17 (2011), 61-89.

7. Anja Kanngieser and Zoe Todd, "From Environmental Case Study to Environmental Kin Study," *History and Theory* 59, no. 3 (2020), 385-393; Tom Özden-Schilling, "Technopolitics in the Archive: Sovereignty, Research, and Everyday Life," *History and Theory* 59, no. 3 (2020), 394-402.

8. Juno Salazar Parreñas, "From Decolonial Indigenous Knowledges to Vernacular Ideas in Southeast Asia," *History and Theory* 59, no. 3 (2020), 413-420.

9. Shannon Speed engaged long-going struggles for Native American autonomy with a human rights approach in her "At the Crossroads of Human Rights and Anthropology: Toward a Critically Engaged Activist Research," *American Anthropologist* 108, no. 1 (2006), 66-76. Her more recent *Rights in Rebellion: Indigenous Struggles and Human Rights in Chiapas* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008) continues to interrogate anthropology's role in knowledge production, whereas scholars such as Michelle Murphy and Zoe Todd seek to engage meaningfully with Indigenous epistemologies and practices.

said, history reveals itself only through the production of specific narratives. What matters most are the process and conditions of production of such narratives.” Addressing the need to interrogate how we produce histories, he continued: “Only a focus on that process can uncover the ways in which the two sides of historicity intertwine in a particular context. Only through that overlap can we discover the differential exercise of power that makes some narratives possible and silences others.”¹⁰

Scholars working from the Majority World as well as from the internal margins of empire have long understood this “exercise of power” as linked to the exclusionary sites of production of Western knowledge: universities, journals, and conferences are all microcosms of our world’s social, racial, and class hierarchies. Nearly a decade before the appearance of Trouillot’s book, for example, renowned Bolivian historian Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui published *Oppressed but Not Defeated: Peasant Struggles among the Aymara and Quechwa in Bolivia, 1900–1980*, an analysis of peasant struggles among two Indigenous communities in Bolivia.¹¹ After more than fifty years of undiminished analysis of colonization, identity, and sovereignty, Rivera Cusicanqui continues to challenge predominant views of how to narrate critically the role of Indigenous communities, working to insure circulation of their own histories. Yet within our imperial academic networks, the Andes that Rivera Cusicanqui documents—with its overlap of pre-, post-, de-, and colonial existences—and her clear activist commitments may seem to some to be frustratingly distant or unsuitable as broader models of engagement—maybe, for some, they are not legitimate enough.

The power to determine what constitutes legitimate scholarly expression infuses, for example, a dismissive appraisal of two admired examples of decolonizing history that was recently published in *The American Historical Review*. The author warns that a multidisciplinary approach with an “enthusiastic adoption” of theory “often produces an overreliance on specialized language,” which could turn readers away. Curiously, the suggestion is that authors instead “should commit to sharing their findings in a style accessible to as many members of those communities as possible.”¹² Buried within the presumed concern for others’ ability to understand is the suggestion that theory can never truly be for, or understood by, and most certainly not *generated* by the unqualified masses. Historians of “those communities” must learn to write—and speak and read—in ways that are deemed appropriate to their kin and our discipline. In short, it is a difficult game to win. If decolonial authors write in an “accessible” style, they might be accused of not engaging canonical texts. If they write in the language of the academy, they are accused of excluding the communities with whom they collaborate. In the battleground of who gets to narrate history, *how* to write and speak is as important as what is researched. Borderlands scholar Gloria E. Anzaldúa understood this when she declared in 1987 that “wild tongues can’t be

10. Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 25.

11. Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, *Oppressed but Not Defeated: Peasant Struggles among the Aymara and Quechwa in Bolivia, 1900–1980* (Geneva: United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, 1987).

12. Silverman, “Living with the Past,” 526.

tamed, they can only be cut out.”¹³ For her, academy rules are locks snapping shut over the mouths of those who dare speak inconvenient truths in accented English. If decolonial histories, no matter how celebrated, are the heavily accented narratives of our past, can they gain the status of History as long as we simply repaint our discipline’s house, leaving its foundations intact?

