

Religion without Redemption

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Social Contradictions and
Awakened Dreams in Latin America

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1

Civilising Paradigms and Colonial Atavisms: Power and Social Sciences

The sixteenth century shaped not only the identity of what would later become Latin America but also laid the basis for the emergence of the capitalist world-system (Wallerstein, 1999), the emergence of the coloniality of power (Quijano, 2000) and the advent of modernity (Dussel, 1994). These events profoundly influenced the endogenous and exogenous dynamics of different societies and human groups. In the late fifteenth century, and at the dawn of the sixteenth century, such transcendental phenomena were generated in everyday life around the world (*Lebenswelt*). The year 1492 represents a foundational moment in the collective imaginary of modern Western subjectivity, as it involved not only the concealment of the Other but also the pragmatic and specific denial of what is considered to be different (Dussel, 1994). Capitalism, modernity and coloniality arise simultaneously. The analysis – diachronic or synchronic – of the socio-historical form¹ of one of these phenomena should not unravel the study of the civilisation triad. Coloniality, modernity and capitalism are intertwined phenomena that have shaped different relations of domination; various control mechanisms and multiple patterns of exploitation in favour of elite interests.

Throughout Latin American history, the phenomenon of colonialism has shown similar characteristics (domination, racism, humiliation, imposition and violence) with different paradigmatic nuances (Hispanisation, Eurocentrism, the American Way of Life). In this sense, we could say that colonialism is a geopolitically determined socio-historical form. The process of coloniality disrupts all levels of social reality, that is, its teleological dynamics can be seen in the field of culture, epistemology, politics, religion, education, etc.² Therefore, the

phenomenon of colonialism is embedded in various projects undertaken by the hegemonic dominant classes. The commodification of social life and the fetishisation of power need to be studied from a critical, negative outlook, since reality must be conceived as perpetual motion, constant disruptions and continuous explosions. Understanding (*Verstehen*) and explaining (*Erklären*)³ society implies recognising its conflicting and contradictory nature.

From the epistemic colonial difference⁴ – which is where we stand – we will analyse critically the horizons of civilising paradigms in Latin America. It is necessary to insist, however, first, that this work focuses on the process of neo-colonialism in Latin America. In this sense, we will not develop a historiographical argument but a socio-historical deconstruction of the colonial/modern/capitalist form. Second, it is evident that social relations are not homogeneous, much less static. We can, however, identify some common features (domination, resistance, struggle, conflict, etc.) that characterise Latin American societies⁵ as colonised societies. Finally, we argue that it is not reality that must conform to the theories, concepts or categories. On the contrary, the analytical tools used to perform critical analysis of the specific social form need to be appropriate.

Ego Conquiro and Modern Subjectivity

The year 1492 is significant in the formation of modern Western subjectivity since it marks the founding moment for what would evolve into its concrete symbolic conscience. On 6 January of that year, Boabdil (Muhammad XII) surrendered in Granada. On 15 February, Torquemada announced his project to commence the expulsion of the Jews from the peninsula. On 17 April, there was the signing of the Santa Fe Accords and on 31 July, the Jews began to leave Castile and Aragon by decree. On 12 October of that same year, there was an ‘encounter’ between two worlds that had previously been disconnected commercially and ideologically. It was against this backdrop, and from the socio-political and cultural upheaval of the Iberian world, that there arose myths of an inquisitorial, prophetic and apocalyptic modernity.

The ‘discovery’ of America is a myth constructed by a European narrative. The legend of the three ships,⁶ which sailed from the Canary Islands on 8 September 1492 led by one Genovese man, serves as an ideological substratum of a Western historiographical narrative. To affirm

that Europeans were the first to reach the 'New World' only helps to consolidate what has been termed 'one unique view of history' (Benjamin, 1969). By this, with Walter Benjamin (2001), we are referring to an idea that stands alone in history, isolated from events unfolding around it; an event that is a representation of the past constructed by the dominant groups and classes of the time. The 'discovery' of America by Europeans was little more than recognition of cartographies that had already been drawn up. Enrique Dussel (1994) noted that the world map of Heinrich Hammer (also known as Henricus Martellus) had similarly revealed the presence of our continent as early as 1489.

