

Racism and Racial Surveillance

Modernity Matters

Edited by
Sheila Khan, Nazir Ahmed Can
and Helena Machado

Translated by Ana Monteiro

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Chapter 8

Postcolonial racial surveillance through forensic genetics

Sheila Khan and Helena Machado

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Introduction

History reminds us that science may easily be used to justify racist stereotypes and racist policies. At the same time, the gene and the science of genetics remain powerful icons in the public imagination. In 1995, sociologist Dorothy Nelkin and historian Susan Lindee published the book entitled, *The DNA Mystique. The Gene as a Cultural Icon* to question the social and historical transformations that have led to the transformation of DNA from a mere biological entity into a powerful ideological and political instrument. Among the various powers culturally attributed to genes, which uncouple them from their objective biological properties and characteristics, the one that worried the authors most was the risk of genetic essentialism. This risk means attributing human essence to genes and obliterating the social, moral and historical complexity of human beings. In the words of the authors:

[I]n the larger culture, DNA can be used to locate responsibility and culpability, as well as to justify social and institutional policies. Those on all sides of the political spectrum can proclaim that specific biological properties of DNA lend support to their policies or goals. And their claims all build on the DNA mystique.

(Nelkin and Lindee, 1995, 3)

This text stems from the observation that the fascination for DNA continues to grow in an increasingly overt way, entangling governability of crime and scientific and political devices that relate genetics and race. In Europe, this problematic connection operates through what anthropologist Amade M'charek calls "present absence" to refer to the phenomenon by which race is present in scientific and police practices, but absent in terms of discourse because of the legacy of the past, which makes European scientists feel uncomfortable about the explicit use of the concept of race (M'charek, 2009; see also Queirós, 2019; Amelung and Machado, 2021).

As a starting point for our debate on postcolonial racial surveillance in the context of the governability of crime, as a symptomatic manifestation resulting from the discomfort and conflict between past and present reifications of race, we were inspired by a recent approach to present absence of race in the terms proposed by M'charek and van Oorschot (2020). The authors highlight this presence as an absence, which emerges as a ghost, a phantasmagorical revelation, which they seek to convey in the exercise of questioning the subject under study:

What ghost is here at work? [...] Race asks us to attend not only to presence but that which is (made) absent, furthermore, race also requires us to attend not only the here-and-now, but to the forgotten and erased. As ghosts are not simply 'of the past' nor something 'of the present,' race asks us to consider temporalities of various sorts.

(M'charek and van Oorcht, 2020, 2–4)

The ghost of the past holds the present hostage to a game, not always perceptible and defined, of absences and presences historically bound by the political, social and cultural interests of societies. In this sense, although DNA is a biological structure considered unique in each individual, at the same time, it is also presented as an element that enables the identification of population groups by their biological uniqueness, thereby generating contradictions that are used strategically according to the institutional and political agenda in question. The theoretical assumption of genetic uniqueness has transformed DNA in modern Western societies into a kind of insignia of human essence. The potential for individualisation attributed to DNA has fuelled state strategies of governability, surveillance and control of certain individuals and populations within the framework of the uses of forensic genetics with regard to supporting criminal justice activities.

In this chapter, the concept of postcolonial racial surveillance requires scrutinising the ways in which science may reinforce racial and ethnic categories, as it might happen in some emerging technologies used in forensic genetics that are applied in criminal justice, are rather illustrative of the matrix of Western modernity and its logic of coloniality, which survived the collapse of colonial empires. Accordingly, this text, supported by the tools of history and sociology (Mignolo, 2007; Santos, 2007; Egorova, 2010; Tutton, Hauskeller and Sturdy, 2014), aims to demonstrate how the processes of transference of imperial legacies today reveal their presence in more subtle or more apparent processes of racialisation, by summoning, on the one hand, and mirroring, on the other, old logics of coloniality, social domination and control and subjugation.

In methodological terms, our research involves an analysis of new instruments, languages, tools and devices supported in scientific discourses and repertoires associated with the growing role of genetics in the formation of

social identities and national identities (Bliss, 2012; Burton, 2018; Oikken, 2018) and in sustaining an imagery of genetic communities (Simpson, 2000; Tutton, 2004; Goldstein, 2008; Scully, King and Brown, 2013; Tamarkin, 2014; Nelson, 2016).

Our aim is to discuss the social processes through which operate, in forensic genetics, what we will call the abyssal character of Western modernity and the multiple configurations, contradictions and injustices that come from the subtle and at times ostentatious imposition of policies of belonging and exclusion that separate the world and reassert the differences between the majestic “us” and the subordinate and dispossessed “others” (Yuval-Davis, 2006).