Historical silences are not confined to archival gaps, contestations of memory, or methodology. The strongest silence is sustained by academic networks and their gatekeepers. Can we claim to be engaged in a global dialogue if we debate decolonial methods mainly among ourselves, including in this journal and from other sites of privilege? The above cited critique of decolonial methodologies is not new for those who navigate multiple worlds and registers—yet it is usually not native scholars who are faulted with using exclusionary language.

In an essay on violence and interculturality, Rivera Cusicanqui observes that academic discussions “are common *among mestizo-criollos* and not *with* or *among* the indigenous.” Conversations among historians and other scholars become “monologues,” for, as she puts it, “the debate is conducted in the cities, using Spanish as the universal *lingua franca*, [which] is further symptomatic of the elites’ inability to take note of the linguistic and epistemological exchanges in and with other languages.” Rivera Cusicanqui cautions that we cannot impose, for example, “the influential work of Jürgen Habermas” on Bolivian reality, which is why she instead created the Andean Oral History Project to capture historical complexity that imported theories could not address.¹⁴ It is worth emphasizing, *entre otras cosas*, that we exist on a planet formed by worlds in which Spanish—not English—is the gatekeeper for the circulation of so-called legitimate knowledge.

As the essays in this forum demonstrate, disparate experiences with colonialism and postcolonialism have led to differing interpretations of decolonized futures. Many scholars, especially those based in North America, have learned from and been inspired by the intellectual practices of Native American studies, Chicano studies, African American studies, and Black Feminism, to name a few. As such, they established new veins of inquiry and pioneered new terms to validate other historicities. In her powerful introductory essay to *How We Get Free: Black Feminism and the Combahee River Collective*, Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor writes, “Black women’s experiences cannot be reduced to either race or gender but have to be understood on their own terms.”¹⁵ Taylor develops the example of how wage differentials used to explain gender difference in pay do not encompass the “enormous injustice” experienced by Black women who are often the primary or sole providers for their families. In other words, although the main statistic about gender pay inequality is powerful, it *does not* and *cannot* measure significantly different levels of oppression experienced by Black women. Similarly instantiating limited notions

13. Gloria E. Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Spinsters/Aunt Lute Books, 1987), 54.

14. Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, “Violence and Interculturality: Paradoxes of Ethnicity in Contemporary Bolivia,” in *New World Colors: Ethnicity, Belonging, and Difference in the Americas*, ed. Josef Raab, transl. Isabel Dulfano and Josef Raab (Tempe: Bilingual Press, 2014), 275.

15. Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, *How We Get Free: Black Feminism and the Combahee River Collective* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2018), 2.

of what needs to be explained, postcolonial studies often misses the nuance that those writing from colonized spaces demand: understand us on our own terms—and terminology. It is not, to paraphrase Taylor, about simply making someone's experience visible; it is about validating these experiences.

In her 2019 opening lecture at the Buenos Aires International Book Fair, anthropologist and one of Latin America's most influential intellectuals Segato suggested why this validation might never arrive: "About twenty days ago, at a meeting with directors of European museums in the Pompidou Museum in Paris, they asked me an important, intelligent, and very unusual question: how does Eurocentrism affect Europe? I affirmed: it is Europe that is alone. It looks at itself in the narcissistic mirror of its museums but lacks a real mirror, one which can exercise resistance and show defects, because those objects cannot return its gaze." Segato added that Europe "does not see its flaws in the eyes of others because it keeps the Other enclosed as treasure in the glass showcases of its colonial power."¹⁶

Is our discipline making glass showcases of decolonial histories—examples to be dissected, debated over, and exhibited as proof of worldliness yet still stuck in the waiting rooms of History?¹⁷ Are they, like the sacred objects discussed in Timothy Neale and Emma Kowal's article, not selected to be stand-ins for a global Australian Indigenous identity but instead found in overflowing warehouses and storage rooms, their histories in a limbo that alternates between a colonial and postcolonial existence?¹⁸ Crucially, what happens to these histories and when do they circulate?