Pomeranz (2004), Mignolo (2003) and Dussel (2004) have brought to the fore a number of political, economic and social factors that shaped Columbus' adventure. It is worthy of note that, at the time, the *mare nostrum* was not known as the commercial 'centre' of the 'inter-regional market'; at the time, the leading centre of trade was located between the East China Sea and the Bay of Bengal. Importantly, Europe needed China and, as Walter Mignolo (2001: 22) pointed out: 'the Atlantic route emerges as a possibility following the Ottoman blockade of the route from China and India'. The role of China is critical to understanding Columbus and the formation of the world-system. Menzies (2003) and Dussel (2004) discuss how, in the first half of the fifteenth century, the Chinese had circum-navigated the planet. However, China abandoned its maritime domain in 1424 following a decision taken by the Ming emperors (1368–1644). This undoubtedly led to a vacuum of power and the growth of commercial shipping in the 'market-world', a fact that later benefited Europe in its endeavours. The measure taken by the empire excluded any possibility of China monopolising the Atlantic.

China was the 'centre' of the Euro-Afro-Asian market, and its technological, economic and military supremacy ensured that it was exempt from the need to reach across the sea; unlike the case in Europe.⁷ It was a simple commercial imperative for the Europeans to find a path to the East and, by relentlessly pursuing trade routes, European sailors inevitably came across a different continent, making the Atlantic theirs.

Walter Mignolo (2001) argues that the emergence of the Atlantic circuit in the sixteenth century had, among other things, two main consequences. It connected the trade circuit of Anahuac with that of Tawantinsuyu and, at the same time, connected them to the Western world market. The outcome was thus the genesis of a world-system. For Wallerstein (1999), the world-system was borne out of the sixteenth century with its inter-

connecting world markets. The transatlantic perspective presented by Wallerstein is crucial to understanding the emergence of capitalism – and its dynamics – on a global scale. Seized by Spain and Portugal, hegemony over the Atlantic bestowed resources (such as labour and metal) upon Europe, contributing to the *rise of the West*. Yet, contrary to Wallerstein (1991), Dussel (2004) argues that hegemony over the Atlantic did not imply the centrality of Europe in the world-system, instead maintaining that it was not until the British Industrial Revolution in the eighteenth century that this would come to fruition.

The emergence of the Atlantic route was fundamental to the origin of the world-system as it synchronised world markets that were previously disconnected. The genesis of the world-system was simultaneously the advent of the first colonial panorama, which involved the subjection of Indigenous forced labour. In a sense, the world-system was built on a geopolitically determined ‘racial division of labour’ (Quijano, 2001). Hence, we now make reference to a modern/colonial world-system. Enrique Dussel (1993) maintains that modernity is intimately linked to colonisation processes in Latin America and the Caribbean. For him, modernity is not an exclusively intra-European phenomenon⁸ and constitutes a relation to an Otherness denied, that of the (*Cemanahuac*) Indigenous world.

Modern subjectivity was established by the Conquest of America, since Europe had no effective self-consciousness of superiority prior to 1492. Europe demonstrated an awareness of the economic, intellectual and political superiority of the Muslim, Chinese and Ottoman worlds. Modern subjectivity is marked by violence that the Spanish imposed upon Indigenous peoples. The statement ‘God is in heaven, the King is far away, I am in command’, is a significant reflection of the founding moment of the modern Western ego. The *ego conquiro* (I conquer) precedes *ego cogito* (I think) (Dussel, 2013) – by nearly a century (and proposed by Descartes in 1636), therefore making it a ‘critical’ moment in awareness of Western superiority as it is the first sign of Europe’s will for power. The *ratio* as an instrument of domination, exclusion and suppression comprised a new ontology after 1492.

For Enrique Dussel, modernity holds certain ambivalence, with elements constantly in tension. While one is linked to the process of emancipation, that is, escaping the state of human immaturity, the other refers to the justification of an irrational praxis of violence.⁹ In this sense, the libertarian core *ratio* is accompanied by a constant drive towards the

immolation of a different Otherness. From its birth, modernity perpetuated a constitutive ritual sacrifice to build the modern Western subjectivity. It is a liturgy that has been repeated over the past five centuries and one that has had immeasurable victims. Reason, progress and development stand as the pillars of colonial *logos*, with the messianic figure of modernity concealing the predator's cruel and bloody face.