Colonial imperialism and biological anthropology

Modernity is, at its root, the celebration of an era of moral human enlightenment, of emancipation, civilisation and progress. However, its dark side boasts a long line of events, projects and ambitions that were only possible and achievable within a logic of coloniality, which is to say of domination, appropriation and violence. In this context, biological anthropology has played a prominent role, ceaselessly seeking, under the aegis of the authority of science, measures and body traits that would allow an “objective” differentiation between biological races, based on the subordination and imposition of colonial power. A historically striking example was the strict enforcement of a fingerprint identification system, commonly associated with a police modernisation practice in Western countries at the end of the 19th century. However, as sociologist Simon Cole points out in his book on the construction of suspect identities through the use of technological and scientific artefacts, the use of fingerprints was implemented in India by the British Empire long before this happened in England (Cole, 2000, 75). The colonists, feeling threatened by local populations, who were seen as “hostile natives,” and faced with the vastness of the country in terms of area and population, and by the variety of religions, ethnic groups, languages and territories, tried, by any means necessary, to implement an identification system that would bring the comfort of law and order enforcement through a technological artefact. The implicit promise was that fingerprints would purify and pacify, through their objective technical language, what the British colonists interpreted as the disordered, the impure and the incomprehensible.

Authors attentive to the study of the Western modernity project (Mignolo and Tlostanova, 2006; Mignolo, 2007; Santos, 2007; Buettner, 2018; Eyerman and Sciortino, 2020) show in their work, with unmistakable soundness, this ambiguity and contradiction regarding the abyssal character of Western modernity, namely, a “mixture of utilitarianism and generosity” (Jerónimo and Monteiro, 2020, 236), which can be seen in the example described

above of the imposition, on the part of the British colonist, of technologies that would make it possible for the administrative power of the empire to classify and make intelligible the native body. The ongoing intensive and discriminatory use of genetic human identification technologies on migrant and refugee populations (Tutton et al., 2014) compels us to critically reflect and analyse the survival and legacy of the project of modernity and its logic of coloniality through genetic science, a precious theme and cornerstone not only of this chapter, but also of the book providing the framework for this text.

The continuities and setbacks in the call for the idea of race in scientific discourses confirm the relevance of its function, being particularly important with regard to the reflection on race as an embryo and theoretical and conceptual recipient of the rhetoric of Western modernity. Accordingly, accepting race and its debate within a comprehensive status is effective and promising, and may even be an important encouragement towards empowerment. As pointed out by Catherine Bliss – a scholar of the interrelationships between anti-racist activism and geneticist practices, whose studies address racial disparities in health, the health of minorities and the biological processes associated with race (Bliss, 2012) – the science of genetics does not necessarily

mark the reemergence of a prior science of race; rather, it is devoted to a new understanding of race – as hybrid of molecular science, social epidemiology, public health, and bioethics. Within the field of genomics, scientists join social science experts in their efforts to put race in historically conscious, yet politically empowering, terms.

(Bliss, 2012, 9)

Bliss lifts the veil a little on a historically and humanly dense complex and eclectic fabric. The study of the heritage of Western modernity requires more thoughtful inspection, and therefore an analysis that is more attentive to the diverse and coexisting dimensions, mechanisms and devices at the service of a modernity that is still active and consolidated in our present time. Accordingly, in order to open up a space of intelligibility of this assumption of ours we will bring new horizons of analysis that can reflect what we call in the title of this text the “legacy of coloniality.”

A social phenomenon that illustrates the reproduction of colonial logic in a postcolonial world, through more or less subtle connections between genetics and race, concerns population composition represented in existing genetic databases, whose development has been prevalent in Europe, North America and Australia. While genetic databases used for scientific research purposes in the curing and therapy of diseases mainly involve white populations, forensic genetic databases reveal an over-representation of individuals from certain ethnic groups and certain nationalities (Machado

and Silva, 2015). This phenomenon reflects discriminatory practices and the stigmatising social selectivity of the criminal justice and penitentiary system. As Chow-White and Duster point out, in a text that questions the reproduction of racial inequalities through the uses of genetics in two different fields – health and crime – global divisions and structural racism are deepened when it is observed that in genetic databases in the biomedical field, the majority of donors are of European origin, while on criminal genetic databases Africans, Latinos, Asians and Indigenous populations, in a situation of marked social and economic vulnerability, are overrepresented (Chow-White and Duster, 2011). While genetic surveillance aimed at white populations is epidemiological in nature and is designed to care for and improve health, genetic surveillance in the criminal field aims to control, punish and exclude, clearly targeting populations that have been colonised or in some way subjected to the experience of imperialism in the so-called Western world.

