Coloniality of Power

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Coloniality of power is a category associated with the Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano. Quijano uses this category to conceptualize a power matrix that constitutes the modern/colonial world based upon "racial" social classification of the world population, which has permitted the control and exploitation of the labor force, wealth, and territories throughout the planet for the sake of the emergence and consolidation of capitalism.

This pattern of power was articulated for the first time with the conquest of the Americas and continues to shape our present. For Quijano, there have been two fundamental axes of this pattern of power. First is the codification of differences with the idea of "race" that support a system whereby the colonized are placed in a situation of natural inferiority in relation to the colonizers. This classification was connected to the project of colonizing the Americas and became a model of global power. Second is the particular articulation of all historical structures of control of labor under the logic of capital accumulation and the world market (Quijano 2000a, 533–34).

In a well-known paper, Quijano argues:

> Coloniality is a constituent and a specific element of the pattern of capitalist power. It is based on the imposition of a racial/ethnic classification on the world's population as a cornerstone of the pattern of power and operates in each of the planes, spheres and dimensions, material and subjective, of everyday social existence and societal level. (2000b, 342)

Thus, coloniality of power operates from the racialization of relations across social and geocultural identities. This racialization legitimized the Euro-centered character of the pattern of world power, thereby naturalizing relations of domination. With an emphasis on historical–structural heterogeneity, Quijano suggests the analysis of power as a net of social relations (of exploitation, domination, and conflict) that are articulated in the struggle for five spheres of social existence:

> (1) Labor and its products; (2) dependent on the former, "nature" and its productive resources; (3) sex, its products, and the reproduction of the species; (4) Subjectivity and its products, material and intersubjective, including knowledge; (5) authority and its instruments, particularly those of coercion, to secure the reproduction of this pattern of social relations and the regulation of its changes. (Quijano 2000b, 345)

Following Quijano's insights, Ramón Grosfoguel proposes that "we could conceptualize the present world-system as a historical-structural heterogeneous totality with a specific power matrix that he [Quijano] calls a 'colonial power matrix'. This matrix

affects all dimensions of social existence such as sexuality, authority, subjectivity and labor" (2007, 217).

Coloniality of power has been the cornerstone in the configuration of a group of authors who have developed a particular perspective called modernity/coloniality. Primarily elaborated by Latin American intellectuals (some of them with an established academic presence in the United States), the modernity/coloniality group has become a referent that seeks to transform the terms and contents of the dominant debates regarding how modernity and its effects have usually been understood. Its aim is to decolonize various dimensions of our present existence that have been deeply shaped by coloniality. This collective of authors has developed a set of concepts to allow a radical decentering of modernity from the perspective of colonial difference.

The modernity/coloniality group elaborates a radical critique of the salvationist and celebratory rhetoric regarding modernity so pervasive in dominant academic and political imaginaries. For the authors in this group, this rhetoric of emancipation is only the visible and celebratory side of modernity; it usually hides the historical fact that modernity also supposes a constitutive dark side closely related to violence, exploitation, and domination (Mignolo 2007).

As Aimé Césaire ([1955] 2000) argues, modern Western civilization cannot be separated from the colonial violence upon which it has been built. The salvationist and civilizational rhetoric with which modernity has been predominantly conceived disavows the practices of violence and oppression that, in the name of modernity, have been imposed on the peoples and places of the non-European world, in addition to European populations. Beyond the violence and oppression, modernity is not only fundamentally based on the colonial domination of vast territories, the appropriation of their wealth, and the exploitation of their labor force; it is also only thinkable because of its constitutive exteriority: coloniality.

In this sense, coloniality is not conceptualized as a historical contingency that can be overcome by modernity, or as its unfortunate deviation (Escobar 2007). On the contrary, coloniality is immanent to modernity; articulated as an exteriority, it is constitutive of modernity. "This notion of exteriority does not entail an ontological outside; it refers to an outside that is precisely constituted as difference by the hegemonic discourse" (Escobar 2007, 186). Hence, the conditions of emergence, existence, and transformation of modernity are connected to those of coloniality as its constitutive exteriority. Coloniality operates, therefore, as the dark side of modernity. Given that there is no modernity without coloniality, the two proponents of this perspective refer to modernity/coloniality (connected by the slash). This slash precisely indicates the relationship of mutual constitution between the two terms, as well as a hierarchy between them.