The crimes carried out by the *ego conquiro* of modern Western subjectivity should not be omitted in one single act of liberating deconstruction, as this would only strengthen the impunity of existing historico-cultural colonial discourses. Epistemic vigilance – to use a term employed by Bourdieu (2002b) – may not, in fact, be separated from memory; that is, beyond the pipe dream of 'axiological neutrality', we must recognise those interests involved in the configuration of social spaces across time.

Coloniality of Power and the World-System

Immanuel Wallerstein coined the term *modern world-system* in order to depict the formation and composition of capitalist dynamics globally. Employing a transatlantic perspective, and influenced naturally by dependency theory, Wallerstein developed original analytic categories which allowed him to understand-explain the logic of capital.

Wallerstein maintains that, from its origins in the sixteenth century, the world-system produced structural inequalities among trading regions, starting with the extraction of resources in the Americas, allowing for the establishment and growth of unequal relations. In this sense, Latin America constituted Europe's first periphery. We should bear in mind, nevertheless, that the centrality of Europe in the world-system does not congeal until the eighteenth century (Dussel, 2004).

For Latin America and the Caribbean, the emergence of the modern world-system marked the advent of the first colonial horizons. Portuguese-Spanish domination created the conditions for what Aníbal Quijano describes as the *coloniality of power*. In fact, world-system and coloniality of power are collaterally synchronic. The pattern of domination between the colonisers and the colonised was organised on the principle of 'race'.¹⁰ The practical consequences of the categorisations were not only the dispossession of peoples from their lands but also the dispossession of identities, that is, Aztecas, Incas, Mayas, Araucanos, Aymaras and so on became Indians. The coloniality of power ran parallel to the establishment

of a new cognitive pattern. The evangelisation of Indigenous peoples resulted not only in the penetration of their imaginary ethical-mythical core but also the reconfiguration of their epistemologies.

To this Aníbal Quijano (2000) adds that: 'America, modernity and capitalism were all born on the same day.' This reiterates that the imposition of the first colonial panorama is coeval with the formation of sixteenth-century Spanish America. The emergence of historical capitalism, therefore, cannot be divorced from the colonial spectre of Latin America and the explosions of constellations which imply ruptures of power.

The idea of race, Quijano (1998) tells us, had been formed during the wars of 'Reconquest' on the Iberian peninsula, given that in those wars the Christians of the Counter-Reformation amalgamated in their perception religious differences with those of phenotypes. How else does one explain the requiring of Certificates of Blood Purity, which the victors established for the Muslims and Jews? The concept of race was born with America, modernity and the (modern) world-system, and appears as the centrepiece of social and cultural relations founded upon biological differences.

With the creation of racial classifications came the practices of social domination, control and socio-ethnic exploitation. The fateful conditions of labour and slavery exterminated the Indigenous peoples of the Caribbean¹¹ almost entirely and undermined considerably the native populations of the continent. For this reason, the Crown of Castile decided to move from slavery to servitude, as its most prized possession – the Indigenous workforce – were in danger of extinction. The Spaniards invented new forms of forced labour, like the *encomienda*, which became a mode of production within capitalism.¹² In fact, 'from this mode a systematic racial division of labour was imposed' (Quijano, 2000: 204).

The racial organisation of labour was being articulated in the dynamics of capital. The rate of Indigenous mortality brought the Europeans to import a workforce through the slave trade.¹³ The workforce (of Indigenous and Black populations), objectified in the products that were exported to European markets, and therefore inscribed into world-system logic, did not earn salaries. Nevertheless, it is known that the Spaniards and Portuguese (the dominant races) were the judges of that right, and the racially differentiated social pyramid was born.

The coloniality of power, as a pattern of domination-exploitation, was configured upon a racial organisation of labour. In this sense, starting from the sixteenth century, race/labour founded not only asymmetric but also

somatically differentiated social relations.¹⁴ According to Katzew (2004), the depictions of castes are particularly exemplary, as these participate in the construction of racial identities linked to social stratification through visual representation. For Katzew, the paintings of castes suggest a basic principle: White or Spanish blood implied a degree of civilisation, while Black blood expressed backwardness and depravity. It is important to keep these notations in mind, as they are still part-and-parcel of the Latin American imaginary.