In this context, our argument with regard to the idea of postcolonial racial surveillance through forensic genetics is based on the following consideration: the permanence of the colonial did not solely imply the renewal of the colonist's vision towards the colonised *Other*. First and foremost, this return has accelerated and strengthened the continuity of the mechanisms of the racialisation of the *Other* expressed in the genetic research of the population within the meaning of its knowledge, but also in the priority of protection and the celebration of a national imagery, which supports the belief of a vision between the “us” and the Other, now living in today's territories of colonising and imperialist experience.

Genetisation and racialisation

The downfall of colonial empires has necessitated a rewriting of history, the application of which is based on the attempt to control the cultural and human diversity that postcolonial migrations have brought about to balancing and repairing the traumas of the past of the countries that faced the presence of the ex-colonised in their territories. The inevitability of postcolonial migrations has resulted in an increase in population genetics research projects in various geopolitical areas, taking into account the emergence of a narrative of national and cultural sovereignty *vis-à-vis* the status of the “Other” and of ethnic minorities; and, thus, the urgent need for a well-articulated interpretation to further substantiate the dividing line between “us” and those who, “genetically,” belong to the nation of the “Others” and who, by this logic of exclusion, represent elements that endanger the sense of national and cultural cohesion, security and identity sustainability. In her study of human genome projects in the Middle East, Elise Burton (2018) observed in great detail the importance of research on population genetics, cross-referencing this reading with the importance of historical legacies and

myths of national creation in countries such as Turkey and Iran. Based on an analysis of interviews with geneticists from both countries, the author observed how genetics emerges as a fundamental and prioritised tool in the project of narrating the nation and its people, showing, with the support of this ethnographic material, how genetics, history and memory intersect like an inescapable equation:

The very process of producing nation-states, in the Middle East and everywhere, requires the elevation of a particular identity at the expense of others – a suppression of internal diversity implemented through cultural hegemony and/or ethnic cleansing. With this in mind, the paradoxical emphasis on the diversity embedded in the national genome reflects the tensions of social and geographical scale (individual, community, humanity: nation-state, region, world) that characterize human genetics both as a professional activity and as a mechanism for identity formation.

(Burton, 2018, 20)

The presence of projects dedicated to the study of the human genome has been accompanied by arid and thorny debates between geneticists and academics from the social sciences, in particular historians (Egorova, 2010). India, a postcolonial country and the subject of a long experience of British colonialism, is still dealing with the concern regarding the understanding of migratory movements and the legacies of these migrations in the cultural and genetic grammar of its people and castes in the geography of the Indian subcontinent (Egorova, 2010; Marshall, 2019; Roy, 2019). Yulia Egorova demonstrates in her various important works (2010/2011, 2010, 2018) how population genetics studies are captured and imprisoned by historical and cultural dimensions that are tied firmly to a timeframe, which constantly pushes the interpretation of genetic results towards other readings, senses and meanings, thus calling for colonial legacies and mechanisms of social and cultural hierarchisation. In her work “Castes of genes? Representing human genetic diversity in India,” Egorova looks deeply into the absence of a sympathetic dialogue between scholars and scientists of genetics and history through interviews with geneticists and historians (also caste historians). At one point in her text, Egorova quotes an excerpt from an interview with an Indian historian, who pointedly expresses the incommunicability between genetics and history, reflected in the following thought:

[S]ocial values are something that you deal with on an everyday basis. Genes are not something that you deal with on an everyday basis. They are intangible. So I think the social values will transcend whatever implications genes may have.

