# Coloniality: The Darker Side of Modernity

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**I.**

I was intrigued, many years ago (around 1991), when I saw on the 'newsstand' of a book store the title of Stephen Toulmin's latest book: *Cosmopolis, The Hidden Agenda of Modernity* (1990). I went to a coffee shop, across the street from Borders in Ann Arbor and devoured the book over a cup of coffee: what was the hidden agenda of modernity? was the intriguing question. Shortly after that I was in Bogotá and found a book just published: *Los conquistados: 1492 y la población indígena de América* (1992). The last chapter of that book caught my attention. It was authored by Anibal Quijano of whom I had heard, but was not familiar. The article was titled 'Coloniality and modernity/rationality'.[1] I bought the book and found another coffee shop nearby. I devoured the article and the reading was a sort of epiphany. At that time I was finishing the manuscript of *The Darker Side of the Renaissance* (1995), but did not incorporate the article. There was much I had to think about and the manuscript was already framed. As soon I handed the manuscript to the press, I concentrated on 'coloniality', which became a central concept in *Local Histories/ Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledge and Border Thinking* (2000). After the publication of the book, I wrote a lengthy theoretical article, 'The Geopolitics of Knowledge and the Colonial Difference', published in *South Atlantic Quarterly* (2002). For Toulmin the hidden agenda of modernity was the humanistic river running behind instrumental reason. For me the hidden agenda (and darker side) of modernity was coloniality. What follows is a recap of the work I have since done in collaboration with members of the collective modernity/coloniality.[2]

The basic thesis is the following: 'modernity' is a European narrative that hides its darker side, 'coloniality'. Coloniality, in other words, is constitutive of modernity — there is no modernity without coloniality.[3] Hence, today the common expression 'global modernities' imply 'global colonialities' in the precise sense that the colonial matrix of power (coloniality, for short) is being disputed by many contenders: if there cannot be modernity without coloniality, there cannot be either global modernities without global colonialities. That is the logic of the polycentric capitalist world of today. Consequently, de-colonial thinking and doing emerged, from the sixteenth century on, as responses to the oppressive and imperial bent of modern European ideals projected to, and enacted in, the non-European world.

**II.**

I will start with two scenarios — one from the sixteenth century and the other from the late twentieth and the first decade of the twenty-first centuries.

**1** The article is available in English: 'Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality', *Cultural Studies*, vol. 21, nos. 2–3, pp. 155–67 (2007).

**2** The first publication in English of the work done by the collective since 1998 has been published in *Cultural Studies*, vol. 21, nos. 1–2 (2007). A special issue on 'Globalisation and the Decolonial Option'.

**3** The point has been argued several times in the past decade. See for instance, Arturo Escobar, 'Beyond the Third World: imperial globality, global coloniality, and anti-globalization social movements', *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 25, no. 1, pp. 207–30 (2004).

**2.1.** Let's imagine the world around 1500. It was, briefly stated, a polycentric and non-capitalist world. There were several co-existing civilisations, some of long histories, others being formed around that time. In China, the Ming Dynasty ruled from 1368 to 1644. It was a centre of trade and a civilisation of long history. Around 200 BC, Chinese Huángdinate (often wrongly called 'Chinese Empire') co-existed with the Roman Empire. By 1500, the former Roman Empire became the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nations, which still co-existed with the Chinese Huángdinate ruled by the Ming Dynasty. Out of the dismembering of the Islamic Caliphate (formed in the sixth century and ruled by the Umayyads in the seventh and eighth centuries, and by the Abassids from the eight to the thirteenth centuries) in the fourteenth century three sultanates emerged. The Ottoman Sultanate in Anatolia with its centre in Constantinople; the Safavid Sultane with its centre in Baku, Azerbaijan and the Mughal Sultanate formed out of the ruins of the Delhi Sultanate that lasted from 1206 to 1526. The Mughals (whose first Sultan was Babur, descendent of Genghis Kan and Timur) extended from 1526 to 1707. By 1520, Moscovites had expelled the Golden Horde and declared Moscow the 'Third Rome'. The history of the Russian Tsarate began. In Africa, the Oyo Kingdom (around what is today Nigeria), formed by the Yoruba nation, was the largest Kingdom in West Africa encountered by European explorers. The Benin Kingdom, after Oyo the second largest in Africa, lasted from 1440 to 1897. Last but not least, the Incas in Tawantinsuyu and the Aztecs in Anáhuac were two sophisticated civilisations by the time of the Spanish arrival. What happened then in the sixteenth century that would change the world order transforming it into the one in which we are living today? The advent of 'modernity' could be a simple and general answer, but... when, how, why, where?

