

# The Role of Race and Gender in the Constitution of the World Capitalist System from a Decolonial Perspective

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With a long-standing tradition in the development of critical theories, Latin America seeks, through a myriad of perspectives, to understand its peripheral position within the mechanisms of the world system. This paper aims to examine the role of race and gender in sustaining the capitalist world system through the lens of decolonial studies. It considers how both categories were historically constructed during the colonial process as tools to legitimize social, economic, and political hierarchies between the dominant and the dominated. In particular, the division of labor, based on racial and gendered distinctions, was instrumental in shaping these power relations. By analyzing these categories as central elements in the formation and maintenance of the capitalist world system, the study highlights their continued influence in perpetuating inequalities today.

*Keywords:* decoloniality, race, gender, Latin America, capitalism

## Introduction

After the neoliberal turn that marked the political, economic, and intellectual spheres in Latin America in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, studies of dependent capitalism and the condition of underdevelopment fell into crisis. In this context, decolonial studies emerged to fill the intellectual void left by Latin American Marxism and to develop a new epistemology of *locus citato* thought, offering a critical reading of dominant capitalism and neoliberal hegemony, which reproduces coloniality on a global scale and across multiple dimensions. Decolonial thinkers have sought to free themselves from Eurocentric epistemologies by focusing on Latin American cosmogonies.

Thus, in the late 1990s, the Modernity/Coloniality group (M/C) was formed by Latin American intellectuals who embraced the notion of a “decolonial turn” (Castro-Gómez & Grosfoguel, 2007) and sought a critical and utopian renewal of the social sciences and thought in Latin America, alongside a radicalization of postcolonialism. It is important to note that the term postcolonialism refers not only to the historical period following decolonization in the 19th and 20th centuries—that is, the political independence of nations subjected to imperialist and neocolonial exploitation—but also to a school of thought that emerged in the 1970s, represented by authors such as Foucault, Lacan, and Derrida, who developed critical approaches to dominant narratives of modernity.

For its part, the Modernity/Coloniality group distances itself from the mainstream of cultural, postcolonial, and subaltern studies, criticizing these currents for failing to completely break with Eurocentric authors such as

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Gramsci and Foucault, since “no act of resistance can occur in the name of the subaltern without this act being imbricated in hegemonic discourse” (Almeida, 2010, p. 12 cited in Ballestrin, 2013, p. 93).

The group thus draws on Wallerstein’s (1974) theoretical construction of the world-system to develop notions, ideas, and concepts that allow them to denounce contemporary forms of domination, even two centuries after the formal end of colonial administrations. In other words, they argue that “relations of coloniality in the economic and political spheres did not end with the destruction of colonialism” (Quijano & Wallerstein, 1992, p. 550) and that “independence did not undo coloniality: it merely transformed its outer form” (ibid., p. 550). It is the structures of the modern capitalist/colonial world system that allow this model of domination to be continually reproduced.

This research seeks to understand the role attributed by decolonial studies to race and gender in the constitution of the modern/colonial capitalist world system. It is argued that, according to this perspective, these two categories are central pillars in the consolidation of the system and vital to the mechanisms that ensure its perpetuation.

Therefore, through a literature review of decolonial works, this study first aims to present the perspective of decoloniality, outlining its main concepts and elements, and subsequently to analyze the role that race and gender occupy within this framework.

### **The Coloniality of Power**

Aníbal Quijano (2000) developed the term *coloniality of power*, one of the central concepts of the Modernity/Coloniality group. It represents the structure of domination to which Latin America has been subjected, erasing the imaginary of the other. One of the consequences of this process is the transformation of Eurocentrism into a global cognitive perspective.