In her lecture, Segato explained her choice to publish with Argentinian publishers as having "nothing to do with patriotic values, but rather the value of pluralism"—and circulation. Argentina's military dictatorship (1976–1983) targeted booksellers and publishers, at the time among the most prestigious in the Spanish-speaking world. Those that survived eventually "succumbed to the colonality of power and knowledge" when publishing houses from Spain arrived, "threatening the beauty and value of the linguistic pluralism and ways of speaking rooted in Argentina." In describing publishing in Spanish as an act of disobedience, Segato added: "Because, let's make no mistake: it is the field of the Humanities, with its power of words, its *poiesis* of concepts, which shapes the future of history. That is why the key to the Humanities remains in the hands of the few, a few who are not located here." By "here," Segato meant, of course, the "peripheral" South of the Global Humanities, yet that same "here" is a pivotal center in Latin American knowledge production. Her act of scholarly disobedience—publishing in Spanish—therefore functions like Rivera Cusicanqui's push for Aymara in Bolivia, revealing space-specific and historically layered tensions. Anzaldúa, speaking from the borderlands, the spaces where uncertain histories collide, used border speak and Chicano Spanish as the means to explain that, for those deemed minorities because they spoke neither English nor Spanish well, the

16. Segato, "The Virtues of Disobedience."

17. Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

18. Timothy Neale and Emma Kowal, "'Related' Histories: On Epistemic and Reparative Decolonization," *History and Theory* 59, no. 3 (2020), 403–412.

only recourse left was “to create their own language.”¹⁹ For those on the margins, it is not just language but the notion of time and the ordering of the world that have to be reimagined. Building and renarrating “misremembered” pasts is not an act of scholarly defiance but an act of self-determination that highlights, as Segato suggests, the value of pluralism.

Such layered tensions are visible in Miranda Johnson’s article in this issue when she revisits a canonical text to ponder where Indigenous researchers situate themselves and examines how they, in turn, are understood in a decolonial setting.²⁰ The challenge of writing from and being situated in the margins equally preoccupies Saidiya Hartman, who begins *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval* with “a note on method.” Voicing a familiar trope for historians who work among those inhabiting societies’ supposed edges, she writes that “[e]very historian of the multitude, the dispossessed, the subaltern, and the enslaved is forced to grapple with the power and authority of the archive and the limits it sets on what can be known, whose perspective matters, and who is endowed with the gravity and authority of historical actor.”²¹

Last year was the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Zapatista uprising, a rebellion led by Indigenous people of southern Mexico who challenged the global economic system and the place that capitalism assigned to those labeled “not modern.” The lessons of the Zapatistas are couched in an easy embrace of perceived contradictions—they are an Indigenous group that sought inclusion within the nation-state while insisting that a modern world could never exist without the autonomous *cosmovisión* (worldview) of the world’s first peoples. Despite an equally long roster of frustrating defeats, in the last two decades the Zapatistas have offered viable alternatives to values embraced and governed by global capitalism. Their communities show that it is possible to move beyond the decolonial and into a space redefined by values and goals that are not anchored in or signified by imperial experience. Their focus on indigenous communal needs (as opposed to individual ones) reframed rules that govern the world—all while they continued to embrace the colonial-era designation of *Indios*, which racialized them as Indians. The term became their armor.²²

The Zapatistas’ communiqués in the 1990s invited us to think critically of, and within, multiworld experiences. Yet many of us remain mired in a postcolonial/subaltern theoretical universe. In contrast, Zapatistas offered a blueprint of what research could become when they declared, “[m]any words are walked in this world. Many worlds are made. Many worlds make us. There are words and worlds that are lies and injustice. There are words and worlds that are true and

19. Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, 77.

20. Miranda Johnson, “Toward a Genealogy of the Researcher as Subject in Post/Decolonial Pacific Histories,” *History and Theory* 59, no. 3 (2020), 421–429.

21. Saidiya Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval* (New York: Norton, 2019), 7.

22. A mere three months ago, a new economic model may have seemed impossible but the pandemic has ushered in new forms of social coexistence. See Kevin Rector, “Bowl of Oranges for a Bunch of Basil: Strapped for Cash, Angelenos Turn to Bartering and Sharing,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 17, 2020, <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2020-05-17/coronavirus-economy-neighbors-barter-trade-produce>.

