

## Coloniality and Democracy<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

The main objective of this article is to undertake a theoretical approximation between post-colonialism and democracy on the basis of the support provided by Theories of the South and Political Theory. Just as post-colonialism is still unable to underpin a post-colonial perspective of democracy, democratic theories are not yet able to support a democratic post-colonial perspective. On the underlying assumption that post-colonial, subaltern and decolonial studies have not been assimilated by political and democratic theories, this article argues that the coexistence of coloniality and democracy against the background of post-colonial societies, gives rise to a set of “missing” issues at the heart of the geopolitics of the “knowledge production theory.” In particular, it seeks to make the case that the condemnation of coloniality has serious implications that must be taken into account by democratic theory and practice when regarded as diffuse and unsatisfactory in the normative sphere of Contemporary Political Theory.

### Keywords

theories of the South; contemporary political theory; democratic theory; post-colonialism; coloniality.

### Introduction

From the middle of the 20th Century, decolonization in Africa and Asia, the so-called third wave of democratization, the end of the Cold War and the gathering forces of globalization, were all signs of the final decadence and obsolescence of *colonialism* and *imperialism*. Although the existence of *colonization* dates back to Ancient Greece and Rome (Ferro, 2011), it was only after the conquest of America that it was undertaken on a large scale and began to serve the interests of *capitalism* and *occidentalism* in a modern global venture. To be precise, the inclusion of the American continental bloc which inaugurated the modern/colonial system, was set in motion in 1492 (Dussel, 2000).

In the 16th Century the continent was baptised with the secular and feminine word “America”, and was added to the imaginary Christian cartography which had previously been confined to Asia (Sem), Africa (Cam) e Europe (Jafet) (Mignolo, 2003). The inclusion of the Asian, African, American and later Australian continents, in the history of colonial domination followed a different rationale of occupation, exploitation and destruction, both in parallel and different periods. In the 19th Century when the idea of “Latin America” became rooted in the midst of the independences and formation of new nation States, the disputes leading to the partition of Africa and Asia by European powers were thought of in terms of the classic debate about *imperialism*. In Latin America, however, what was witnessed was what Casanova (2002; 2006) called *internal colonialism*.

For many authors, thinking about colonialism and imperialism in the 21st Century is not a question of having anachronistic or paranoid memories about the third world. In different ways, the continuous intellectual property of both processes that characterize the past of colonized countries, provide a useful interpretation of the persistence of different degrees of global inequality in the present. An analysis of the lingering traces of colonial and imperial relations, together with their different contemporary forms of reproduction, can assist in understanding the complex levels and degrees of structural injustices in economic and cultural fields (Fraser, 2001).

From the 1990s onwards, the “boom” years of neo-liberal, hegemonic and post-modern theories of globalization, sought to celebrate the different “destinies” – of History, the State and the ideological left/right dichotomy. In the analysis of globalism and globalization, which postulated an inexorable trend towards the integration and interdependence of the Northern and Southern hemispheres, *colonialism* and *imperialism* belonged to a vocabulary that had been superseded by the rationale of worldwide governance and was apparently incompatible with it. The term ‘governance’ which was formulated in the first half of the 1990s under the auspices of the United Nations, unlike the notion of Government, became a political expedient with ‘horizontal’ and democratic pretensions that began to be used to justify and ensure the operational effectiveness of the contemporary international system. This scenario encountered theoretical resistance from the cosmopolitan neo-liberalism of David Held to the Marxist neo-Gramscianism of Robert Cox.

New names were given to old trends by a series of authors in the 21st Century, especially in States regarded as falling below the ideal ceiling set by Western development. These included the following: systems of humanitarian aid and intervention, the activities of multinational companies, the leading role played by international, private, unelected actors who lacked any *accountability*, the maintenance of fixed schedules in a supposedly global civil society and the qualitative-quantitative world classifications, as measured by the *rankings* of democracy, development, security and human rights. The classic historical formulations of colonialism and imperialism — the conquest of territory, exploitation of natural resources and indigenous or slave labor, geographical disputes and partitions, and the destruction of original local cultures — are all currently being reproduced in other guises, discourses, activities and strategies. This is being carried out to maintain and serve the same economic and political interests of the central countries, although led by different agencies, institutions and transnational players.

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Terms such as recolonization, global colonialism, transnational colonialism, the new multinational imperialism, occidentalism, eurocentrism, and empire, form a set of (re) formulations that seek to seize the different reproductive dynamics of the contemporary colonial and imperial logic in different spheres — political, economic and epistemological<sup>2</sup>. The list can be expanded by reviving some of the terms of the 1970s and 1980s, such as sub-imperialism, orientalism and post-colonialism. In the 21st Century, the notion of de-colonization has been revived although it is presumed to be an anachronism, and acquired a particular meaning as a confrontation between modernity and coloniality.

This article thus traverses a region in what today can generically be thought of as Theories of the South<sup>3</sup> (Connell, 2007), and is viewed from a perspective that does not produce the hierarchy of an inverted, non-Western essentialism. Thus the understanding of a wide-ranging set of theoretical ideas concerning the geopolitics of knowledge is put forward, despite the fact that this (a) does not ignore the critical openings provided by U.S. and European authors, when entering into dialogue; (b) at the same time, seeks to dispel the notion that “theory is the work that the Center carries out” (Connell, 2012: 9) and recognizes the value of marginalized and labelled theorizings such as social and political “thought”. It is thus evident that the epistemic disobedience and decolonial option do not need to rely exclusively on authors who were born, worked and spoke in a peripheral geographical region. Setting out from the assumption that theories are always flawed in their attempt to provide a single and universally applicable explanation, the idea of the South acts as a metaphor for non-canonical theories — and paradoxically depends on this subaltern trait to make sense.