In this way,

[...] the coloniality of power represses the modes of knowledge production, the knowledge, the symbolic world and the images of the colonized, and imposes new ones. It thus naturalizes the imaginary of the European invader, epistemically subalternizes the non-European other, and negates and even forgets non-European historical processes. (de Oliveira & Candau, 2010, p. 19)

According to Quijano, one of the central features of this modern/colonial model of power is the invention of the idea of race as a mechanism to determine the division of labor and legitimize colonial exploitation. This is achieved by hierarchizing Europeans as superior and non-Europeans as inferior, civilized versus primitive. In this way, the colonial process introduced a new model of capitalist power in which all ethnicities acquired a racial connotation, giving rise to new historical social identities (natives, blacks, mestizos, etc.).

For Mignolo (2017, p. 10),

the colonial matrix is constructed and functions on a series of heterogeneous historical-structural knots, linked by the “/” (slash) that divides and unites modernity/coloniality, imperial laws/colonial rules and center/peripheries, which are the consequences of the global linear thinking at the root of the modern/colonial world. Its legitimacy is rooted in the principles of diverse knowledge and the apparatus of enunciation, which consists of categories of thought, social actors and institutions sustained by the continuity of education.

This racialization of identity served to legitimize colonial domination between the conquerors and the conquered, functioning as the axis of the new power structure. In doing so, it influenced all material and subjective spheres of social existence (Ballestrin, 2013, p. 101). Europe—and Europeans—thus came to define themselves in relation to America. However, more than a marker of geographical origin, “race and racial

identity were established as instruments of basic social classification of the population” (Quijano, 2000, p. 122) and used to determine the pattern of domination.

“Biology” served as a tool to naturalize the “superior” character of the conquerors, devaluing the conquered along with their mental and cultural contributions. However, Quijano argues that race is not biologically grounded, but has been central to the development of modern capitalism. Within this context, identities acquire a different ontology, and the concept of race justifies population hierarchization, defines each person’s place within the power structure, and legitimizes domination (ibid., p. 122). In other words, it defines “basic mode of universal social classification of the world’s population” (ibid., p. 123).

In agreement with Quijano, Castro-Gómez (2005) believed that the notion of coloniality of power offers the most comprehensive explanation of the mechanisms of power that govern the modern/colonial world system, and that are reproduced within nation-states. Thus, racial and cultural differences are used to legitimize violence by the colonizer, who is seen as rational and entitled to exercise power over the colonized, portrayed as in need of civilization through Westernization. The philosopher further argues that coloniality of power reveals that:

The pan-optic devices erected by the modern state are part of a larger, global structure, shaped by the colonial relationship between centers and peripheries brought about by European expansion. From this point of view, we can say this: modernity is a “project” insofar as its disciplinary devices are linked to a double juridical governmentality. On the one hand, the internal governmentality exercised by national states in their attempt to create homogeneous identities through the politics of subjectivation; on the other, the external governmentality exercised by the hegemonic powers of the modern world/colonial system in their attempt to ensure the flow of raw materials from the periphery to the center. Both processes are part of the same structural dynamic. (Castro-Gómez, 2005, p. 83)

Mignolo (2000, p. 36) asserted that there is no modernity without coloniality. Alongside Wallerstein, Quijano argues that the capitalist world economy would not exist without the colonial process in the Americas (Quijano & Wallerstein, 1992, p. 549), and that “the foundation of modernity/coloniality lies in the discovery and invention of America” (Ballestrin, 2013, p. 102).

He also claims that one of the main axes of this new model of power is the articulation of all historically known forms of labor control—as well as the control of its resources and products—around capital (Quijano, 2000, p. 122). However, Quijano interprets modernity and the colonial process in Latin America through the lens of capitalism, focused on capital accumulation, profit, labor exploitation, and the control of production and distribution—phenomena that respond to the logic of wage labor and the global market. From this perspective, coloniality not only originates in the Americas and is internationalized from the New World (ibid., pp. 125-126), but is also a constitutive element of the capitalist model of power (Ballestrin, 2013, p. 101).