(Egorova, 2010/2011, 42; cf. Goldstein, 2008)

The danger of identity genitisation of the population associated with political agendas for the reparation of historical sovereignty, on the one hand, and movements for the protection of Indigenous cultures, on the other, is assumed as an analytical concern in the studies of Ernesto Schwartz-Marín and Eduardo Restrepo (2013). With regard to human genome projects carried out in Colombia and Mexico, these case studies bring to the surface of their text very particular and compelling reflections, namely, the relationship between the legacy of coloniality and its appropriation in the political, ideological and public interpretation of genetics databases: originally from an anodyne desire to better understand human evolution and its migratory dynamics. As a consequence, the authors observe, when their results from these databases are published, they are hijacked and subjected to political and historical manipulation (see Nader, 1996), which hides the legacies of the colonial past based on beliefs, social representations and racialised stereotypes of all the populations existing within these countries. Their work highlights the survival of the mechanisms of coloniality that population genetics studies strengthen, both within civil society and in the various institutions that make up these societies. In this regard, the process of historicising and narrativising population genetics databases (Ruah, 2009¹; Egorova, 2010, 2010/2011) turns the spotlight on specific social groups by accentuating their identity differentiation, bolstering and invigorating the old dynamics and premises of modernity and the logic of coloniality through the production of a supposedly more rational and objective language, but which basically revitalises the mechanisms of racialisation and human differentiation. In the opinion of Ernesto Schwartz-Marín and Eduardo Restrepo:

Biocoloniality recovers how elements of coloniality are constitutive of the scientific making of populations, producing ‘genetic identities’ (especially those linked to existing discourse of race and nation) which are understood as being in need of protection and /or preservation from capitalist expropriation or the unruly circulation of bio-capital. Genomic studies in Colombia and Mexico deployed concepts of population – indigenous people, Europeans, Africans, mestizos – that were open to racialized readings and these categories brought with them a baggage of colonial history.

(2013, 2 and 11)

Population genetic studies represent the political, ideological, social and cultural dimensions to analyse the ideological heritage of modernity and empire, understanding the continuity of the colonial legacy in current practices of racial surveillance and criminalisation (Machado, Granja and Amelung, 2019; Granja, Machado and Queirós, 2020). As anthropologist Noah Tamarin (2014) points out, genetic technologies also serve to weave a genetic diaspora that is allowed to be re-imagined in new forms of belonging, deeply

marked by inequalities forged by racial differences constructed by colonial processes that serve as much to empower ethnic-racial groups² as to perpetuate and consolidate community policies that exclude and discriminate. In the same vein of academic debate, Alondra Nelson (2016), in her book *The Social Life of DNA: Race, Reparation and Reconciliation after the Genome*, highlights how DNA-based identification genetic technologies have served as much to reproduce scientific racism as to “repair” the civil rights of African-Americans, the descendants of slaves, who, by means of DNA genealogy tests, are able to reconstitute their family roots and rebuild communities, senses of belonging and diasporas.

The social and political value of DNA technologies is undeniable in the context of reconciliation projects, which aim to reunite individuals, families and communities separated by dramatic political events. In post-apartheid South Africa, DNA analysis has helped to identify the bodies of former members of the African National Congress who were “disappeared” in the fight against state-sanctioned racial discrimination (Nelson, 2016, 9). However, racial discrimination through genetics systemically persists, taking form in police and security practices. This chapter will delve further into a long-standing debate in countries such as the United States, where authors such as Troy Duster (2003) have shown how institutional racism is reinforced by the activities of the justice system when they use genetic evidence. We will propose the concept of postcolonial racial surveillance to critically reflect the way in which, through forensic genetics, racism is coupled with the belief of Western modernity that DNA has an almost magical power to reveal the truth.

Racial criminalisation in Europe: “genetics” of the “Other”

The malleability associated with the nature of the race, with its phantasmagorical personality, can only be fully addressed on uncovering the processes by which racialisation, confined to the logic of coloniality, is maintained, activated and camouflaged. Accordingly, the ghost metaphor associated with race is the tip of a much denser and more complex iceberg that the devices of racialisation promote as a cultural and historically intrinsic affirmation: on the one hand, the protection of an idea of nation, culture, of a greater and sovereign identity; on the other hand, the ambition of control and surveillance *vis-à-vis* the unwanted, inevitable and inescapable presence of the “Other.” Despite not being an area of reflection for this text, we should bear in mind that the return of the colonial is simultaneously the rebirth of Eurocentric nativism,³ nationalism and populism.