The world-system and the coloniality of power are coeval in the formation of modern subjectivity, given that its hegemonic *logos* is mediated by social relations of control, domination and exploitation. The coloniality of power, as a critical concept, considers historic-structural dependency and the specific characteristics of Latin America. The uniqueness of original peoples was violently subjected to Western absolute¹⁵ universality. Throughout this process of identification and classification, Indigenous people never ceased to struggle¹⁶ and resistance to colonialism certainly remained constant. Nevertheless, since the Conquest of the Americas, a new power relationship has been implemented, not only socially but at an epistemic level as well.

Edgardo Lander (2000) points out that it was through the separations or partitioning of reality that Western epistemology came into being. The rupture between subject and object is correlated to the Hellenic-Christian¹⁷ separation between God, man and nature. In this sense, the colonisers-evangelisers shared a knowledge based on the estrangement between the body and soul, implying a subalternisation of knowledge. At the same time, the coloniality of power involved the ‘coloniality of knowing’.

The teleological dynamic of the coloniality of power and knowledge gave birth to the coloniality of doing in Latin American and Caribbean society.¹⁸ With the coloniality of doing, we refer to the colonial discursive practices, naturalised above all by the *mestizo* population in a symbolic-cultural context. If race/work/gender (Quijano, 2001) articulate the concept of the coloniality of power, then it is the habitus of the imaginary and double consciousness which configures the ‘coloniality of doing’.

The coloniality of doing permits us to distinguish aesthetic, linguistic, symbolic and cultural practices. Undoubtedly, social relations imply struggle, tensions and ruptures. The coloniality of doing, however, recognises the continuities of the structures of domination. The link between culture and power could be revealed through this analytical tool.

Eduard Glissant (1997) uses the term ‘imaginary’ to refer to the symbolic construction through which a community defines itself. For this Antillean thinker, the word does not connote a mental image, much less a technical form where the imaginary is part of a differentiation structure between the Symbolic and the Real. The imaginary is not only constituted in and through colonial power, rather it is also made by ruptures and responses of communities, groups and classes that the colonial discourse uses in its own description (Mignolo, 2000).

As of the sixteenth century, we witness a struggle of imaginaries (colonisers and the colonised) in constant transformation. The conquerors tried to impose their imaginary through religion, to later inculcate their own values, *Weltanschauung*, culture and morals. It is fundamental to understand that the imaginary, like reality, is not a static, neutral and immobile process; on the contrary it is dynamic and in constant tension.

On the other hand, the concept of double consciousness was formulated by the sociologist W.E.B. Du Bois (1990) to characterise the dilemma of subjectivities forged in the colonial reality; that is to say, amid the processes experienced in the daily lives (*Lebenswelt*) of the subaltern. If Du Bois used this notion to explain the uniqueness of the Afro-American experience, as a subaltern group, then for our part we can incorporate it into the comprehension-explanation of the processes of subjection of the *criollos* or *mestizos* of Latin American and Caribbean societies.

Walter Mignolo (2000) is convinced that the principle of double consciousness characterises the imaginary of the modern colonial world from the margins of the empires. For him, the emergence of the ‘Western hemisphere’ marked the insertion of the *criollos* of European descent into the colonial imaginary. Mignolo (2000: 68) makes a distinction between the White *criollos* and the Black *criollos*, given that the latter: ‘were not the conscious heirs of the colonisers and emigrants, rather, they were the heirs of slavery’. The White *criollo* double consciousness would become concretely distinguished from the *mestizo* double consciousness, given that the racial divide continues to be of the utmost importance in the social relations of the colonial world. The White *criollo* will affirm his difference towards Europe in political and cultural terms, but never when it comes to phenotypes. Frantz Fanon (2004), for one, analysed the processes of subjection experienced by the colonised in the context of racial discrimination. In his work, *The wretched of the earth* (2004: 5), he describes the existential peculiarities of the colonial imaginary, where the somatic aspect is cardinal in the relations which are established, and

maintained that: 'The governing race is first and foremost those who come from elsewhere, those who are unlike the original inhabitants, "the Others".' The double consciousness of the *mestizo* would become central to the formation of a colonial *habitus*. The 'coloniality of doing' becomes evident in discursive practices, which imply preferences, tastes and determined antipathies.