### **The Coloniality of Knowledge**

The articulation of all forms of labor control around capital was decisive not only in establishing global capitalism but also in constructing a Eurocentric world cultural order. In the same vein, the concept of the *coloniality of knowledge* emerges as a critique of the repression of all non-European forms of knowledge. The intellectual and historical knowledge of peoples deemed inferior by the Eurocentric perspective—such as indigenous and African peoples—was systematically destroyed and erased. Thus, Castro-Gómez (2005, p. 84) argued that the mode of knowledge production itself follows a Eurocentric, phallogocentric, and logocentric logic. The colonization of knowledge is the epistemic dimension of the colonization of power.

For the author, the European project of modernity was an effort to make man, guided by reason, the organizing principle of the world and the master of all things. From this perspective, the rational individual was believed to possess the capacity to uncover the laws of nature and subject them to human control (ibid., p. 80).

The result is what de Oliveira and Candau (2010, p. 20) call *epistemic racism*, in which experiences, histories, and cultural resources have been subjected to a singular Eurocentric global cultural order. In other words, Europe has occupied a central hegemonic position not only in political and economic domination but also in shaping subjectivity, culture, and global knowledge (Quijano, 2000, p. 126).

The *coloniality of knowledge* thus represents the epistemic, political, and historiographic hegemony of the Old Continent (de Oliveira & Candau, 2010, p. 21)—an epistemic hierarchy that privileges European knowledge and epistemology to the detriment of non-European forms of knowledge (Mignolo, 2017, p. 11).

In this way, the evolutionary notion that Europe was the model to be followed—because it was seen as the most advanced civilization—was imposed globally through the modern/colonial world system. In other words, a myth rooted in the racial classification of the world's population constructed a narrative of unilinear, unidirectional human progress in which societies move from a state of nature towards a European ideal.

The belief that modernity and rationality were exclusively European phenomena led to the creation of dual Eurocentric categories such as primitive/civilized, irrational/rational, traditional/modern, and Europe/non-Europe. At the same time, it is important to understand that the idea of modernity—and of Europe as the producer of modernization—is also part of the ethnocentric historical construction of the world-system. It is within this continent that the hegemonic center of the modernity process has been located.

According to Mignolo (2017, p. 4),

Modernity was born with coloniality: America was not an existing entity to be discovered. It was invented, mapped, appropriated and exploited.

The peoples of the so-called New World had their histories, languages, cultures, and memories suppressed and were reduced to generic identities such as *Indian* or *Black*. These categories, in addition to being racial and colonial, carried pejorative connotations. They were associated with inferiority, irrationality, and backwardness. In this way, European exploitation was legitimized, as non-European civilizations were considered *pre-European*, and thus primitive and subject to domination.

In this sense, Quijano (2000, p. 133) asserted that

the model of power based on coloniality also implied a cognitive model, a new perspective of knowledge in which the non-European was the past and therefore inferior, always primitive.

Thus, for Castro-Gómez (2005), the global power structure that drives modernity is inscribed in the operations of a historical configuration of power within the capitalist world-system. Quijano and Wallerstein (1992, p. 552) reinforced this point, arguing that

Modernity has become not only the justification for economic success, but also its proof. It's a perfectly circular argument, diverting attention from the development of underdevelopment.

### The Coloniality of Being

The group also develops the concept of *coloniality of being*, a concept less widely known and used, but nonetheless crucial. It refers to the denial of the human condition to the colonized—that is, to non-Europeans. In this sense, Africans and indigenous peoples are subalternized through epistemic violence, as is anything that

falls outside the white, male, heterosexual standard. This process erases the history of European coloniality in favor of a narrative of European modernity.

Quijano (2000, pp. 136-137) argued that the formation of nation-states occurred in parallel with colonial domination in the New World, and that the state itself is a structure of power marked by the imposition of some over others—specifically, through the control of labor (its resources and products), of sex (its resources and products), of authority, of intersubjectivity, and of knowledge (ibid., p. 129). In this way, it becomes clear that the very Eurocentric structure that shaped the history of nation-state consolidation in the Americas inherently excluded indigenous, Black, and mestizo minorities.