Historical presentism is a focus of dangerousness, contamination and noise when removing this tension from the colonial past in postcolonial European time and space from analysis on racial criminalisation, racial surveillance

and the social and cultural marginalisation of certain social groups. Denying this historical presentism leads us to critically weigh up and defend the thought that the manifestations of racialisation, racial criminalisation and racial surveillance at the time of the European imperial collapses summon, on the one hand, and mirror, on the other, the logic of coloniality and therefore of domination, appropriation and social control through more refined instruments, tools and devices underpinned by discourses and repertoires that are political (Jones, 2016; Bonjour and Duyvendak, 2018; Kešić and Duyvendak, 2019), cultural (Essed and Hoving, 2014; Marchetti, 2014; Wekker, 2016) and scientific (M'charek, Schramm and Skinner, 2014; Queirós, 2019; M'charek, Toom and Jong, 2020; M'charek and van Oorschot, 2020). A further argument is expanded on in this work: the presence of the coloniser and the colonial in the racialised identity of the colonised individuals not only provoked alienation, fear and suspicion, but at the same time ushered in a perspective of historical and visual confrontation of the evils produced by empires and their historical, social and moral incipience *vis-à-vis* the colonised individual – “the colonial Other” – (Kearney, 1991), who comes to live together with the coloniser in the space of the former “mother” countries, reminding about and challenging with his presence “the defeat and imperial withdrawal” (Gatrell, 2020, 241). Alienation, fear and suspicion that reflect ancient colonial logics and hegemonies are formed as camouflage mechanisms of racialisation and human differentiation within which the concept of race occupies the space of both the colonialist imagery and the discomfort that this imagery induces when confronted with policies and discourses of the former colonising mother countries – for example, the United Kingdom, Germany, Portugal, the Netherlands, etc. – in which values such as equality, democracy and respect for human diversity are publicly defended.

Recent studies, particularly in former colonising powers, such as the Netherlands, Italy and France (Kešić and Duyvendak, 2019), demonstrate this overwhelming defence of an idea of a pure, immaculate and modern nation, which justifies and underpins the unceasing production of mechanisms and tools of racialisation and human differentiation, and which extends globally to multiple different geopolitical frameworks, such as, for example: India, Russia, China and postcolonial societies in South America (Marshall, 2019).

The flow of postcolonial migrations envisaged as the embryo of decolonisation and political emancipation struggles in the former colonised territories has posed a number of challenges in the space of an empire-less Europe: firstly, to integrate the colonial “Others” into its culture; and secondly, to focus efforts on the development and implementation of a policy of social assimilation that might function as an instrument of cultural invisibility and social distancing without thereby creating identity tensions and social upheavals within the postcolonial host cities in their challenging interaction with the “foreigner among us” (Gatrell, 2020, 242). Boaventura de Sousa

Santos defines, in great detail, the nature of the historical relations between the colonial individual and the colonised Other, when he says that “modern western thinking is abyssal thinking. The fundamental characteristic of abyssal thinking is the impossibility of co-presence on both sides of the line” (2007, 3–4). It is in the challenge of this territorial and cultural tension resulting from the return of the colonial that several authors welcome and denounce what Boaventura de Sousa Santos’ reflections generously sum up:

The colonial that returns is in fact an abyssal new colonial. This time, the colonial returns not only to the former colonial territories, but also to metropolitan societies. Herein lies the great transgression, as the colonial of the classical period could under no circumstances enter metropolitan societies, except on the initiative of the coloniser (as a slave, for example). The metropolitan spaces that have been demarcated since the beginning of Western modernity [...] are being invaded and breached by the colonial. In these circumstances, the abyssal metropolitan is confined to an increasingly limited space and reacts by re-marking the abyssal line. In its perspective, the new intrusion of the colonial has to be confronted with the orderly logic of appropriation/violence.

(Santos, 2007, 3–4 and 13)

Walter Mignolo and Madina Tlostanova reinforce this same terminology in their work *Theorizing from the Borders* (2006), referring to it as “borders,” however. The authors are peremptory in their observations in drawing attention to the machine behind the logic of modernity and coloniality: “[T]he modern foundation of knowledge is territorial and imperial. By modern we mean the socio-historical organization and classification of the world founded on a macro-narrative and on a specific concept and principles of knowledge” (2006, 205). It is this cut-off line of social, epistemic, cultural and ontological hierarchisation (Tlostanova, 2015), and, no less secondary, that of racial differentiation, a passenger accompanying the return of both the coloniser and the colonised at the terminus of historical colonial and imperial experiences (Ribeiro, 2004; Stoller, 2011; Tlostanova, 2014; Khan, 2015; Buettner, 2020; Ballinger, 2020). The question that stands out is therefore this: How does the logic of the coloniality, so integral to Western modernity, remain active and dynamic in European postcoloniality?