**2.2.** At the beginning of the twenty-first century the world is interconnected by a single type of economy (capitalism)[4] and distinguished by a diversity of political theories and practices. Dependency theory should be reviewed in the light of these changes. But I will limit myself to distinguishing two overall orientations. On the one hand, the globalisation of capitalist economy and the diversification of global politics is taking place. On the other, we are witnessing the multiplication and diversification of anti-neo-liberal globalisation (e.g., anti-global capitalism).

On the first orientation, China, India, Russia, Iran, Venezuela and the emerging South American Union have already made clear that they are no longer willing to follow up on uni-directional orders coming from the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank or the White House. Beneath Iran there is the history of Persia and the Safavid Sultanate; beneath Iraq the history of the Ottoman Sultanate. The past sixty years of Western entry in China (Marxism and capitalism) did not replace China's history with the history of Europe and the United States since 1500; and the same with India. On the contrary, it reinforced China's aim for sovereignty. In Africa, the imperial partition of Western countries between the end of the nineteenth and early-twentieth century (that provoked the First World War) did not replace the past of Africa with the past of Western Europe. And so in South America, 500 years of colonial rule by peninsular officers and, since early 1900, by Creole and Mestizo elites, did not erase the energy, force and memories of the Indian past (cf., current issues in Bolivia, Ecuador, Colombia, South of Mexico and Guatemala); neither did it erase the histories and memories of communities of African descent in Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Venezuela and the insular Caribbean. Moving in the opposite direction was the emergence of the state of Israel in 1948, which exploded toward the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century.

**4** Every time I say 'capitalism' I mean it in the sense of Max Weber: 'The spirit of capitalism is here used in this specific sense, it is the *spirit of modern capitalism*... Western European and American capitalism... ' *The Protestant Ethics and the Spirit of Capitalism* [1904/05], London: Routledge, 1992, pp. 51–52.



On the second orientation, we are observing many non-official (rather than non-governmental) transnational organisations not only manifesting themselves 'against' capitalism, globalisation and questioning modernity, but also opening up global but non-capitalist horizons and de-linking from the idea that there is a single and main modernity surrounded by peripheral or alternative ones. Not necessarily rejecting modernity but making clear that modernity goes hand in hand with coloniality and, therefore, modernity has to be assumed in both its glories and its crimes. Let's refer to this global domain 'de-colonial cosmopolitanism'.[5] No doubt that artists and museums are playing and have an important role to play in global formations of trans-modern and de-colonial subjectivities.

**III.**

What happened in between the two scenarios outlined above, the sixteenth and the twenty-first centuries? Historian Karen Armstrong — looking at the history of the West from the perspective of a historian of Islam — has made two crucial points.

Armstrong underscores the singularity of Western achievements in relation to the known history until the sixteenth century. She notes two salient spheres: economy and epistemology. In the sphere of economy, Armstrong points out that 'the new society of Europe and its American colonies had a different economic basis' that consisted in reinvesting the surplus in order to increase production. The first radical transformation in the domain of economy that allowed the West to '*reproduce its resources indefinitely*' is generally associated with colonialism.[6]

The second transformation, epistemological, is generally associated with the European Renaissance. Epistemological here shall be extended to encompass both science/knowledge and arts/meaning. Armstrong locates the transformation in the domain of knowledge in the sixteenth century, when Europeans 'achieved a scientific revolution that gave them greater control over the environment than anybody had achieved before'.[7]

No doubt, Armstrong is right in highlighting the relevance of a new type of economy (capitalism) and the scientific revolution. They both fit and correspond to the celebratory rhetoric of modernity — that is, the rhetoric of salvation and newness, based on European achievements during the Renaissance.

There is, however, a hidden dimension of events that were taking place at the same time, both in the sphere of economy and in the sphere of knowledge: *the expendability of human life* (e.g., enslaved Africans) and of life in general from the Industrial Revolution into the twenty-first century. Afro-Trinidadian politician and intellectual Eric Williams succinctly described this situation by noting that: 'one of the most important consequences of the Glorious Revolution of 1688 [...] was the impetus it gave to the principle of free trade.... Only in one particular did the freedom accorded in the slave trade differ from the freedom accorded in other trades — the commodity involved was man.'[8] Thus, hidden behind the rhetoric of modernity, human lives became expendable to the benefit of increasing wealth and such expendability was justified by the naturalisation of the racial ranking of human beings.

In between the two scenarios described above, the idea of 'modernity' came into the picture. It appeared first as a double colonisation, of time and of space. Colonisation of time was created by the simultaneous invention of the Middle Age in the process of conceptualising the Renaissance;[9] the colonisation of space

**5** Walter D. Mignolo, 'Cosmopolitanism and the De-Colonial Option', in Torill Strand (ed.), *Cosmopolitanism in the Making*. Special issue of *Philosophy and Education. An International Journal*, forthcoming.