Through the fragmented incursions of feminist theorists, “open” Marxists, and post-colonial, subaltern and de-colonial people, the aim is to broaden the debate. This involves a theory of democracy that is impeded in some models but is, to some extent, hegemonic in the sphere of contemporary Brazilian Political Science by being representative, participative and deliberative. Although these last two factors seek, in a critical way, to complement the liberal, individual and electoral logic forged and exported from the North America/European axis, these models have still been practically incapable of dealing (creatively and on a theoretical basis) with problems that in principle have not relied on the polyarchy to resolve.

During the 20th Century and at the beginning of the 21st Century, democracies showed they were able to accept the emergence of inequalities and injustice even though they

had political regimes with sufficient capacity and power to reduce or eradicate them. In historical, theoretical and practical terms, the meaning and significance of democracy remains a question for debate among political and social actors. European democracies, which are regarded as showcases because of their stability and duration, were also able to coexist with colonial and imperial practices<sup>4</sup>. Until today, the Civil War in England, the War of Independence in the United States and the 1789 Revolution in France are credited with having led to Western emancipation and obscure the importance of the Haitian and Mexican revolutions for the “grammar” of Human Rights.

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Since the 16th Century, colonialism and imperialism have gathered strength and reproduced an identifiable structural triad which is responsible for causing inequality and injustice: capitalism, racism and sexism. Within the sphere of the Theory of Democracy, the following question can be asked: what does democratic self-determination involve in post-colonial societies?

Can the legacy of a fairly remote colonial past be smuggled in to assist in the exercise of democracy? At present, are the normative and alternative formulations for representative Western liberal democracy through its most critical and radical exponents, listening to or heeding the questions raised by the South? What are these questions?

A lengthy course of action is needed (although this has not often been attempted) to find a theoretical meeting point between the subaltern/post-colonial/de-colonial project and the democratic project, just as post-colonialism has not yet been able to support a post-colonial perspective of democracy. On the basis of this second key factor, this article suggests that the nature of coloniality should be taken into account by the contemporary field of the Theory of Democracy. This sets out from the idea that in post-colonial democracies, the confrontational relationship between modernity and its hidden face – coloniality – raises a set of problems that are absent from the central geopolitics of knowledge.

The structure of this study can be basically divided into two parts. The first deals with the meaning of the term ‘post-colonialism’ and deciding on what challenging ways it can make a contribution to Political Theory. Although not directly concerned with the question of democracy, the subaltern and post-colonial studies entail readings and interpretations that question the epistemological basis of social and political theory. Latter, a theoretical exploration of the Latin-American modernity/coloniality group, is conducted to obtain an understanding of *coloniality in democracy* and *democracy in coloniality*. Finally, if coloniality can be regarded as the reproduction of the logic of injustice and inequality, it can be assumed that it must dwell among the theoretical concerns of democracy – at least those of the Global South.

### **1. Political Theory and Post-Colonialism: Some Approximations**

The term “post-colonialism” can be understood in different temporal and theoretical ways<sup>5</sup>. Sanjay Seth offers a useful definition for the prefix “post” in post-colonial theories: “the ‘post’ in the post-colonial theory does not mean the period or era ‘after’ colonialism came to an end, but rather, it refers to the entire historical period from the beginning of colonialism<sup>6</sup>” (Seth, 2013: 1). By suggesting that colonialism does not form a part of the past, the term is used to claim that the conquest, colonialism and the empire “are not footnotes or episodes in a larger historical scene, such as that of capitalism, modernity or the expansion of international society but are, on the contrary, a central and constitutive feature of this history” (Ibidem: 20).

In effect, a common factor in the post-colonial theories is the complaint about the persistence of the colonial and imperial rationale of Western modernity. However, owing to the fact that its course was accompanied by post-structural and post-modern theories, post-colonialism has been viewed with mistrust by the contemporary Marxists (Castro-Goméz, 2005; Persram, 2008). Post-colonialism underwent something which the Indian Marxist Aijaz Ahmad (2002) described in critical terms as *culturalism*<sup>6</sup>.

A genealogy that is mindful of what is produced in the post-colonial era does not allow such an emphasis to be laid on this withdrawal from the term by Marxist criticism. Franz Fanon and Ranajit Guha, the main exponents of the “French” and “sacrosanct” triads of post-colonialism, respectively, had a strong influence on the writings of the Marxians and Marxists. The inspiration of Gramsci can be seen in Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak and Stuart Hall. And even the modernity/coloniality group which demands the radicalization of the post-colonial argument when applied to Latin America, (to the disappointment of Walter Mignolo and Ramón Grosfoguel), cannot escape from the Marxism found in the Philosophy of Liberation, the Dependence Theory and the analysis of the world system which forms a part of its basis and theoretical influences. However, in its post-colonial criticism, Marxism is unable to resist the criticism of subjects, eurocentrism, the primacy of the West and the need for progress and modernity. In other words, hegemonic Marxism has been unable to break through the barriers of modernity and eurocentrism.