Countries with authoritarian and dictatorial experiences cannot be excluded from this analysis of the logic of coloniality, including the former Soviet Union, China, India and the territories of South America, including the most paradigmatic cases, such as Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Bolivia and Paraguay. Although our text sees European countries as historically anchored to colonial regimes as its analytical priority, and because the project of Western modernity is the beacon within the analytical framework of the works making up this book, it must be said that modernity has not been

a reality exclusive to Europe. Parallel to this project of Western modernity, other modernities have also been established in the body of imperial expansion experiments in China, the former Soviet Union and India. Of these various matrices of modernity, the one that stood out most for its temporal and spatial criteria, asserting itself for this reason as unique and hegemonic, was that of Western modernity (Dussel, 1995, 2000). The fall of empires has been witnessed in other parts of the world too, which explains the aspiration for a return to imperial imagery.

In today's globalised world, the United States of America, China, Russia and India demand a neo-colonialist and neo-imperialist geopolitical stance (Shih, 2012; Pieterse, 2018) in various forms: surveillance of human mobility, tightening of social control, massive funding for technological tools for the surveillance of migratory movements and genetic databases. The cross-checking of academic research with data compiled from investigative journalism exposes strong cohesion with regard to the observations and reflections that these studies seek to demonstrate (Rosenberg, 2019). Whether in Europe or in other geographical contexts, what strikes you are the ways in which forensic genetics operates as a "fortification" mechanism, as Noah Tamarkin (2019) calls it in his study of the uses of forensic genetics in criminal justice in South Africa. In the words of the author:

As a security infrastructure, national criminal DNA databases contribute to the fantasy of the impenetrability of the built form. Through its association with safety and security, DNA has been rebranded in post-apartheid South Africa from an association with extraction for the benefit of researchers to the means to ascertain the truth, which can then facilitate justice.

(Tamarkin, 2019, 4–5)

One of the possible questions to figure out the ways in which racialisation processes of surveillance supported by technical-scientific and digital means that contain massive amounts of DNA records of suspects and convicts operates is to understand what rationalities guide decisions about who should remain in these databases. These decisions have profound ethical and social implications, and are anything but neutral (Machado e Silva, 2014).

Continuities of coloniality: racial surveillance and postcolonial others

Elizabeth Buettner, historian and scholar of the colonial and imperial experience of European empires, portrays, in a text, the postcolonial condition of populations that mobilise and are forced to do so by the various processes of decolonisation, highlighting two striking features of European postcolonialism in her reading: initially, post-imperial European nations sought to

integrate their colonial subjects through an economic criterion. However, at a later stage, this integration was essentially defined by an attempt at integration dressed up as acceptance, which for many of those who arrived in the former colonising mother countries resulted in a twofold and mutual alienation: either on the part of the host societies that did not recognise these Others as “theirs” or on the part of those who did not see themselves in, let alone identify with, the cultural, social and historical languages intrinsic to the nations that colonised them. Transporting this assumption to concrete situations, the historian highlights the following: “[A]lthough European countries have benefited extraordinarily from migrant labour of colonial origin, inclusive citizenship policies have been replaced by measures that reinforce exclusion after decolonisation has taken place” (Buettner, 2020, 42).

Studies on the life and identity narratives of populations arriving from former Portuguese, Dutch, French, Italian (Ballinger, 2017, 2020) and British colonies (Burrell et al., 2019; Da Costa and Da Costa, 2019; De Noronha, 2019) demonstrate the absence of cultural empathy, complicity and homogeneity between the social groups that the colonial and imperial experience has created and which, ironically, does not recognise it as being part of a larger and more inclusive history because of its geopolitical and temporal scale and geographical framework. As Buettner observed in her analysis of the persistence of colonial imagery after the various processes of decolonisation, on the one hand, and of immigration and postcolonial movements, on the other, the matrix of Western modernity and its logic of coloniality have endured far beyond the collapse of empires, sustaining, in the post-imperial European space, both the survival of the old provisions of colonial vocabulary and the complicity with the old grammar of racialisation, racial surveillance and of the continuous production of the “Other,” as well as the rearranging (Santos, 2007) of the abyssal and border lines between postcolonial and postcolonialised populations.

The pressing question now is how do studies of population genetics databases provide the context for a debate more suited to understanding these continuities of the past?

The processes of racial criminalisation, racial surveillance and social control are still being held hostage, despite a certain attempt at scientific rationality, of the social and cultural imagery that intervenes with and conditions the analysis and reading of the population’s genetics databases (Parmar, 2017). It is in no way out of place or far-fetched to assume that criminalisation, as well as racial surveillance, are much more a mental and cultural consequence of prejudices and stereotypes, which the history and memory of countries with colonialist experiences are unable to eradicate and expel from perceptions about Other. Studies on the relationship between genetics and history point to a sense of divergence, showing how the ghost of the history of human experience represents a restraint and reserve for the practice of interdisciplinarity: “[I]f historians are expected to study

genetics and geneticists are expected to study history, well this is too much to ask” (Egorova, 2010, 360). However, the exercise of this interdisciplinarity is urgent, for a closer examination of how historical density can represent a problem of analytical castration of the “Other.”