**6** Karen Armstrong, *Islam: A Short Story*, New York: The Modern Library, 2000, p. 142 (emphasis added).

**7** Ibid., p. 142.

**8** Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery*, Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1944, p. 32.

**9** John Dagenais, 'The Postcolonial Laura', *MLQ: Modern Language Quarterly*, vol. 65, no. 3, September 2004, pp. 365–89.

by the colonisation and conquest of the New World. In the colonisation of space, modernity encounters its darker side, coloniality. During the time span 1500 to 2000 three cumulative (and not successive) faces of modernity are discernable: the first is the Iberian and Catholic face led by Spain and Portugal (1500–1750, approximately); the second, the 'heart of Europe' (Hegel) face lead by England, France and Germany (1750–1945); and finally the US American face lead by the United States (1945–2000). Since then, a new global order began to unfold: a polycentric world interconnected by the same type of economy.

In the last quarter of the twentieth century, 'modernity' was questioned in its own *chronology* and ideals, within Europe and the United States: the term post-modernity refers to such critical arguments. More recently, altermodernity is coming out as a new term and period, within Europe.[10] *Spatially*, expressions such as alternative modernities, subaltern modernities and peripheral modernities were introduced to account for modernity but from non-European perspectives. All of them have one common problem: these narratives and arguments maintain the centrality of Euro-American modernity or, if you wish, assume one 'modernity of reference' and put themselves in subordinate positions. All these narratives have another element in common: they assume that 'the world is flat' in its triumphal march toward the future while concealing coloniality. And finally, all of them overlooked the possible reality that local actors in the non-European world are claiming 'our modernity' while de-linking from Western imperatives, be it the corporate camp claiming 'our capitalist modernity' or the de-colonial camp claiming 'our non-capitalist, de-colonial modernity'.

The corporate claim (de-Westernisation) is being forcefully argued by Singaporean Kishore Mahbubani, among others. Mahbubani had made the case for the rise of the 'new Asian hemisphere and the shift of global power'.[11] 'Modernity' is not rejected but appropriated in the current shift lead by East and South Asia. Mahbubani's provocative question: 'Can Asians Think?' is, on the one hand a confrontation with Western epistemic racism and, on the other, a defiant and disobedient appropriation of Western 'modernity': Why would the West feel threatened by Asian appropriation of capitalism and modernity if such an appropriation will benefit the world and humanity at large, he asks?[12]

In the de-colonial camp (that is, not the postmodern and the altermodern), transmodernity would be the parallel concept. This type of argument is already at work among Islamic intellectuals. Being part of the modern-world system and entrenched unabashedly with European modernity, a global future lies in working toward the rejection of modernity and genocidal reason, and the appropriation of its emancipating ideals.[13] Similarly, claims are being made in the growing con-versations on 'de-colonial cosmopolitanism'. While Kant's cosmopolitanism was Euro-centred and imperial, de-colonial cosmopolitanism becomes critical of both, Kant's imperial legacies and of polycentric capitalism in the name of de-Westernisation.[14] For these reasons, trans-modernity would be a more fitting description of envisioned futures from de-colonial perspectives.[15]

**IV.**

The preceding explorations are based on the hypothesis that modernity and coloniality are two sides of the same coin. 'Coloniality' is short hand for 'colonial matrix (or order) of power'; it describes and explains coloniality as the hidden and darker side of modernity. The hypothesis runs as follows:

**10** See for instance the symposium on Global Modernities, a conceptual debate on *Altermodern: Tate Triennal 2009 Exhibition* (http://www.tate.org.uk).

**11** *The New Asian Hemisphere: The Irresistible Shift of Global Power to the East*, Kishore Mahbubani, 2008. Mahbubani is dean of the Lee Kwan Yee School of Public Policy in Singapore and collaborator for the Financial Times. See an illuminating interview in youtube.

**12** See interview with Kishore Mahbubani by Suzy Hansen in http://dir.salon.com.

**13** Kaldoum Shaman, *Islam and the Orientalist World-System*, London: Paradigm Publishers, 2008.

**14** Walter D. Mignolo, 'The Darker Side of the Enlightenment. A Decolonial Reading of Kant's Geography' in Stuart Elden and Eduardo Mendieta (eds.), *Kant's Geography*, Stony Brook: Stony Brook Press, forthcoming.