"Colonial difference" refers to the places and beings that are located as the constitutive exteriority of modernity. These places and beings have been produced as inferiors of modernity, as nonplaces and nonbeings of modernity (Escobar 2007, 61). As such, colonial difference is as much a historical experience as a locus of enunciation.

It is important, from this analytical perspective, to avoid confusing colonialism (a form of political and administrative domination with a corresponding set of institutions) with coloniality (which refers to a more comprehensive and profound pattern of global power) (Grosfoguel 2002). Colonialism has been one of the historical experiences

constitutive of coloniality, but the latter is not reducible to colonialism; rather, it includes other experiences and articulations that operate within our present. While colonialism refers to a situation of submission of places and people colonized by an administrative and military metropolitan apparatus (which across most of the planet has disappeared as such), coloniality consists of the global articulation of the Western domination predicated on a naturalized inferiorization of places, human beings, knowledges, and subjectivities, coupled with natural resource extraction and the exploitation of the labor force under the logic of the expanding reproduction of capital (Quijano 2000b).

This planetary articulation of Western domination is the historical legacy of colonialism, and operates through contemporary civilizational apparatuses, such as the discourses and technologies of development or globalization. It includes both ontological dimensions (coloniality of being) and epistemic ones (coloniality of knowledge) that have supported diverse modalities of Eurocentrism (Mignolo 2002).

"Coloniality of being" refers to the ontological dimension of the coloniality of power—that is, the lived experience of the modern/colonial world system in which determined populations are rendered inferior, partially or fully less than human, while others are presented as the expression of humanity (Maldonado-Torres 2004). These effects traverse the ontological constitution (the being in the world), both for those who find themselves on the side of colonial difference and those who are situated on the side of imperial difference. This elaboration is underpinned by Frantz Fanon's notion of the "specter of non-being," which inscribes the "wretched of the earth" with negativity, lack, and failure. The coloniality of being not only affects those who are cast as inferior and dehumanized but also those who imagine themselves as superior and as embodying the paradigm of humanity (with their racialized articulations). Most recently, from a feminist perspective, the work of María Lugones (2010) complements the category of coloniality of power by taking into account the ways in which race, sex, and gender underlie coloniality.

The category of "coloniality of knowledge" refers to the epistemic dimension of the coloniality of power. The coloniality of knowledge is constituted by a pattern of global classification and hierarchization of knowledge, where some forms of knowledge appear as authentic and relevant while other forms of knowing are expropriated, made to seem inferior, and silenced to the point that they cease to be knowledge and appear instead as ignorance or superstitions. These knowledges are classified according to the theological paradigm first and the scientific one later, rejecting those modalities of knowing that escape the legibility and appropriation of these paradigms. This classification implies not only the equation of true knowledge and European Western knowledge, as presented in its religious, philosophical, and scientific systems, but also the rendering of other forms of knowing of "others" as inferior, or the full erasure of these forms altogether.

The coloniality of knowledge refers to the effect of the subalternization, folklorization, or invisibilization of a multiplicity of knowledges that do not respond to the modalities of production of 'Western thought" associated with conventional science and expert discourses. The coloniality of knowledge supposes, therefore, a kind of "epistemic arrogance" whereby those who imagine themselves to be modern and consider themselves the owners of the most adequate (or only) means for accessing

truth (be it theological or secular) thereby suppose that they can manipulate the natural or social world according to their own interests. Other forms of knowledge, generally associated with non-European populations, are dismissed as ignorant, disparaged, thought of as inferior, or, at certain times, appropriated by European apparatuses of production of theology, philosophy, or science (Walsh 2007).

The modernity/colonialitiy group has also problematized the most conventional and widespread analyses regarding modernity, which have assumed that modernity emerged in Europe, from where it diffused with varying degrees of success to various corners of the world. The model of modernity depicts it as emerging in Europe first, followed by the rest of the world later (Chakrabarty 2000). Countering this widespread assumption, the authors of the modernity/coloniality group argue that Europe must be understood from a world-system perspective from where Europe itself is the result of this geopolitical system, including technologies of governmentality and discursive formations that produce it as such (Grosfoguel 2007). This conceptualization decenters conceptions that have a strong hold within common sense, constituting a blind spot for many prominent philosophers and theorists of modernity.

The majority of accounts of modernity have located its origins around the seventeenth to eighteenth centuries, associated with very well-known processes such as the Enlightenment, the Reformation, and the Industrial Revolution, mostly referring to France, Germany, and England, respectively. In contrast, following the works of the Latin American philosopher Enrique Dussel, who distinguishes between a first and second modernity, from the modernity/coloniality group there is an attempt to rewrite the most conventional accounts of modernity.