truthful. We make truthful worlds. We are made by truthful words. In the world of the powerful, only the rulers and their servants fit. In the world we want, everybody fits. The world we want is a world in which many worlds fit.”²³ Versions of these many worlds have struggled to find, as mentioned above, legal places in our present world. Such is the case of *buen vivir*, an indigenous movement that is now an ambivalent part of both Ecuador’s and Bolivia’s constitutions. The 2008 Ecuadorean constitution begins by stating the intent to create “a new form of public coexistence, in diversity and harmony with nature, to achieve the good way of living, the *sumak kawsay*.”²⁴ As economist, feminist scholar, and coordinator of La Red Latinoamericana de Mujeres Transformando la Economía (Network of Women Transforming the Economy), Magdalena León T. posited, it is not simply about creating critical thought; it is about producing the means to implement and sustain ideas.²⁵ Yet even ideals enshrined in a constitution have a rocky road to implementation. As mining companies and Ecuador’s extractivist agenda use the concept of *sumak kawsay* (mining for living well) equally with those who are against development, the core meaning of the movement is diluted and misrepresented.²⁶

Relearning is at the core of community-engaged and genuinely collaborative historical work. More than just incorporating new ways of seeing the world, relearning means revisiting what we think we know and actively listening for what has been silenced. It is more than simply undoing histories. We are already immersed in a world of parallel histories, aware of certain permissible narratives that coexist in the same academic universe without necessarily converging.²⁷ Accordingly, when Africanists, South Asianists, and Latin Americanists came together in 2017 to discuss histories of science, medicine, and technology, we discovered that most of us were already engaged in similar subfield conversations about theoretical models that did not adequately encompass our work.²⁸ Inspired by these conversations, and adding new geographic pairings, we came together

23. “Cuarta Declaración de la Selva Lacandona,” Enlace Zapatista, January 1, 1996, <https://enlacezapatista.ezln.org.mx/1996/01/01/cuarta-declaracion-de-la-selva-lacandona/> (my translation). Scholars have revisited the Zapatistas’ decades-old invitation to rethink with worlds, as in the case of Mario Blaser and Marisol de la Cadena, who encourage scholars to “reconsider the material-semiotic grammar of *the relation* among worlds that dominates the fabrication of the current historical moment” (“Pluriverse: Proposals for a World of Many Worlds,” in *A World of Many Worlds*, ed. Marisol de la Cadena and Mario Blaser [Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018], 4).

24. Republic of Ecuador Const. of 2008, pmb, Political Database of the Americas, Georgetown University, updated January 31, 2011, <https://pdba.georgetown.edu/Constitutions/Ecuador/english08.html>.

25. Magdalena León T., “Después del ‘desarrollo’: el ‘Buen Vivir’ y las perspectivas feministas para otro modelo en América Latina” *Umbrales* 18, no. 1 (2008), 35-44.

26. Joe Gerlach, “Ecuador’s Experiment in Living Well: Sumak kawsay, Spinoza and the Inadequacy of Ideas,” *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space* 49, no. 10 (2017), 2241-2260.

27. Stating what we now take as a given, Walter D. Mignolo notes, “[t]here are several histories, all simultaneous histories, inter-connected by imperial and colonial powers, by imperial and colonial differences” (“Coloniality of Power and De-Colonial Thinking,” *Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2-3 [2007], 155-156).

28. The results of our musing resulted in a coedited issue. See Gabriela Soto Laveaga and Pablo F. Gómez, “Introduction,” in “Thinking with the World: Histories of Science and Technology from ‘Out There,’” ed. Gabriela Soto Laveaga and Pablo F. Gómez, special issue, *History and Technology* 34, no. 1 (2018), 5-10.

again in April 2019 at a workshop that Warwick Anderson and I organized at Harvard University.

It soon became clear that it is difficult—if not impossible—to *unlearn* what we think we know, especially when speaking about boundaries, be they physical, linguistic, or disciplinary. For example, how does one unlearn geography in order to remap the world mentally? In his lesson plans for a fraught world, Eduardo Galeano insists that “[t]he map lies. Traditional geography steals space just as the imperial economy steals wealth, official history steals memory, and formal culture steals the word.”²⁹ How does one unlearn our ways of doing, writing, and thinking about history? Or how does one unlearn the words we use to define and divide our past? Moreover, what *tools* do we use to begin excavating this new terrain—especially when the languages we speak, the archives we seek, and the memories we share all come from a place of conquest, exile, and struggle? For some, posing so many questions with so few definitive answers is problematic. Yet the act of *asking* new questions begins to shift the frame of analysis and makes visible other possible histories and futures. As Fanon memorably exclaimed at the end of *Black Skin, White Masks*: “O my body, make of me always a man who questions!”³⁰