**15** See Enrique Dussel, 'Modernity, Eurocentrism and Transmodernity: in dialogue with Charles Taylor', Biblioteca Virtual CLACSO. For an analytical survey of 'transmodernity' and 'coloniality', see Ramón Grosfóguel: 'Trans-modernity, Border Thinking and Global Coloniality. Decolonizing Political Economy and Postcolonial Studies', *Eurozine*, 2007, (http://www.eurozine.com).

**16** 'On the Colonization of Amerindian Languages and Memories: Renaissance Theories of Writing and the Discontinuity of the Classical Tradition', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 34, no. 2, 1992, pp. 301–30 (http://www.jstor.org).



**17** See Fredric Jameson, *A Singular Modernity. Essays on the Ontology of the Present*, London: Verso, 2002.

**18** For example, in Africa, Kwame Gyekye: *Tradition and Modernity. Philosophical Reflections on the African Experience*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997; in Iran, Ramin Jahanbegloo (ed.), *Iran: Between Modernity and Tradition*, Laham, Md: Lexigton Books, 2004; in India, Ashis Nandy, *Talking India. Ashis Nandy in Conversation with Ramin Jahangegloo*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2006. In South America, where the intelligentsia is basically of European descent (contrary to Africa, Iran or India, where the intelligentsia is basically 'native', that is, not of European descent), the concern is more with modernity than with tradition, since 'tradition' for such ethno-class is basically European tradition. Which is not the case for Africans, Iranians or Indians.

**1.** As I mentioned before, the European Renaissance was conceived as such, establishing the bases for the idea of modernity, through the double colonisation of time and space. The double colonisation was tantamount with the invention of European traditions. One was Europe's own tradition (colonisation of time). The other was the invention of non-European traditions: the non-European world that co-existed before 1500 (colonisation of space). The invention of America was indeed the first step in the invention of non-European traditions that modernity was in charge of superseding by conversion, civilisation and later by development.[16]

**2.** 'Modernity' became — in relation to the non-European world — synonymous with salvation and newness. From the Renaissance to the Enlightenment, it was spearheaded by Christian Theology as well as by secular Renaissance Humanism (still linked to theology). The rhetoric of salvation by conversion to Christianity was translated into the rhetoric of salvation by the civilising mission, from the eighteenth century on, when England and France displaced Spain leading to Western imperial/colonial expansion. The rhetoric of newness was complemented with the idea of 'progress'. Salvation, newness and progress took a new turn — and a new vocabulary — after the Second World War, when the United States took over the previous leadership of England and France, supported the struggle for decolonisation in Africa and Asia and started an economic global project under the name of 'development and modernisation'. We know today the consequences of salvation by development. The new version of this rhetoric, 'globalisation and free trade', is under dispute.

From de-colonial perspectives, then, these four stages and versions of salvation and newness coexist today in diachronic accumulation although from the (post)modern perspective and self-fashioned narrative of modernity, based on the celebration of salvation and newness, each stage supersedes and makes the previous one obsolete: *it builds on newness and on modernity's own tradition.*

**3.** The rhetoric of modernity (salvation, newness, progress, development) went hand in hand with the logic of coloniality. In some cases, it was through colonisation. In other cases, like China, it was by diplomatic and commercial manipulations from the Opium War to Mao Ze-dong. The period of neo-liberal globalisation (from Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher to the collapse of the George W. Bush administration with the failure in Iraq and on Wall Street), exemplifies the logic of coloniality taken to its extreme: to the extreme of revealing itself in its own spectacular failure. The economic failure of Wall Street coupled with the failure in Iraq, opened up the gates to the polycentric world order.

In summation, modernity/coloniality are two sides of the same coin. Coloniality is constitutive of modernity; there is no modernity, there cannot be, without coloniality. Postmodernity and altermodernity do not get rid of coloniality. They only present a new mask that, intentionally or not, continues to hide it.

**V.**

Because the idea of modernity was built as solely European and, in that argument, there was and is just a 'singular' modernity,[17] it engendered a series of latecomers and wannabes (e.g., alternative, peripheral, subaltern, altermodernities). All of which reproduce the vexing question on 'modernity and tradition', a question you do not find much debated among Euro-American intellectuals. For that very reason, the debates about 'modernity and tradition' were and still are a concern, mainly, of intellectuals from the non-European (and US) world.[18]