In its initial phase, the canons of post-colonial literature were concerned with questions regarding liberty, self-determination and the decolonization of the people. The division between the people and the worlds of the colonized and colonizers reflected an antagonism that was necessary for the post-colonial message of the so-called Third World of that time. However, the precursors of post-colonialism such as Césaire, Fanon and Memmi, were unaware of the complex world of identity and subjectivity which was subsequently explored by Said, Spivak, Gilroy, Hall and Bhabha. It can be stated that the central feature of subaltern and post-colonial criticism has a fundamental epistemological character. Since it is driven by its own post-structural and post-Marxist opening, it enables post-colonial intellectuals to dwell on the existence of other subjects who are not European, white, Western, male, heterosexual or proletarian.

This emphasis on the directly political dimension of the politics of difference allows post-colonialism to reconsider, in a critical way, most of the assumptions linked to the field of politics and identity. What is in question is above all the connection between the colonial experience and the conceptualization of difference. In short, it is clear that under colonialism, the pathways of difference (material, political and cultural) have taken an irreversible course, or in other words, it is clear that they are forced to play their role from an extremely ordinary script (Puwar, 2008: 271).

It should be noted that the problematic feature of a *non-European subject* seeks to advance in a fairly radical way, the displacement of the *non-Western subject* — something which is not undertaken by fundamentally Eurocentric authors like Foucault, Althusser, Deleuze, Derrida, Laclau and Mouffe. In 1988 Gayatri Spivak wrote:

Some of the most radical criticism coming out of the West today is the result of an interested desire to conserve the subject of the West or the West as Subject. (...). Although the history of Europe as Subject is narrativized by the law, political economy and ideology of the West, this concealed Subject pretends it has “no geopolitical determinations” (Spivak, 2012: 25).

Under the influence of her mentors in the Indian group of *Subaltern Studies*<sup>7</sup>, Spivak examined the representations of the Western discourse with regard to the subject of the

Third World, or in other words, the subaltern who cannot speak despite the intellectual attempts to give him/her a voice. She recognized the limits of her own theorization: "I am aware that I am writing in a work environment committed to the ideological production of neocolonialism, including through the influence of figures like Foucault" (Spivak, 2008: 51).

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In carrying out this epistemic criticism, the feminist contribution was crucial to ensure that essentialism was not reproduced in an inverted way. The subaltern subject constantly suffers from the strategies of subalternation or rather, from the fact of being subordinated. However, this does not allow him/her to be treated in a wholly monolithic way:

Clearly, if you are poor, black or a woman, you get it in three ways. If, however, this formulation is moved from the first-world context to the post-colonial (which is not identical with the third world) context, the description of "black" or "color" loses persuasive significance. The necessary stratification of colonial subject constitution in the first phase of capitalist imperialism, makes "color" useless as an emancipatory signifier (Spivak, 2012: 110).

A few years earlier, Chandra Mohanty sought to reveal the ethnocentrism of Western feminism which tends to categorize the average woman of the Third World in monolithic terms, by judging the lives of other women on the basis of a standard empirical benchmark (Puwar, 2008: 245). As early as 1984, Mohanty stated that:

Any discussion of the intellectual and political construction of "third world feminisms" must address itself to two simultaneous projects: the internal critique of hegemonic "Western" feminisms and the formulation of autonomous geographically, historically and culturally grounded feminist concerns and strategies. The first project is one of deconstructing and dismantling; the second, one of building and constructing. While these projects appear to be contradictory, the one working negatively, the other positively, unless these tasks are addressed simultaneously, "third world" feminisms run the risk of marginalization or ghettoization from both mainstream (right and left) and Western feminist discourses (Mohanty, 2008: s/p.).

Since it involves factors related to identity, the concern with the subject is shown to be of crucial importance to post-colonialism and political theory. In her book *Postcolonialism and Political Theory*, Nalini Persram raises a key question:

and what about outside the colony, in the afterlife of the colony, in postcoloniality? (...) One is the persistent interrogation of how the moment following colonialism largely either interpolates the postcolonial subject as neocolonial subject, or through coercion or subversion renders in effect postcolonial subjectivity as neocolonial subjecthood (Persram, 2008: xix/xx).

Although this may be digressing from the article, perhaps it is worth considering the reflections of Franz Fanon on the colonized subject. What he would like to draw attention to is the contribution made by post-colonialism to political theory for a subsequent attack on the theory of democracy. As well as the problematic aspects of the subjects and colonized identities and subalternity, what is highlighted is the attempt to render European and Western thought provincial, while at the same time demonstrating the different courses pursued in post-colonial societies. In these societies, concepts such as democracy, nation, nationalism, community, citizenship, civil society, sovereignty and the public/private sectors, do not correspond exactly to the distinctions made (and stages passed through) within the European domain itself.

It is of crucial importance to think about new experiences together with the living meanings and attributes which must be achieved in colonized societies. This is particularly

the case when it is borne in mind that many of them in some way involve a resistance to the colonial and imperial design, the vestiges of which are still prevalent – for example, racism in Latin America. It seems to be reasonable to think about the difficulties and hurdles – and their implications – or rather, the different forms of injustice and inequality that Europe did not always necessarily overcome.