Of course, the idea of unlearning in order to move forward is scarcely novel. In his 1937 address to the Royal Society of Arts, for example, Charles Marriott, an architect with a “devastating way of seeing the real building behind the trappings on it,” opted to speak about unlearning his discipline.³¹ Marriott used the camera shutter as a metaphor to question space and the boundaries of what is seen. In addition to speaking about architecture, Marriott offered insights into “some other subjects of which the appreciation has been hindered by information of the wrong kind,” specifically history and geography. Those of a “certain age,” he reminisced, would recall that the subject of history “was completely obscured and distorted by the kind of information that we were made to acquire.” This was mainly an invented history of the names and dates of monarchs and battles, Marriott claimed, “but of the daily life of the common people . . . we learnt nothing at all.”³² Marriott’s “common people” were of course not those whose decolonial histories we now seek to retell, but it is striking that even Marriott, a respected white Englishman, felt that official history—the subject taught in schools—“bore [only] some relation to the daily newspaper and the observations of the daily walk.”³³

The articles in this forum stand at the junction of many fields, including history, anthropology, sociology, Native American studies, science and technology studies, and museology. They make clear that close scrutiny of formations such as power, race, and identity—enduring hangovers of colonial and postindependence

29. Eduardo Galeano, *Upside Down: A Primer for the Looking-Glass World* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2014), 318.

30. Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 230.

31. Oswald P. Milne, “Proceedings of the Society,” *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts* 85, no. 4390 (1937), 185.

32. Charles Marriott, “Unlearning Architecture,” *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts* 85, no. 4390 (1937), 186.

33. *Ibid.*, 187.

societies—has often been missing from our histories, especially histories of science.³⁴ For those who hail from places that continue to be (re)colonized, histories can be scarred narrations that have been fabulously disfigured by omissions and distorted commissions. Most of these articles urge collaborative recognition of the traces that people, land, sea, rivers, and nonhumans—entities and identities made to move in and out of languages, cultural settings, and legal status—leave as historical records. To recognize such plural histories ethically, we need genuine collaboration, not perfunctory consultation. We all require sharp vision to observe and become accustomed to mixed identities, multiple time registers, and manifold worlds.

Yet can we truly, as Warwick Anderson asks, leave colonialisms behind?³⁵ A few years ago, I stumbled on an odd display in the Deutsches Technikmuseum in Berlin. It was a “colonial sample case”—a box with thirty-five compartments that at one point held rice, sugar, coffee, cacao, and tea. In other words, it was a box of assorted goods—a tangible definition of what “colonial” meant in 1925, the date printed on the box. Next to the box was a faded photograph of a *Kolonialwaren* shop, where Germans could purchase food and other goods from European colonies. The object’s description explained that “the term ‘colonial goods’ is labeled as ‘obsolete’ while ‘colonial railway’ can no longer be found” in the *Duden* dictionary. I found this fascinating because it meant that after territorial “loss,” the terms simply ceased to exist in the empire or fell out of use as they became politically inappropriate or inconvenient.³⁶ They are words that were intentionally eliminated from dictionaries, from use, from memory. Yet the power to forget experiences, categories, and histories so easily is a privilege that is not extended to the colonized. Because for many the past is so viscerally *right now*, we need disciplinary recognition that practices of history necessitate present engagement.

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34. This insight was best captured by Aníbal Quijano, who wrote that the “racial axis has a colonial origin and character, but it has proven to be more durable and stable than the colonialism in whose matrix it was established” (“Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America,” *Nepantla: Views from the South* 1, no. 3 [2000], 533).

35. Warwick Anderson, “Finding Decolonial Metaphors in Postcolonial Histories,” *History and Theory* 59, no. 3 (2020), 430–438.

36. A quick internet search suggests that there is only one remaining *Kolonialwaren* shop, and it is located in Bremen, Germany. Edeka, the name of one of Germany’s most popular supermarket chains, is an abbreviated version of the company’s original name, *Einkaufsgenossenschaft der Kolonialwarenhändler im Halleschen Torbezirk zu Berlin*, which contains the word *Kolonialwaren*.