Basically, the problems and concerns with modernity and tradition are enunciated from or in relation to the ex-Third World and of non-European histories — Japan, for example. In/for Japan, modernity was and is an issue extensively explored and debated. Harry Harootunian explored the issue in detail in his book *Overcome by Modernity. History, Culture and Community in Interwar Japan* (2000); in Russia, modernity was an issue since Peter and Catherine the Great who wanted to jump on the band-wagon of European modernity, but it was too late and ended up in reproducing, in Russia, a sort of second-class modernity.[19] China and India are not exempt. I have mentioned de-Westernisation arguments advanced in East and South East Asia. Sanjib Baruah recently summarised 'India and China' debating modernity. In a section revealingly entitled 'engaging the modern', Baruah observes that India is — in spite of its recent corporate face — the home of strong intellectual opposition to ideas of development and modernisation, following the teaching of Mahatma Gandhi.[20] His analysis points toward conflictive scenarios confronting arguments in defence of 'wanting to become modern and to develop' with those engaging in radical criticisms of modernity and development.[21] The scenario is a common one in Africa and in South America. But in that general scenario, what is really at stake in modernisation is vested in economic development. Baruah writes:

> Critics of modernity enjoy quite a bit of intellectual prestige in India (though this should not be confused with an actual adherence to their ideas). India is home to sophisticated intellectual and activist opposition to mainstream ideas on development and modernisation. As the China-historian Prasenjit Duara points out, counter narratives to modernity have 'almost as much visibility as the narrative of progress' in India. Viewed comparatively, the 'general acceptability and prestige' of Gandhi's anti-modern ideas in India is remarkable, even though policymakers ignore his ideas in practice.[22]

In England, Anthony Giddens ended his argument in his celebrated book *The Consequences of Modernity* (1990) by asking himself: 'Is Modernity a Western Project?' He sees the nation-state and systematic capitalist production as the European anchor of modernity. That is, control of authority and control of economy grounded on the historical foundation of imperial Europe. In this sense, the answer to his question was 'a blatant yes'.[23]

What Giddens says is true. So, what is the problem? The problem is that it is half true: it is true in the story told by someone who dwells, comfortably one should think, in the house of 'modernity'. If we accept that 'modernity' is a Western project let's then take responsibility for 'coloniality' (the darker and constitutive side of modernity): the crimes and violence justified in the name of modernity. 'Coloniality' in other words is one of the most tragic 'consequences of modernity' and at the same time the most hopeful in that it has engendered the global march toward de-coloniality.

**VI.**

If you dwell in the history of British India, rather than in Britain, the world doesn't look the same. In Britain you may see it through Giddens lenses; in India probably through Gandhi's lenses. Would you make a choice or work with the undeniable

**19** See Madina Tlostanova, 'The Janus-Faced Empire Distorting Orientalist Discourses. Gender, Race and Religion in the Russian/(post) Soviet Construction of the Orient', *WKO* (Spring 2008); Leonid Heretz, *Russia on the Eve of Modernity. Popular Religion and Traditional Culture under the Last Tsars*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007; Eugene Ivakhnenko, 'A Threshold-Dominant Model of the Imperial and Colonial Discourses of Russia', *South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol. 105, no. 3, 2006, pp. 595–616.

**20** Sanjib Baruah, 'India and China: Debating Modernity', *World Policy Journal*, vol. 23, no. 4, 2006–07, p. 62.

**21** 'Modernisation' since 1945 translates as 'development', that is, conflating the spirit of an historical period with economic imperial designs. The argument has been made several times. For instance, Arturo Escobar, *Encountering Development. The Making and Unmaking of the Third World*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994; for the Mediterranean area, see Ella Habiba Shohat, 'The Narrative of the Nation and the Discourse of Modernization: The Case of Arab-Jews in Israel', 1998 (http://www.worldbank.org).

**22** Baruah, op. cit., p. 63.

**23** Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity*, California: Stanford University Press, 1990, p. 174.



conflictive co-existence of both? Indian historian and political theorist, Partha Chatterjee addressed the problem of 'modernity in two languages'. The article, collected in his book *A Possible India* (1998), is the English version of a lecture he delivered in Bengali and presented in Calcutta.[24] The English version is not just a translation but also a theoretical reflection on the geo-politics of knowledge and epistemic and political de-linking.

Unapologetically and forcefully, Chatterjee structured his talk on the distinction between 'our modernity' and 'their modernity'. Rather than a single modernity defended by postmodern intellectuals in the 'First World' Chatterjee plants a solid pillar to build the future of 'our' modernity — not independent from 'their modernity' (because Western expansion is a fact), but unrepentantly and unashamedly 'ours'.