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In contradicting the platonic status of modern political theory, Persram (Ibidem) stresses the need to postulate a *politicizing theory*. In effect, this reveals a trend that can be found in the kind of Political Science carried out in Brazil. In the face of the disciplinary mainstream, the political theory (or thought, as the case may be) drew on Handbooks of Political Science, as a subdiscipline that is set apart from more empirical and quantitative kinds of analysis. The criticism of normativity is very often conducted by breaching the principles of the analysis of “things as they are”, which leads to the paradox of depoliticized political theory. In the sphere of Political Science and Theory the recurring debates about theories of the South are beset with difficulties because:

The phenomenon of “political modernity” — namely, the rule by modern institutions of the state, bureaucracy, and capitalist enterprise — is impossible to think of anywhere in the world without invoking certain categories and concepts, the genealogies of which go deep into the intellectual and even theological traditions of Europe. Concepts such as citizenship, the state, civil society, public sphere, human rights, equality before the law, the individual, distinctions between public and private, the idea of the subject, democracy, popular sovereignty, social justice, scientific rationality, and so on all bear the burden of European thought and history. One simply cannot think of political modernity without these and other related concepts that found a climactic form in the course of the European Enlightenment and the nineteenth century. These concepts entail an unavoidable — and in a sense indispensable — universal and secular vision of the human (Chakrabarty, 2000:4).

This passage from the classic study of Dipesh Chakrabarty is often cited and represents a huge challenge for post-colonial, political theory. The origin/invention/paternity/foundation of European concepts and institutions committed to human liberty have turned into dangerous, risky and undesirable attempts at decolonization or de-Westernization. However, what is in play here is not so much to forge a new *hubris of the zero point* (Castro-Goméz, 2005a) as to recognize in an appropriate way, the fact that these experiences were paradoxically forged within the heart of European self-civilization while running parallel with external colonial and imperial practices.

Thus the colonial and imperial designs that can be found in the “universal and secular vision of the human” (cf. Chakrabarty) are open to question. This is because post-colonial political thought “is a response to practices of expropriation and domination that were often carried out in the name of liberal ideas” (Kohn and Macbride, 2011:13). From this perspective, liberal theories have been formulated as a means of endowing colonial domination and expropriation with legitimacy. Far from advocating a political purity, the following questions arise: “If, for example, democratic political life is increasingly understood as negotiated at temporally contingent and spatially local levels, what happens to the universal and transhistorical signature of political theory? If politics and culture inform each other, what is the distinction between political theory and various forms of cultural theory?” (Persram, 2008: xvii).

The pattern of decolonization has become bolder than the post-colonial project, although the conditions for the possible emergence of the former originated in the latter. Several

critics of both have moved on from condemning its irresponsibility to rejecting the entire “package” of Eurocentrism and Western civilization. Nonetheless, it can be argued that the pattern of decolonization should be regarded as an affirmation of commitments:

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Decolonization, the dream of self rule, is the most recent incarnation of the long-standing project to achieve political freedom and therefore deserves a prominent place in the discipline of political theory. Political theories of decolonization provided extend ruminations about the challenges of founding a new polity that is more just, and they have the potential to deepen how political theorists understand core concepts such as freedom, equality, sovereignty, and rule of the law (Kohn and McBride, 2011:3).

In this attempt to find possible post-colonial applications to political theory, different channels of thought are pursued to define a theory of democracy. Originally, a direct concern with democracy was missing from post-colonial concerns, especially with regard to the historical background itself and the phase of the theoretical/institutional development of the democratic theory. But if the set of studies grouped under the generic label of post-colonialism was still not able to support a post-colonial perspective of democracy, the contrary is also true. In other words, viewed from another standpoint, contemporary democratic theory has failed to assimilate the contributions made by post-colonialism and the theories of the South.

As this absence can be categorized as two-way, the aim here is to encourage thinking about post-colonialism through democratic theory rather than the contrary. The contemporary hegemonic models of democracy raise difficulties by theorizing about the exercise of democracy in circumstances that are not ideal and involve inequality at various levels. Hence, the democratic and participative experiences currently being offered by a group of Latin American countries provide an opening that is more susceptible to the inclusion of demands emanating “from below” and from the processing of historically “subalternized” identities.

In the first approximation carried out in this article two courses are set out, based on the suggestive premise that coloniality coexists and cohabits with democracy in a predatory way. This is a question of understanding *coloniality in democracy and democracy in coloniality*. In the first dimension, the question entails thinking about how the aspect of democracy understood as inequality and injustice, constitutes an obstacle to the achievement of democracy in post-colonial societies, in the absence of metrocentric contexts which are “producers” of democratic theories. In the second dimension, or rather in seeking to think about democracy in coloniality, it is a question of understanding the orchestration of democracy in the service of coloniality both on an inner and outer plane.

## 2. Coloniality and Democracy

The Modernity/Coloniality group (M/C) was formed in 1998, following the dissolution of the Latin American Subaltern Studies Group, which in turn was inspired by the Indian project. This collective comprised Latin-American intellectuals based in various universities of the Americas. It made some harsh criticisms of post-colonialism and sought to include Latin America<sup>8</sup> in a radical manner, through the notion of a decolonial turnaround. In seeking an estrangement from post-colonialism itself, the investigative program drew on different Latin-American authors, some of whom were themselves members of an individual intellectual background influenced by Marxism, the liberation philosophy, the dependence theory and the analysis of the world-system. Some of its main exponents are Walter Mignolo, Enrique Dussel, Aníbal Quijano, Santiago Castro-Gómez, Ramón Grosfoguel, Nelson Maldonado-Torres, Catherine Walsh, Arturo Escobar, among others<sup>9</sup>.