The concept of *habitus* becomes essential in the analysis of domination, given that its value lies in exposing the effects of the system on the doing of the social being. While Bourdieu differentiates between the *habitus* of classes, we make the distinction of the colonial *habitus* of classes. Like all concepts, *habitus* should not substantiate itself. On the contrary, it should dialectically exhibit tensions, struggles and intrinsic contradictions in social relations; in this case, colonial relations.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, the *coloniality of doing* is configured by the *imaginary*, the *double consciousness* and *habitus*. Its specificity should be pronounced geopolitically, given that it is a dynamic process, and therefore heterogeneous and explosive. In the different experience of *habitus*, the coloniality of doing accentuates the symbolic and cultural features of social practices. The analysis of everyday life is transcendental in the research of historical social sciences, and for this reason the concept is indispensable for the studies of cultural and social processes of peripheral societies.

The formation of nation-states in Latin America reinforced the coloniality of doing and of knowing. The articulation of the world-system of the nation-states is linked to the process of social discipline undergone by the Latin American population. The reconfiguration of the coloniality of power, in the nineteenth century, influenced the way in which citizenship has been understood. Generally, it does not suffice to be a male (gender), you also had to be White (race), possess properties and distinguish oneself from Indigenous people.¹⁹ In this sense, Santiago Castro-Gómez recalls three disciplinary practices which contributed to forge the citizenship of the nineteenth century: constitutions, city ordinances and the grammar of language. According to him, writing was made into an instrument of subjection in the invention of negated Otherness. For Castro-Gómez (2000), the shaping of the citizen, as a 'legal subject' is possible only within the framework of disciplinary writing and, in this sense, within the space of legality defined by the constitution. Hence, the juridical-political function of the constitutions was, precisely, to invent citizenship

– to create a field of homogeneous identities that would make viable the modern project of governability.²⁰

The consolidation of the nation-state in Latin America was legitimised by the pipedream of an ineluctable journey towards modernity. The ‘state of nature’ is then transcended and the ‘political state’ is instituted via geopolitically determined apparatus or institutions. For this reason, political organisation – as with the constitutions – was established within the confines of Western parameters.

The nation-state and its corollary, citizenship, exercised a disciplining of doing upon groups and individuals. The logic of power was transfigured at the dawn of the nineteenth century, demonstrating that the relations of domination, as well as those of resistance, are not static, much less are they homogeneous.

The colonial paradigm was transfigured and moved to northern Europe (England, Germany and France). Such displacement is significant because it implicitly marginalised the role of Spain and Portugal in the narrative of modernity.²¹ In this sense, Europe not only established itself as the centre of the world-system but also began to fabricate an ideology that was imposed in the social imaginary.

From the nineteenth century onwards, Latin American societies suffered the influence of the new imperial powers (England, Germany and France), although this did not cause the fall of the Spanish and Portuguese stronghold. While power changed hands, the White *criollo* core preserved their privileges, as evidenced in the ideological debates between liberals and conservatives.

Just as, during the sixteenth century, Indigenous peoples had to convert to Christianity, the nineteenth-century residents had to become citizens. The coloniality of power was consolidated within the state apparatus, the coloniality of knowledge was strengthened with *Lumière* and *Aufklärung* and the coloniality of doing in the urban ordinances and in civil laws. The civilising mission demanded a refinement of autochthonous discursive practices; in this sense, good morality had to replace socialising forms of the vulgar.²² The train of progress had taken off and no force, neither in Heaven nor on Earth, could step in its path.

If the process of national independence implies a rupture with patterns of colonial domination, the political, economic and cultural liberation of Latin America has never been achieved. The umbilical cord of foreign dependency was never cut. The civilisational paradigm was simply transfigured. England, Germany and France (Dussel, 2013; Wallerstein,