As philosopher Immanuel Wallerstein (1996) argued, the very emergence of the social sciences served to scientifically legitimize the state's control over individual lives, to define collective goals, and to construct a shared cultural identity for citizens. In other words, the social sciences were at the service of the state, legitimizing the exclusion and homogenization of subjects who did not conform to the ideal profile of subjectivity required by “modernization”—as well as the domination of European states over their colonies.

This leads us to what Castro-Gómez and Mignolo call *the invention of the other*: a mental representation of the other that stems from specific dispositifs of knowledge and power, conceals any pre-existing identity, and is based on processes of material and symbolic production (Castro-Gómez, 2005, p. 81). It is important to stress, as Quijano does, that Europe became a new geocultural identity and, through the new model of power, was responsible for the production of new historical identities—ones that were Eurocentric in nature.

Modernity, then, represents a global model of power that seeks to define a singular form of social existence through the coloniality of power, capitalism, and Eurocentrism. The racial and patriarchal foundations of this knowledge structure are what ultimately legitimize the current world order (Mignolo, 2017, p. 6).

The modern invention of dichotomous categories has served to construct the image of *barbarism*, which is defined in opposition to the figure of the modern citizen—i.e., *civilization*. According to Castro-Gómez, these mental constructs were disseminated by state institutions such as schools, law, the state, the social sciences, hospitals, and prisons (Castro-Gómez, 2005, pp. 82-83). The idea of *citizenship*, then, becomes a mechanism for enforcing submission to order and controlling difference.

As Castro-Gómez (2005, pp. 81-82) explained:

The acquisition of citizenship is therefore a funnel through which only those whose profile corresponds to the type of subject required by the project of modernity pass: male, white, family man, Catholic, landowner, literate and heterosexual. Individuals who don't meet these requirements (women, employees, the insane, the illiterate, blacks, heretics, slaves, Indians, homosexuals, dissidents) will be excluded from the “literate city”, confined to the realm of illegality, subject to punishment and therapy by the same law that excludes them.

As Beatriz González-Stephan (1996) argued, the main practices that enabled the Latin American “invention of the other” in the 19th century also contributed to shaping the profile of *homo economicus* in Latin America. To understand how this relates to the constitution of capitalism as a world system, it is necessary to analyze the invention of the other from a geopolitical perspective.

Thus, a *geopolitics of knowledge* emerges—referring to the aforementioned idea that knowledge, power, and culture were centralized in Europe. All forms of knowledge produced by the “others”—their epistemologies and subjectivities—were silenced by the colonial process and the ethnic hierarchies constructed

by the modern/colonial power matrix. From this angle, the production and perspective of knowledge itself were subordinated to a colonial/modern, capitalist, and Eurocentric world order.

### Colonialism and Coloniality

Within this framework, colonialism—though officially ended from a political-historical perspective—persists and is continually updated through the notion of *coloniality* within the state. Even when not codified in law, coloniality remains embedded in social practices and institutional structures, such as schools and political systems. As Gustavo Lins Ribeiro (2011, p. 289) noted, colonialism is “a powerful, all-encompassing historical force that shapes to this day major characteristics of nation-states that are former colonies”.

The system of power—including labor relations and forms of knowledge—continues to operate according to this colonial pattern. Despite its often unconscious nature, this still constitutes epistemic violence. Decolonial thinkers reject Eurocentric forms of knowledge and seek to develop theories of Latin America from Latin American perspectives.

Consequently, as Castro-Gómez emphasizes, modernity should not be seen as a process of creating alterities, but rather as a process of *epistemicide*—the destruction of epistemologies (Santos & Meneses, 2010, p. 10). Its logic is constructed according to Eurocentric, logocentric, and phallogocentric interests. All the multiplicity and complexity of life forms are ignored in favor of a modernity that enforces a binary logic and represses difference (Castro-Gómez, 2005, p. 80).

Non-European epistemologies were excluded from the space of critical and scientific knowledge production because, within a Eurocentric framework, modernity and rationality are considered exclusively European, white and male products (Grosfoguel, 2008, pp. 202-203). Thus, modernity becomes a way of producing knowledge that reinforces the colonial/modern, capitalist, and Eurocentric model of power.