Mignolo, Grosfoguel and Castro-Gom ez have all sharply criticized post-colonialism and subaltern Indian/Latin-American studies in different places. Basically their argument is that the post-colonial mainstream – in particular, Said, Spivak, Bhabha, and Chakrabarty – have not managed to escape from the influence and inspiration of the Eurocentric post-structural and post-modern authors – Eurocentric critics of Eurocentrism like Foucault and Derrida –, which ended up by reproducing the “imperialism” of cultural, post-colonial and subaltern studies<sup>10</sup> (Mignolo, 1998).

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In the M/C group, the question of democracy has also attracted radical and adverse criticism. Collectively, it does not provide a theory of democracy; nor does it address the matter in any depth. If it is possible to support a common democratic perspective in Latin-American decolonial thought, in its initial phase it must undergo a categorical rejection of Western European democracy.

However, this does not automatically lead the authors to an affiliation with Marxism. With the exception of Dussel, Quijano, Lander and Wallerstein<sup>11</sup>, whose Marxist leanings are well known, especially in the readings of Mignolo, Grosfoguel and Castro-Gom ez<sup>12</sup>, Marxism appears to be more a secular narrative of modernity – albeit critical – than a failure to escape from Eurocentrism. The Marxist attack on Eurocentrism also carried out by Lander (2006), assimilates peripheral versions of Marxism such as those of Mari ategui and Gramsci – though to a lesser extent. While the former has incorporated the indigenous question – a school of thought given renewed energy by the Bolivian Vice-President and sociologist  lvaro Garc a Linera –, the legitimacy of Gramsci resided in the place he holds at the periphery of Europe itself – the same argument applied to the Portuguese sociologist Boaventura Sousa Santos. This selective rejection that saw a shift to both neo-Marxism and Marxism – through blindness or a complicity with colonialism and Eurocentrism – means that the M/C group refuses to accept the validity of Marxism as a single radical, critical and anti-capitalist utopia for the 21st Century<sup>13</sup>:

It is no longer possible to construct a global design through a single epistemology for the problems of the world, whether they be of the left (socialism, communism etc.) or the right (developmentalism, neo-liberalism, liberal democracy etc.). From this epistemic diversity, there are anti-capitalist, anti-patriarchal and anti-imperialist ideas which have different ways of confronting and overcoming problems caused by power, sexual, racial, spiritual, linguistic gender and class relations within the current “capitalist/patriarchal, modern/colonial world order”. (...) The Western world cannot impose its liberal concept of democracy on forms of indigenous, Islamic or African democracy. For example, the Zapatista Movement of the Tojolabales cosmology redefines democracy as “to lead by obeying” and its institutional practice constitutes “carac ois [snails]”. These are concepts that are very different from Western democracy where “who leads does not obey and who obeys, does not lead” and whose institutional practice is made up of parliaments and national assemblies (Grosfoguel, 2008: 34).

This line of argument is corroborated by the contemporary experience of Latin America itself, especially in the refounding of the State, the struggle of social movements and the affirmation of traditional identities of subalternity such as indigenous natives or maroons [“quilombolas”]. Throughout the continent, there can be found resistance to the rationale of modernity/coloniality and the constitution of other forms of relationships between subjects, the State, Law and politics. At a practical level, the political decolonization project is bound up with the epistemic de-Westernizing project, which can more clearly be found at an institutional level in the Bolivian government of Morales and Li era.

Democracy will be seen to have more depth if it takes on other benchmarks for the community, territory, nature and culture of the indigenous people. Basically this means the resignification and decolonization of the European ideal of civil society itself.

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The hegemonic conception of democracy, impedes the perception of another historical lineage of democracy which is doubtless more universal and profound: the community as a structure of authority, that is, the direct and immediate control of the people within a determined space. To go no further, this lineage is not absent from the history of Western Europe itself (Quijano, 2002: 23).

Quijano's argument, which is in tune with the demands of the indigenous people and Zapatistas, regards the Nation-State as a straitjacket restraining their own democracy:

For countries where the coloniality of power is the real basis of power relations, the concept of citizenship, "democratization" and nationalization cannot be regarded as real except in the substandard way of the Eurocentric model of the Nation-State (...). What the term democracy means in the real world in the global pattern of colonial/modern/capitalist/Eurocentric power, is a clear and specific phenomenon — a system of negotiation that defines the limits, conditions, modalities of exploitation and domination, where the institutional emblem is the institutional and modern brand of the nation-state (Quijano, 2002:15, 22).

In this article in which Quijano explores the question of democratic authority when confronted with the power of coloniality as a worldwide standard, the author seeks refuge in an anthropological and relativist argument, (despite signs of a Marxist influence), which it is very difficult for Political Science and International Relations to accept.

One of the greatest theoretical and political challenges which is raised by those who are concerned about justice and democracy in the world today, is precisely how to interlink two apparently irreconcilable traditions — cosmopolitanism and post-colonialism. The attempts to play down the importance of universal human rights are put in jeopardy by the fact that it is possible to cast doubts on what exactly is a right and what it means to be human. The construction of a universal principle that is not ethnocentric (Benhabib, 2000) is a requirement that is very difficult to put into effect. Human Rights are under threat in the countries of the North.

In this section, what remains to form a complete picture of democratic theory is the need to be able to take account of other non-Western and non-liberal experiences which can be added to the pluriversal features of democracy. To succeed in this endeavour, depends on displacing both elements so that practices can be recognized that are able to add or broaden ideas that are to some extent shared and can thus be viewed as democracy in the sphere of Western progressive discussion.