This is one of the strengths of Chatterjee's argument. But remember, first, that the British entered India, commercially, toward the end of the eighteenth century and, politically, during the first half of the nineteenth century when England and France, after Napoleon, extended their tentacles in Asia and Africa. So for Chatterjee, in contradistinction with South American and Caribbean intellectuals, 'modernity' means Enlightenment and not Renaissance. Not surprisingly Chatterjee takes Immanuel Kant's 'What is Enlightenment' as a pillar in the foundation of the European idea of modernity. For Kant, Enlightenment meant that Man (in the sense of the human being) was coming of age, abandoning its immaturity, reaching his freedom. Chatterjee points out Kant's silence (intentionally or not) and Michel Foucault's short sightedness when reading Kant's essays. Missing in Kant's celebration of freedom and maturity and in Foucault's celebration was the fact that Kant's concept of Man and humanity was based on the European concept idea of humanity from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment and not in the 'lesser humans' that populated the world beyond the heart of Europe. So, 'enlightenment' was not for everybody, unless they become 'modern' in the European idea of modernity.

One point in Chatterjee's insightful interpretation of Kant-Foucault is relevant for the argument I am developing here. I would surmise, following Chatterjee's argument, that Kant and Foucault lacked the colonial experience and political interest propelled by the colonial wound. Not that they had to have it. But yes, that their view cannot be universalised. If you have been born, educated and your subjectivity formed in Germany and France, your conception of the world and feeling will be different from someone born and raised in British India. Thus Chatterjee can state that 'we — in India — have built up an intricately differentiated structure of authorities which specifies who has the right to say what on which subjects'.[25] In 'Modernity in two languages' Chatterjee reminds us that the 'Third World' has been mainly 'consumer' of First World scholarship and knowledge:

> Somehow, from the very beginning, we had made a shrewd guess that given the close complicity between modern knowledge and modern regimes of power, we would for ever remain consumers of universal modernity; never would we be taken as serious producers.[26]

Chatterjee concludes that it is for this reason that 'we have tried, for over a hundred years, to take our eyes away from this chimera of universal modernity and clear up a space where we might become the creators of our own modernity'.[27] I imagine you are getting the point. 'The other' (the *anthropos*) decided to disobey: epistemic and political disobedience that consist of the appropriation of European modernity while dwelling in the house of coloniality.

**24** Partha Chatterjee, 'Talking About Modernity in Two Languages', *A Possible India. Essays in Political Criticism*, New Delhi: Oxford India, 1998, pp. 263–85.

**25** Ibid., pp. 273–74.

**26** Ibid., p. 275.

**27** Ibid.

**VII.**

It is not common to think of international law as related to the making of 'modernity'. I will argue in this section that international law (more exactly legal theology) contributed in the sixteenth century to the creation — a creation demanded by the 'discovery' of America — of racial differences as we sense them today. What to do, Spanish legal theologians asked themselves, with the 'Indians' (in the Spanish imaginary) and, more concretely, with their land? International law was founded on racial assumptions: 'Indians' had to be conceived, if humans, as not quite rational, although ready for conversion.[28] 'Modernity' showed up its face in the epistemic assumptions and arguments of legal theology to decide and determine who was what. Simultaneously, the face of 'coloniality' was disguised under the inferior status of the invented inferior. Here you have a clear case of coloniality as the needed and constitutive darker side of modernity. Modernity/coloniality is articulated here on the ontological and epistemic differences: Indians are, ontologically, lesser human beings and, in consequence, not fully rational.[29]

Conversely, museums have been counted in the making of modernity.[30] However, questions about museums (as institutions) and coloniality (as the hidden logic of modernity) have not been asked. It is taken for granted that museums are 'naturally' part of the European imagination and creativity. In VII.1 I attempt to unveil coloniality under international law regulating international relations. And in VII.2, I open up the question about museums and coloniality. Museums, as we know them today, did not exist before 1500. They have been built and transformed — on one hand — to be the institutions where Western memory is honoured and displayed; where European modernity conserves its tradition (the colonisation of time) and — on the other hand — to be the institutions in which the difference of non-European traditions is recognised.[31] The open question is then how to de-colonise museums and to use museums to de-colonise the reproduction of Western colonisation of time and space.[32]

**VII. 1**

Francisco de Vitoria is rightly celebrated mainly among Spanish and other European scholars for being one of the fathers of international law. His treatise, *Relectio de Indis* is considered foundational in the history of the discipline.

Central to Vitoria's argument was the question of *ius gentium* (rights of the people or rights of nations). *Ius gentium* allowed Vitoria to put at the same level of humanity both Spaniards and Indians. He did not pay attention to the fact that by collapsing Quechuas, Aymaras, Nahuatls, Mayas, etc, under the label 'Indians' he was already stepping into a racial classification. So it was not difficult for Vitoria to slide smoothly into the second step of his argument: although equal to Spaniards in the domain of *ius gentium*, Vitoria concluded (or he knew it first and then argued it) Indians were sort of childish and needed the guidance and protection of Spaniards.