It is therefore crucial to distinguish between *colonialism* and *coloniality*. Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2007) explained that the former refers to the political and economic domination of one nation by another, while the latter describes a broader model of power that emerged through the modern colonial process. It is not tied to formal domination but to the ways in which labor, knowledge, and social relations are subjected to the global capitalist market and structured according to racial and gender hierarchies.

Since coloniality—unlike modernity—has no clear endpoint (Mignolo, 2003), Catherine Walsh proposes the use of the term *decoloniality* to differentiate the ideas of the Modernity/Coloniality group from the historical processes of political independence and decolonization (Mignolo, 2008, p. 246). While colonialism precedes coloniality, coloniality *survives* colonialism. It remains alive in texts, in the criteria for academic legitimacy, in culture, in common sense, in self-perception, in aspirations, and in many other aspects of modern experience.

As Bernardino-Costa, Maldonado-Torres, and Grosfoguel (2018, p. 9) wrote,

even after decolonization, Latin America continued to reproduce the economic, political and cognitive logics of existence, of the relationship with nature, that were forged during the colonial period.

With the official end of colonial rule and the abolition of slavery, ethnic hierarchies were reinforced through structural racism and sexism, as well as through the maintenance of cultural and economic domination. As Quijano and Wallerstein observe:

In the more peripheral zones of the capitalist world-economy, for example in Latin America in nineteenth and twentieth centuries, racism could hide behind the petticoats of ethnic hierarchy. [...] The meritocratic system justifies racist

attitudes without the need to verbalize them. (Quijano & Wallerstein, 1992, p. 551)

According to Quijano and Wallerstein (1992), for the first three centuries of the modern world-system, Latin American states were integrated into this structure in a secularized form, due to their colonial character. In other words, they were politically subordinate to the European metropolises. In this regard, they affirm the Modernity/Coloniality group's position that socio-cultural hierarchies among states did not end with Latin America's formal independence. Rather, coloniality continued to reproduce itself politically, economically, and culturally (*ibid.*, p. 549).

This continuation can be clearly seen in the processes of political independence in Latin America during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which were marked by the withdrawal of capital and an intensification of colonial features and domination in the social and political structures of these newly independent states.

As a result, the decolonial studies argue that the formation of Latin America inaugurated a new model of global, capitalist, and Eurocentric power. From a historical standpoint, the temporal marker for the beginning of the modern/colonial system is the "discovery"/invasion of the Americas. This moment signals both the onset of the modern era and the colonial period in the American continent. However, although the modern period has given way to contemporaneity, coloniality has taken root as a persistent epistemology—one that continues to shape the global order today, reproducing the same characteristics of global power.

### **Race and Gender in the Capitalist World System**

The legitimization of ethnic hierarchies and the invention of historical and social identities determined the role and function of each individual within the social structure—that is, they were responsible for the division of labor. This racist classification of domination became global, along with capitalist forms of exploitation and the racialized division of labor. As Quijano (2000, p. 124) explained:

domination/exploitation, in this case race/labour, has been articulated in such a way as to appear naturally associated, which has been exceptionally successful so far.

Accordingly, Black people were enslaved, indigenous peoples were subjected to servitude, and Europeans, in contrast, were classified as the dominant race—occupying roles such as salaried workers, merchants, artisans, or farmers. Only European nobles were permitted to hold positions in the colonial administration, whether civil or military. It is important to note that "the racist distribution of labor within modern/colonial capitalism was maintained throughout the entire colonial period" (*ibid.*, p. 124). Unpaid labor was assigned to racialized populations, while the privilege of paid work was reserved for white Europeans.

Maria Lugones (2008) expanded on this analysis by introducing the category of sex/gender into the colonial matrix of power. According to Lugones, the binary distinctions of male/female, biological dimorphism, heterosexuality, and patriarchy are also colonial constructions, which she refers to as the modern/colonial gender system. This framework was introduced to justify male supremacy and to allocate social roles in accordance with Eurocentric patriarchal norms.