### **3.1 Coloniality in Democracy**

The concept of "coloniality" is widely employed, expanded and put into effect by the M/C group and should not be confused with colonialism or colonization. Its contemporary relevance lies in the fact that it seeks to establish a relational logic at different levels of power. The empirical verification of coloniality is not easy to observe, grasp or quantify. The strength of the concept lies more in its accusatory than its operational proposal — methodologically speaking.

Coloniality allows us to understand the continuity of colonial forms of domination after the end of colonial administrations, produced by colonial cultures and structure in the modern/

colonial capitalist world-system. "Coloniality of power"<sup>14</sup> refers to a crucial structuring process in the modern/colonial world-system that articulates peripheral locations in the international division of labor with the global racial/ethnic hierarchy and Third World migrants' inscription in the racial/ethnic hierarchy of metropolitan global cities. Peripheral nation-states and non-European people live today under the regime of "global coloniality" imposed by the United States through the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank (WB), the Pentagon and NATO. Peripheral zones remain in a colonial situation even though they are no longer under colonial administration (Grosfoguel, 2008: 55-56).

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Thus the concept imprints a notion of actuality on colonialism regardless of the fact that it has ended its period as a historical process. Coloniality was regarded by the groups as being divided into three fields: Power, Knowledge and Being. Individually through Mignolo, the concept of the Coloniality of Power was broadened to embody the following economic controls: authority, natural resources, gender/sexuality and subjectivity/knowledge (Mignolo, 2010). Unlike the classical colonial and neo-colonial pattern from the 16th-19th Centuries, contemporary relations of coloniality do not involve territorial possessions, the direct extraction of natural resources or the exploitation of local slave labor. Coloniality is the hidden and necessary side of modernity; it is its indissolubly constitutive part (Mignolo, 2003: 30), since paradoxically it is "intrinsically bound up with colonial experience" (Maldonado-Torres, 2008: 84). Modernity is unable to wipe out coloniality because it cannot exist without it (Quijano, 2000: 343).

Hence it can be inferred that coloniality has survived and is reproduced in the democracy of post-colonial societies. For this reason, it operates by bolstering historic and structural inequalities which are reproduced in different levels, degrees and spaces. In a similar way to subalternity, rationality and the intentions of agents operating in coloniality – which it reproduces and undergoes – it is difficult to measure in terms of self-reflective awareness.

It should be noted that not all situations of repression are the results of colonialism – see the history of the patriarchal society and slavery – despite the fact that they can be strengthened or indirectly caused by it. Even though there is no colonialism without exploitation or oppression, the reverse is not always the case. This same reasoning can be applied to the notion of coloniality. Although coloniality should not be confused with exploitation or oppression, it is reasonable to state that it brings about inequality in people's lives and inequality in itself, that penetrates society in some way and leads to a spiral of injustice. The African and Latin-American continents are cited by the international ranking tables as having the most extreme examples of inequality in the world.

Clearly this does not imply that every economic and social blemish can be attributed to coloniality or the colonial past. For this reason, one can agree with some key authors who work in the area of civil society in Latin America such as Leonardo Avritzer and José Maurício Domingues, and also with the argument that the dividing-line between colonial and post-colonial may not be the single means of finding an explanation for collective action and other processes in the continent:

Some important movements for understanding Latin-American societies have their origins outside or far from this dual brand, as is the case of the Landless Movement in Brazil or the Maroons Movement which gathered momentum when legislation was drafted about the land of the Empire, or movements like those of feminists which formulate their policies of recognition outside this brand. In view of this, before plural translation processes can be horizontal and egalitarian they must be based on a broader brand than that which is provided by the distinction between the colonial and post-colonial (CES/AL, 2009).

At the same time, the dimension of coloniality seeks to unveil another dimension of inequality which is regarded as diffuse and unsatisfactory by the democratic theory. By raising this question, it is hoped to enhance and not devalue the debate.

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Is the world finally responding to coloniality? Now in the 21st Century, it is encouraging that the term “decolonization” has been revived in particular academic, political, cultural and artistic places. Thus the contemporary demands for decolonization have led to considerable resistance. This applies to several situations. By taking part in various organizations and institutions — states, companies, universities, NGOs, international bodies etc — the actors that reproduce coloniality can carry it out through their practices, experiences and discourses. On the other hand, their resistance can be articulated with or without this exact vocabulary while also being generic and diffuse in the empirically identifiable processes that are found in the practices, conversation, subjects and identities which challenge the standards of Western, rational, enlightened, capitalist, heterosexual and white modernity (Grosfoguel, 2008).

Some of the popular movements that struggle for economic, environmental, social and political justice in Latin America can be framed in the empirical processes of decolonization under way (Mignolo, 2010). Hence, what is generically understood by “civil society”, is shaped in extremely fertile and creative ground for the practices and application of decolonial theories and ultimately for the theory of democracy.

### 3.2 Democracy in Coloniality

Currently, the imposition of democracy through either humanitarian or military interventions from outside, represents a paradox in practical terms (or moral terms to ensure its legitimacy). “We have moved on from a characterization of “people without writing” of the 16th Century, to “people without history” in the 18th and 19th Centuries, and “people without development”, in the 20th Century and more recently, “people without democracy” in the 21st Century” (Grosfoguel, 2008: 48). By dehumanizing democracy and human rights and turning them into sterile, strategic discourses, the answers are no less violent:

If Eurocentric thinking claims “democracy” to be a Western natural attribute, Third World fundamentalisms accept this Eurocentric premise and claim that democracy has nothing to do with the non-West. Thus, it is an inherent European attribute imposed by the West. (...). Third World fundamentalisms respond to the imposition of Eurocentred modernity as a global/imperial design with an anti-modern modernity that is as Eurocentric, hierarchical, authoritarian and antidemocratic as the former (Grosfoguel, 2008: 73).