At that moment Vitoria inserted the *colonial difference* (ontological and epistemic) into international law. The colonial difference operates by converting differences into values and establishing a hierarchy of human beings ontologically and epistemically. Ontologically, is assumed that there are inferior human beings. Epistemically, it is assumed that inferior human beings are rational and aesthetically deficient.[33] Legal scholar Anthony Anghie has provided an insightful analysis of the historical foundational moment of the colonial difference.[34] In a nutshell the argument is the following: Indians and Spaniards are equal in the face of natural law as both, by natural law, are endowed with *ius gentium*. In making this move, Vitoria prevented the Pope and divine law from legislating on human issues.

However, once Vitoria established the distinction between 'principes Christianos' (as well as Castilians in general) and 'los bárbaros' (e.g., the *anthropos*) on the other, and he made his best effort to balance his arguments based on the equality he attributed to both people by natural law and *ius gentium*, he turns into justifying Spaniard's *rights and limits* toward 'the barbarians' to expropriate or not; to declare war or not; to govern or not. Communication and interaction between Christians and barbarians are one-sided: *the barbarians have no say in whatever Vitoria said because barbarians were deprived from sovereignty even when they are recognised as equal per natural law and ius gentium.*

The move is foundational to the legal and philosophical constitution of modernity/coloniality and the principle of reasoning would be maintained through the centuries, modified in the vocabulary from barbarians to primitives, from primitives to communists, from communists to terrorists.[35] Thus *orbis christianius*, secular cosmopolitanism and economic globalism are names corresponding to different moments of the colonial order of power and distinct imperial leadership (from Spain to England to the United States).

Anghie made three decisive points about Vitoria and the historical origins of international law that illuminate how modernity/coloniality are bound together and how salvation justifies oppression and violence. The first is 'that Vitoria is concerned, not so much with the *problem of order among sovereign states but the problem of order among societies belonging to two different cultural systems*'.[36]

The second is that the framework is there to regulate its violation. And when the violation occurs, then the creators and enforcers of the framework had a justification to invade and use force to punish and expropriate the violator. This logic was wonderfully rehearsed by John Locke in his *Second Treatise on Government* (1681). One can say that 'coloniality', in Vitoria, set the stage not only for international law but also for 'modern and European' conceptions of governmentality. It seems obvious that Locke did not get as much from Machiavelli as from the emergence of international law in the sixteenth century, and in the way that Vitoria, and his followers, settled to discuss both the question of 'property' and 'governance' in the interaction between Christians and the barbarians.[37]

The third is that the 'framework' is not dictated by divine or natural law but by human interests, and in this case, the interests of Christian Castilian males. Thus, the 'framework' presupposes a very well located and singular locus of enunciation that, guarded by divine and natural law, it is presumed to be uni-versal. And on the other hand, the uni-versal and uni-lateral frame 'includes' the barbarians or Indians (a principle that is valid for all politics of inclusion we hear today) in their difference thus justifying any action Christians will take to tame them. The construction of *the colonial difference* goes hand in hand with the establishment of *exteriority*: exteriority is the place in which the outside (e.g., *anthropos*) is invented in the process of creating the inside (e.g., *humanitas*) to secure the safe space where the enunciator dwells.[38]

Clearly, then, Vitoria's work suggests that the conventional view that sovereignty doctrine was developed in the West and then transferred to the non-European world is, in important respects, misleading. *Sovereignty doctrine acquired its character through the colonial encounter*. This is the darker history of sovereignty,

**28** Thus it is not surprising to find today growing concerns, and a number of scholars, working on the de-colonisation of international law, Branwen Gruffydd Jones (ed.), Boulder/New York: *Decolonizing International Relations*, Roman and Littlefield Publishers Inc., 2006.

**29** For the ontological and epistemic difference, see Nelson Maldonado-Torres, 'On the Coloniality of Being: Contributions to the Development of a Concept', *Cultural Studies* vol. 21, nos. 2–3, 2007, pp. 240–70.

**30** I am thinking, certainly, of Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum. History, Theory, Politics.* London: Routledge, 1995, pp. 60ff, but also of more specific studies such as Nick Prior, *Museums and Modernity, Art Galleries and the Making of Modern Culture*, Oxford: Berg Publisher, 2002, and Gisela Weiss, *Sinnstiftung in der Provinz: Westfälische Museen im Kaiserreich*, Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöning Verlag, 2005; and the review by Eva Giloi for *H-German,* June, 2007 (https://www.h-net.org).