Drawing on Third World feminist theorists such as Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí (1997) and Paula Gunn Allen (1986), Lugones demonstrates that in many indigenous societies prior to colonization, the concept of gender either did not exist or was not a meaningful axis of social organization. Thus, colonization introduced not only a racial division but also a gendered one. Within this logic, the ideals of strong, intelligent, and civilized masculinity—and submissive, pure femininity—are Eurocentric constructions that naturalize domination.

These labor control mechanisms were sociologically new in that they were designed to serve the global market. As Quijano put it:

While the world has been built up around and in function of capital, its character as a whole has also been established with a capitalist characteristic. In this way, a new, original and singular structure of relations of production has been established in world historical experience: world capitalism. (2000, p. 123)

In this sense, Europe came to dominate the global market, impose colonial domination, and control commercial capital, labor, and productive resources. This generated what Quijano calls a *social geography of capitalism* (ibid., p. 126): a geographical distribution of labor control in global capitalism, with Europe at the center of the capitalist world—or the modern world-system, as conceptualized by Wallerstein (1974), drawing on Raúl Prebisch's (1959) Center-Periphery model and the concept of global capitalism. Quijano terms this the *coloniality of global capitalist power*, since the coloniality of power is tied to the concentration of capital, labor, and markets in Europe (ibid., p. 125).

According to this framework, the global model of power that emerged relied on historically structured configurations—based on the fictitious constructs of race and gender—to establish systems of labor control. Consequently, the white, capitalist invention of race and gender served to naturalize and elevate the figure of the white European male as the “superior” subject.

It is important to note that, according to Eurocentrism, systems of labor control constitute a unilinear historical sequence that predates capital. However, the colonial experience in the Americas challenges this notion. These labor systems did not precede capital but emerged alongside it, fully compatible with and organized around the world market. In this way, the capitalist system was configured. As Quijano (2000, p. 131) argued:

The Eurocentrism of modern/colonial capitalism was in this sense decisive for the different destinies of the process of modernity between Europe and the rest of the world.

The success of the system lies precisely in its articulation of capital with multiple labor regimes and organizational forms—since social relations became structured around the commodification of labor power. In capitalism, labor becomes a commodity that generates other commodities for the international system.

The invasion of the Americas was therefore crucial to the success of capitalism. It was through the colonial experience that capital consolidated itself and became the dominant mode of economic and market organization. Yet, despite the fact that a capitalist world economy would not have been possible without Latin America, Quijano and Wallerstein (1992, p. 549) noted that the continent was never fully incorporated into it.

Quijano (2000, p. 133) explained:

The constitution of Europe as a new historical entity/identity was made possible, in the first place, by the free labor of the indigenous people, Blacks and Mestizos of America, with their advanced technology in mining and agriculture, and with their respective products, gold, silver, potatoes, tomatoes, tobacco, etc. (Viola et Margolis, 1991). Because it was on this basis that a region was configured as the seat of control of the Atlantic routes, which in turn were converted, precisely on this same basis, into decisive global market routes.

From this perspective, the exploitative and oppressive relationships that were foundational to the construction of the modern/colonial world-system in the 16th century are underpinned by race, gender, and labor control (Ballestrin, 2013, p. 101). As Grosfoguel (2006b, p. 26) highlighted, in Quijano's analysis, race



and racism function as “the organizing principle that structures all the multiple hierarchies of the world-system”.

In line with this, Quijano and Wallerstein identify three key elements in the configuration of the capitalist world economy: geographical expansion; the proliferation of various forms of labor control in different regions; and a strong state apparatus to centralize the system. Latin America, they argue, was central to enabling all three—particularly by becoming a *geosocial construct* essential to the emergence of the modern world-system in the 16th century (Quijano & Wallerstein, 1992, p. 549).