When the platforms of democracy and human rights serve to justify contemporary “imperial” expansion, coloniality is imposed:

The concept of “democracy” in modern Europe (in geographical terms, the Mediterranean and the Atlantic) and the United States, is embodied in a powerful linguistic and philosophical legacy: Graeco-Roman thought. To put it more clearly, the Graeco-Western concept of “democracy” is not combined with Mandarin as a language or legacy of Chinese thought; nor in Arabic or Arabic-Islamic philosophy; nor in Aymara or Quechua and the kind of thinking associated with these languages, etc. etc. Surely one is not saying that all these societies were despotic, as is suggested by the examples of John Locke. It can be inferred from his writings that the Western concept and idea of democracy should be adapted everywhere in the world, to such an extent, that the world will be nothing else but a vast network of branches of Western democracy (Mignolo, 2008a: 44).

However, the Western attempt to make the indivisibility of liberal models of representative democracy universal and bound up with the economy and market (Avritzer and Santos, 2002) and erect barriers which individual freedom cannot go beyond, has been questioned by a large number of actors from the north and south of the globe. Since 2011, the number of mass demonstrations suggests the emergence of a new “people on the march” movement in the world, which has caused a good deal of tension with regard to the urgent question of the limits of democracy. This is despite the indetermination of political and ideological projects that are really in play and being increasingly disputed or postulated. (Pinto and Ballestrin, 2013).

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Although Mignolo emphatically rejects Marxism, he explores the old maxim that democracy is incompatible with a capitalist economy. By stating that “coloniality is the price that has to be paid for an entrepreneurial democracy for the consumerist middle class” (Mignolo, 2008a: 50), the author who is an enthusiastic supporter of the Andean governments of Bolivia and Ecuador, distrusts the other apparently counter-hegemonic replies made to capitalism:

“This is a scenario in which the problem of maintaining capitalism will not be simply that of giving it a “human face” (which is the Euro-American liberal solution), but a “multipolar, secular and/or religious (Socialist/Islamic, Orthodox Christian, Slavonic, Confucianist — with features of liberalism and socialism)”. These are the pathways opened up by China, Russia, Iran and Venezuela. (Ibidem:53)”.

In his view, democracy should necessarily move on to:

A hermeneutic-decolonial interpretation of “democracy” (which) sets out by recognizing the ideal “of justice and equity” on one side and which is made in the West, where the ideal is conceived and practised under the banner of “democracy”. This has been the contribution of the West to a view of “justice and equity” which serves as a unique vision although there have been numerous paths leading to it. Hence, while the imperial/colonial dimension of “democracy” is universal and we already have more than enough signs that the rhetoric of peace is a justification of war, and that the decolonial dimension of “democracy” is pluriversal: there is a single horizon but the ways to reach it are varied — it has various languages, shapes and interests in knowledge, various religions, subjectivities, types of sexuality, etc. Hence, “only the horizon of justice and equity has ‘pluri-versity’ as its slogan and ‘uni-versality’ as a design”. In his view, there is a need to dismantle colonial differences, whether they are epistemic or ontological; it is necessary to recognize that the contribution of the West is important not just to global, but also to local and regional, democracy (Ibidem: 47).

Mignolo thus established the following dichotomy: “democracy as an imperial project and as a diversity of decolonial projects. That is ‘pluri-versal’ democracy as a ‘uni-versal’ project” (Ibidem: 48).

The ideas of Mignolo have been the object of sharp criticism that cannot be disregarded. The core of these criticisms — which range from the romanticizing of decolonial processes to the fact that they are freed from contradictions and praised as a kind of primitive fundamentalism — lies basically in the choice of other models that do little to resolve the problem of the complexity of the representative post-colonial democracies, and there remains a tension between modernity and coloniality. The reformulation of the idea of the Nation-State has thus become a fundamental feature of this argument for the creation of political and economic alternatives that are really democratic and anti-capitalist.

Moving on to some reflections about the democratic issue raised by some of the exponents of the M/C group, does not imply complete agreement with them. Nonetheless, in terms of the theoretical phase, and the prevailing climate of opinion today, it can be regarded as highly opportune to make an attempt to politicize the political and democratic theory. According to Connell,

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“the metrocentrism of the sociological imagination is more evident in theories of “globalization”. Of all the sociological issues, it is in this that the relationship between the metropolis and periphery is most sharply distinguished. (...) In reflecting on neoliberalism, the writers of the North, hardly ever cite thinkers of the South who would be able to correct their misconceptions ” (Connell, 2012: 10).

And with regard to theories of democracy (not “experiences of democracy)?

*What contribution will we be able to make?*

### **Final Considerations**

The post-structuralist lessons that are expressed everywhere, originate from a Marxist realm where every theory that serves something or someone, finds a greater degree of acceptance in the field of political philosophy than political theory. Whereas post-colonial political theory achieves the so-called politicization of theory, decolonial political theory leads to a call for its decolonization. When giving thought to the question of *colonial difference*, this disparate group of authors draws attention to a factor that has tended to be overlooked by the theorists/philosophers of the theories of democracy – this is the recognition of justice that has been the driving-force behind several important studies in Brazil. It is only recently that Latin-American societies, including Brazil have been characterized as “post-colonial” and this has opened up a research field which is considered in the country to be Political Science.