This group claims that modernity began before it is commonly assumed. The first modernity articulated with the emergence of the world system, while the second is associated primarily with the Industrial Revolution and the Enlightenment, in the eighteenth century (Dussel 2002). The first modernity not only preceded the second but also constituted its condition of possibility. Before the enunciation of the Cartesian *ego cogito* (I think, therefore I am), there is the *ego conquiro* (I conquer, therefore I am). This "conquistador ego," this *ego conquiro*, forms a central pillar for Dussel's argument on the emergence of modernity. The derived subjectivity of the experience of the discoverer and *conquistador* is the first modern subjectivity, which then locates Europeans as the center and end of history.

In addition, the authors of this group claim that modernity should not be thought of as a purely European invention; on the contrary, Europe, along with the colonies, is a product of modernity. In other words, Europe is not an entity already constituted and whose agency produced itself by modernity; rather, it is the same historical processes that produce modernity and Europe. Therefore, what happens in one specific place (say, the possibility of a "free" labor force for the industrial worker in England) is not explained exclusively by local factors but rather by its placement and role in the modern/colonial world system. This is exemplified by the 1938 book *The Black Jacobins*, in which C. L. R. James shows how the French Revolution was closely connected to the Haitian Revolution. As this revolution was taking place, the powers of the age (Spain and England) focused on battling the until-then-rich French colony rather than directing their military forces against the nascent revolution in France. In this sense, the Haitian

Revolution was a nonevent for European thought, as argued by authors such as Susan Buck-Morss (2009) and Michel-Rolph Trouillot (1995).

In addition, the modernity/coloniality group has insisted on the "geopolitics of knowledge"—a perspective that argues for the situationality of knowledge, not just in its production but in its circulation and appropriation as well. From the perspective of the geopolitics of knowledge, the existence of a de-subjectivized, disembodied knowledge is just an illusion produced by the most dominant Eurocentric epistemology. Knowledge is always anchored in and embodied by the subjects that produce it, independent of their reflexive capacity to understand and map these imprints. The histories and trajectories of these subjects (which do not operate only in the mental register but are also embodied) inscribe in the most diverse forms not only the resulting knowledge but also the possibilities and impossibilities of the very ways of knowing.

In opposition to the discourse of modernity that has illusorily claimed that knowledge is disembodied and displaced, various authors from the modernity/coloniality group argue that knowledge is necessarily traversed by the specific locations that constitute the very conditions of existence and enunciation of the cognizant subject (Mignolo 2002, 18–19). The category of "locus of enunciation" refers to locations that are institutional (metropolitan/periphery, academic/nonacademic, government/nongovernmental establishments), social (racial, ethnicized, culturalized, sexual, generational, class, gender, etc.), and geohistoric (West/rest; civilization/barbarism–savagery; development/underdevelopment; national, regional, and local formations; etc.). This dense inscription implies that knowledge is always situated in multiple ways. The imprints of place, in its irreducible historicity, mean that the production of knowledge is something different from the idea of pure and universal knowledge.

Finally, with the notion of decoloniality, these authors highlight the political implications of this approach of modernity/coloniality. They usually refer to these implications as a decoloniality project, decolonial delink, or decolonial option. What is at stake with the concept of decoloniality is radical subvertion (not just a reaction), from the place of colonial difference, of the conditions that have subalternized countless knowledge, experiences, and ways of life worldwide. Decoloniality seeks, ultimately, the emergence of possible decolonized models of social life that would constitute not just another universality but a radical pluriversality: a world where many worlds fit.

SEE ALSO: Modernity; Race and Racisms; Postcoloniality; Power, Anthropological Approaches to; World-Systems Theory; Indigenous and Local Knowledge and Science: From Validation to Knowledge Coproduction; Postcolonialism

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ABSTRACT

Coloniality of power, a category elaborated by the Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano, refers to the pattern of global power that emerges with the modern world system, which is associated with racial classification and has permitted the control and exploitation of the labor force, wealth, and territories throughout the planet for the sake of the emergence and consolidation of capitalism. This category has been nodal for a group of authors, mostly from Latin America, to develop a set of categories and conceptualizations that radically problematize the most common assumptions about modernity. They argue that coloniality is the constitutive dark side of modernity. This entry examines this group's elaboration of the category of coloniality of power, particularly those that refer to the decentering of modernity when colonial difference is taken into account.

KEYWORDS