Without making our argument in-depth, it should be said that the colonial that returns is accompanied by its logic of coloniality; not as a colonial master, a slaver, a colonial foreman, but presented under other guises, languages, devices and tools within the framework of a postcolonial, democratic and cosmopolitan geopolitical imagery that Europe sells itself, its citizens and its own presence and attitude *vis-à-vis* the new global and post-imperial world. It, therefore, becomes imperative to reactivate old forms and devices to reinforce and redefine them under other matrices and rules so as to make the logics of control, surveillance and domination of postcolonial populations legitimate, valid and well-founded. Accordingly, it is not spurious to argue that the security and racialisation rules of the Other from the colonial past have remained in a present of European postcoloniality (Balibar, 2004; El-Enany, 2020). The new human lexicon will be much more astute, sinuous and subtle, because the dividing line will be made between the recognition of those who are worthy of citizenship, identity and memory and those who will be denied, questioned on and challenged about the merit of being granted citizenship, an identity and a narrative (Marfleet, 2007; Gatrell, 2016; Stone, 2018). Mignolo and Tlostanova reinforced this reality in their studies by stressing:

‘Borders’ will be in the twenty-first century what ‘frontiers’ were in the nineteenth. Frontiers were conceived as the line indicating the last point in the relentless march of civilization. One the one side of the frontiers was civilization; on the other, nothing; just barbarism or emptiness.
(2006, 205)

In the space of the postcolonial scenario these frontiers are impossible and unthinkable. However, the role of the limit – “border” – of restriction, of marginalisation, is feasible and efficient through the ideological, legal and social justification that sustains the construction of these same limits of mobility, location and social interaction, forever under the influence of a perspective historically marked by the colonial and colonising experience. Therefore:

‘borders’ are not only geographic but also political, subjective (e.g. cultural) and epistemic and, contrary to frontiers, the very concept of ‘border’ implies the existence of people, languages, religions and knowledge on both sides linked through relations established by the coloniality of power (e.g. structured by imperial and colonial differences).
(Mignolo and Tlostanova, 2006, 208)

At the heart of this line of analysis, the serious uses of history are undeniably important, on the one hand, for us to understand the strengthening and refinement of racial criminalisation and security measures on certain social groups (Phillips et al., 2019). And, on the other hand, to understand how the protocols activated with regard to racial criminalisation, racial surveillance and social control over certain social groups reflect, through political, cultural and scientific complicity, the legacy of the coloniality logic through new instruments and devices. But also, therefore, through discourses in which issues such as citizenship and genetics are played out in an arena of technological power, historical manipulation and political rhetoric, which relentlessly legitimise and sustain physical and social “frontiers” and “walls” in the human geography of the global world.

The geopolitics of DNA are concealed by the neutrality of science in its function of reproducing and legitimising social inequalities, which easily tend to be explained as biological and natural differences. Recent developments in DNA technologies that allow you to deduce physical appearance through genetic material, and to discern markers of biogeographical ancestry, weave a complex and ambiguous web of relationships between institutional mechanisms of control, surveillance and categorisation of criminalised populations (Amelung, 2021; Queirós, 2021). There are, thus, risks of the re-emergence of biological and genetic ideas of ethnicity and race with regard to the manifestation of criminality (Duster, 2003), underpinned by deterministic nomological modes. In this context, the epistemic authority on genetics tends to see social and political differences as biological differences, while at the same time constricting or limiting human rights such as freedom, privacy, informational self-determination, non-discrimination on the basis of genetic information, presumption of innocence and equality.

The human body has always been used to morally and politically classify individuals, groups and populations – by skin colour, gender, physical appearance and body language. What is new about DNA is that it enables a method of human identification that radically reduces the possibilities of negotiation and resistance. On the one hand, it represents the promise of a greater degree of certainty and reliability with respect to other forms of identification. On the other hand, DNA technology fits, thanks to its portability and expressiveness in digital and numerical language, into today’s contexts of massive expansion of information databases and new technology surveillance networks. DNA, thus, conveys a form of technological control based on the knowledge of biological individuality and the overlapping of suspicion and cultures of objectivity, with profound implications for the reinforcement of discriminatory rationales and of marginalisation and surveillance of certain social groups in the light of the tension of the colonial past in postcolonial European time and space.