The principle aim of this article has been to make an attempt to draw together post-colonial, subaltern and decolonial theories with political theory. This has been undertaken with a view to determining what contribution this can make to the development of democratic theory, also thought of as the global South. In contrast with what is argued in different (neo)liberal theories, it is known that in practice, democracy is able to live alongside violence, war and poverty. Although the rationale of coloniality cannot be detached as a determinant variable of these and other forms of inequality and injustice, it can be thought of in theoretical terms as a dynamic, appropriate and specific feature. In the context of post-colonial societies, the coexistence of coloniality and democracy is accompanied by a variable for thinking about inequality, justice and democracy – which in a general way, are missing in the contexts where these same theories are produced.

A full theoretical account of the experiences of the South and the ability to enter into a dialogue with the North on an equal footing, constitutes an important epistemological struggle for breaking the global division of work in the Social Sciences (Alatas, 2003). It is also with this objective in mind that the politicization or decolonization of political and democratic theories, can take on an importance among us.

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**Notes**

1. Article originally presented at the 37th Annual Meeting of ANPOCS.
2. Neera Chandhoke, David Held, Ramón Grosfoguel, Pablo González Casanova, David Harvey, Marc Ferro, Walter D. Mignolo, Samir Amin, Hardt e Negri, Rui Mauro Marini, Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, among others.
3. "Present in all these projects [outside the European and North American traditions, which are the basis of an alternative universalism], but not in the Eurocentric theory, this is the colonial encounter itself. This "encounter" is not just the moment of colonial conquest of indirect control, no matter what else it may be. It involves the constitution of colonial society, the transformation of social relationships under colonial power, the struggle for decolonization, the installation of new relationships of dependence and the struggle to broaden or challenge this dependence. The social thinking which emerges from this historical experience is what I have called the "*Southern theory*" (2012:12). The expression is also used by Jean Comaroff. For further perspectives, see the international review *Global South*.
4. "The historic moment in which the European intellectuals redefine the word "democracy" and employ it to think about European societies of the future without monarchies and also the historic moment in which the imperial expansion of Europe and the consolidation of the economy, which today we call capitalist, enters its apogee" (Mignolo, 2008:42).
5. In the reading of Costa (2006: 83-84) "the 'post' of post-colonial does not simply stand for 'after' in a chronological sense; it concerns an operation to reconfigure the discursive field in which hierarchical relationships are signified (Stuart Hall). The colonial, in turn, goes beyond colonialism and refers to situations of different kinds of oppression defined at gender, ethnic and racial frontiers".
6. Aijaz Ahmad made some of the harshest criticisms of post-colonialism, according to the reading of Castro-Gómez (2005: 30-31) "the post-colonialism of Said, Bhabha and Spivak – in the same way as the post-structuralism of Foucault, Deleuze and Derrida – is an ideology that masks class interests in a world characterized by the triumph of neoliberal capitalism. In this case, it concerns a new intellectual class of immigrants who work in elite universities in the United States, mainly in humanities and social sciences faculties; they are Asian, African and Latin American academics from the upper classes of their country of

origin who feel the need to appear as “postcolonial intellectuals” and show a sophisticated grasp of French theories of the vanguard which must be accepted in the competitive academic environment of the First World. They feel they have to write books that hide their class origin and attack the colonialism of the “Empire” on which they are knocking on the door (Ahmad 1993:196). In the opinion of Ahmad, the poscolonialists are individuals who, on the one hand, hypocritically condemn the suffering caused by colonial oppression which they and their families have benefited from, and on the other, show the profile of a new generation of professional immigrants who take advantage of these benefits to position themselves in an advantageous position in the First World. No other book than *Orientalism* can better express the desires of this new class of academics or explain their instant success”.

7. According to Ahmad (2002), Edward Said can be categorized as a complete poststructuralist.

8. The penetration, reception and contribution to/of cultural, subaltern, post-colonial and globalist studies in Latin America is complex and in a general way, requires the inclusion of Latin American issues.

9. For a genealogy of the Modernity/Coloniality Group, see Ballestrin (2013).

10. A similar critique, opposed to Walter Mignolo himself, is conducted by Silvia Riveira: “Mignolo and company have built up a small empire within an empire, by strategically appropriating the input of the school of studies of subalternity of India and its various Latin American offshoots, to make a critical reflection of colonization and decolonization” (Riveira, 2010: 58).

11. Active partnership of the M/C group which has broadened the notion of the world-system to cover several meanings (especially the modern/colonial world system).

12. Also Boaventura de Sousa Santos who collaborated with the group and entered into a dialogue with its members

13. In the view of Castro-Gómez (2005: 17), one of the problems of Marxism is that “colonialism is a collateral effect of the European expansion in the world and to this extent, forms a part of a necessary transition to advent of world communism”.

14. In the updated words of Aníbal Quijano himself, the originator of the concept at the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s: “The coloniality of power is a concept that takes account of the cornerstone of the current model of power, the basic and universal social classification of the people of the planet round the idea of “race”. This notion and the social classification which is based on it (or the term “racist”) had their origins 500 years ago together with the words America, Europe and capitalism. These words are the deepest and most long-lasting expression of colonial domination and were imposed on the whole population of the planet during the expansion of European colonialism. Since then, in the power of the current world order, they

pervade each and every area of social existence and constitute the most profound and effective form of social, material and inter-subjective domination and for this very reason, are the most universal inter-subjective basis of political domination within the prevailing order of power". (Quijano, 2002:1 ).

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