The peripheralization of Latin America in the world-system is thus linked to the racialization and the gendered differentiation of its population as a strategy for labor control. The invention of racial and gender categories is a hallmark of this system, in which: “ethnicity was the inevitable cultural consequence of coloniality. It delineated the social boundaries corresponding to the division of labor” (ibid., pp. 550-551).

Quijano further contends that:

the coloniality of power based on the idea of race must be recognized as a fundamental factor of the national question and the nation-state. The problem, however, is that in Latin America, the Eurocentric perspective has been adopted by dominant groups as their own, leading them to impose the European model of nation-state formation on power structures organized around colonial relations. (Quijano, 2000, p. 144)

In this light, capital in the region has been used to articulate labor control and exploitation, reflecting a model of power that, as Quijano notes, is historically and structurally heterogeneous (ibid., p. 145). Latin America has not experienced a bourgeois democratic revolution nor a linear evolution of productive modes. Instead, it has undergone “a gradual and uneven purging of the social and capitalist character of society and the state, slow, irregular and partial” (ibid., p. 145).

## Conclusions

According to decolonial thought, coloniality is the symbolic and material continuation of colonialism, reproduced indefinitely through its persistence in institutions and social practices. While colonialism may have ended in formal political terms, its epistemic and structural foundations remain embedded in the functioning of modern nation-states. To this day, modernity and its values—such as capital accumulation, profit, and exploitation—are conceived through a Eurocentric lens.

This article sought to demonstrate that, for decolonial authors, the foundations of colonial domination are rooted in the logic of the modern/colonial world system, whose structure relies fundamentally on three interlocking categories: race, gender, and the division of labor. These are not merely classificatory tools, but mechanisms of control and exclusion that sustain global hierarchies.

In this regard, Luciana Ballestrin (2013, p. 110) synthesized the main contributions of the Modernity/Coloniality group in five central points:

- (1) The re-narration of Latin America as the founding space of both colonialism and modernity;
- (2) Its role as the first laboratory for race-based colonial violence;
- (3) The concept of colonial difference, which explains the foundational logic behind modern hierarchies;
- (4) The exposure of the coloniality of power, knowledge, and being as an ongoing structure of domination, even after the formal end of colonialism and imperialism;
- (5) The development of a decolonial perspective that proposes radical and plural horizons for human emancipation and knowledge production.

From this perspective, Latin America appears not only as a region subordinated to the global capitalist system, but as the original testing ground for the modern logic of racial and gender domination. As Quijano (2000, pp. 141-142) asserted, dependence on Europe was less about explicit political or economic subordination and more about the fact that the dominant groups in Latin America were more inclined to follow the interests of the European bourgeoisie.

This global power structure—defined by racism, patriarchy, and capitalist exploitation—not only sustained colonialism but continues to uphold Latin America's peripheral position in the world system. The invasion of the Americas, as Ballestrin (2013, p. 102) noted, marked the arrival of the heterosexual/white/Christian/patriarchal/European/capitalist male, and with him, the reproduction of a global order based on exclusion, classification, and domination.

The coloniality of power and knowledge thus determines the South's subordinate position, not just economically, but epistemologically and ontologically. In this sense, Quijano (2000, p. 146) warned that:

any category used to characterize the political process in Latin America has always been a partial and distorted way of examining this reality. This is an inevitable consequence of the Eurocentric perspective, in which a unilinear and unidirectional evolutionism is mixed contradictorily with the dualistic vision of history [...] What we have been able to advance and conquer in terms of political and civil rights, in a necessary redistribution of power, of which the decolonization of society is the presupposition and starting point, is now being swept away in the process of reconcentration of the control of power in global capitalism and under the management of the same people responsible for the coloniality of power. It's time, then, to learn to free ourselves from the Eurocentric mirror in which our image is always, necessarily, distorted.

In this light, decolonization must not only dismantle the political and economic remnants of colonialism, but also its deeply embedded racial and gendered structures, which continue to define whose knowledge counts, whose lives matter, and who gets to belong in the modern world.

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