Conclusion

The concept of postcolonial racial surveillance through forensic genetics involves thinking about biopolitical power practices, which connect science with the imposition of state power in their webs of social classification and discriminatory exclusion. The social and political processes associated with postcolonial racial surveillance devices symbolically project relationships between genetic identification, prediction and corporeality. They are based on rhetoric celebrating the efficiency and infallibility of science and technology, which, on the one hand, reduce the space for dissonant and critical voices, while on the other, do not materialise values and ideologies of the dominant social order.

More than a review of the elusive and liquid nature of race, the logic of coloniality and the survival of its legacy are only fully scrutinised when we understand, on the one hand, the infinite energy that underlies the history of human experience in the world, and, on the other, the mechanisms, devices and tools that obey this logic. Accordingly, bringing together postcolonial migratory movements and studies of the population genetic databases of colonialist and imperialist historicity allows us to understand, reach and look into the engineering of a new coloniality of control, surveillance and racialisation of the postcolonial Other. This physical, bodily, racial, cultural and symbolic proximity determines many of the divisions within a whole geopolitical symbology and imagery of progress, civilisation and development that have structured the creation and sustenance of the narrative of Western modernity from its outset.

A decolonising look at the social and historically moulded processes that underlie the racialisation of the surveillance of populations considered suspicious entails a critical attitude, aware of the need to operate in two ways: Firstly, moving beyond a Eurocentric perspective or one focused on the US model, which tarnishes social sciences literature on the ethical and political implications of forensic genetics (Wienroth, Morling and Williams, 2014). This step means historically understanding and learning from the peripheries, from an awareness of the geopolitical relationships that shape our theoretical and methodological approach (Mignolo, 2000). Secondly, it is important to reclaim reparation practices (Hall, 2018), in the future, for the injustices of the past. We have proposed, in this text, the concept of postcolonial racial surveillance as a way of working towards epistemic justice, reflecting on the implications of a “body-politic of knowledge” with no claim to neutrality or objectivity. Finally, aware of the noises of the times, this text is written as a means to address the social, political and ethical implications of forensic genetics, which, from our point of view, should think about alternative ways of building ethical rationalities and forming utopias. This ecology of new rationalities and utopias will necessarily involve revealing the logics that survive and transcend both Western modernity and the mechanisms that sustain and legitimise it in the space and time of European postcolonial contemporaneity.

Notes

- 1 The work of Ruah Benjamin is in full agreement with the authors' analytical intervention when she expounds on this public and political interference with regard to the reading and production of a historicising sense of genetic databases, as follows:

[I]n the context of national genomics initiatives the work of calibrating scientific and socio-political classifications is not haphazard conflation, but a deliberate interpretation of genomic data to match the socio-historical record and a re-imagining of historical and cultural narratives to make sense of genomics findings.

(Ruah, 2009, 342)

- 2 In his ethnographic work on the Lemba in South Africa, Noah Tamarkin demonstrates how genetic references allow cultural links to be revealed between cultural groups and minorities – and, in particular, Blacks and Jews – and how awareness of this genetic complicity promotes a perception of a genetic diaspora in so-called Black Jews. This merging that genetics support, promotes a transnational and cultural sense in the assessment that Black Jews build for themselves:

This was genetic diaspora in its Lemba institutional emergence: as Raulinga explained to me, people do not become Lembas by circumcision, language, religion, or by their place of residence. People become Lembas by blood, which for him slipped easily into DNA. He explained: “DNA will show you who you are. That is blood. At least 50% of the Lemba genes are of Jewish blood. [...] We had the test. We are one. The Jews have said openly color is not the issue, it is the blood.” His message was clear: we shared the same blood, the same DNA, and therefore regardless of ritual, linguistic, religious, geographic, or phenotype differences, we were one.

(2014, 560–561)

- 3 It is appropriate here to make a brief note of what some authors define as nativism:

[T]he main (not the only one) differentiation at work in the nativist problem is culture, juxtaposing what counts as authentically national with what is perceived as culturally alien (not belonging to the nation) to such a degree that it comes to be seen as a problem and even a threat.

(Kešić and Duyvendak, 2019, 444; see also Rogers Brubaker, ‘Between nationalism and civilizationism: the European populist moment in comparative perspective,’ *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 40, no. 8, 2017, 1191–226)

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