**31** Walter D. Mignolo, 'Museums in the Colonial Horizon of Modernity', CIMAM Annual Conference, São Paulo, November 2005, pp. 66–77, (http://www.cimam.org).

**32** Two examples of de-colonial uses of museums installations are Fred Wilson's *Mining the Museum* (http://www.citypaper.com); and Pedro Lasch, *Black Mirror/Espejo Negro* (http://www.ambriente.com).

**33** A case in point could found in Immanuel Kant, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime* (particularly section IV), Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960.

**34** Antony Anghie, 'Francisco de Vitoria and the Colonial Origins of International Law' in Eve Darian-Smith and Peter Fitzpatrick (eds.), *Laws of the Post-colonial*, Ann Arbor: the University of Michigan Press, 1999, pp. 89–108.

**35** A de-colonial history of international law can be found in Siba N'Zatioula Grovogui, *Sovereigns, Quasi Sovereigns, and Africans*, Minneapolis: the University of Minnesota Press, 1996.

**36** Anghie, op. cit., p. 102 (emphasis added).

**37** Franz Hinkelammert's analysis of Locke's inversion of human rights is very helpful to understand the double side/double density of 'modernity/coloniality' and how the rhetoric of modernity continues to obliterate coloniality. See his 'The Hidden Logic of Modernity: Locke's Inversion of Human Rights', 2004.

**38** It is certainly very telling that a Japanese scholar, Nishitan Osanu, has cogently argued that 'anthropos' and 'humanitas' are two Western concepts. Indeed, they produce the effect of reality when the modern ideals of 'humanitas' cannot exist without the modern/colonial invention of 'anthropos'. Think of the debate of immigration in Europe, for example. There you have modernity/coloniality at its best. See Nishitai Osamu, 'Anthropos and Humanitas, Two Western Concepts' in Naoki Sakai and Jon Solomon (eds.), *Translation, Biopolitics, Colonial Difference*, Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2006, pp. 259–74.

which cannot be understood by any account of the doctrine that assumes the existence of sovereign states.

Briefly stated: if modernity is a Western invention (as Giddens says), so too is coloniality. Therefore, it seems very difficult to overcome coloniality from a Western modern perspective. De-colonial arguments are pressing this blind spot in both right-wing and left-wing oriented arguments.[39]

**VII. 2**

In the context at hand, 'museums' as we know them today (and their forerunner — Wunderkammer, Kunstkammer) have been instrumental in shaping modern/colonial subjectivities by splitting Kunstkammer into 'museums of arts' and 'museums of natural histories'.[40] Initially, Peter the Great's Kunstkammer was put in place toward 1720, while the British Museum (founded as a Cabinet of Curiosity) was created later (toward 1750). However, the institution of Kunstkammer in the West became the locale for curiosities brought from European colonies, most of the time, by looting. The history of the building, Le Louvre, goes back to the Middle Ages. But the museum, Le Louvre, came into being after the French Revolution.

Nowadays, a process of de-Westernisation has already begun. The hundreds of museums being constructed in China are part of this process. De-Westernisation is a process parallel to de-coloniality at the level of the state and of the economy. Kishore Mahbubani, quoted above, is one of the most consistent and coherent voices of de-Westernisation and the political, economic and epistemic shift to Asia.[41]

One can ask, then, given this exhibition titled 'Modernologies' what is the place of museums and art, in general, in the rhetoric of modernity and the colonial matrix of power? How can museums become places of de-colonisation of knowledge and of being or, on the contrary, how can they remain institutions and instruments of control, regulation and reproduction of coloniality?[42] By asking these questions, we are entering here in plain territory of knowledge, meaning and subjectivity. If international law legalised economic appropriation of land, natural resources and non-European labour (of which 'outsourcing' today shows the independence of the economic sector from patriotic or nationalist arguments of 'developed' states) and warranted the accumulation of money, universities and museums (and lately mainstream media) warranted the accumulation of meaning. The complementarity of accumulation of money and accumulation of meaning (hence, the rhetoric of modernity as salvation and progress) sustains the narratives of modernity. While colonialilty is the unavoidable consequence of 'the unfinished project of modernity' (as Jürgen Habermas would say) — since coloniality is constitutive of modernity — de-coloniality (in the sense of global de-colonial projects) becomes the global option and horizons of liberation. The horizon of such liberation is a transmodern, non-capitalist world, no longer mapped by 'la pensée unique', adapting Ignacio Ramonet's expression, neither from the right nor from the left: coloniality engendered de-coloniality.

**VIII. Coda**

I hope to have contributed to understanding how the logic of coloniality was structured during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; to understand how it changed hands, was transformed and adapted to the new circumstances, although maintaining the spheres (and the interrelations) in which management and control of authority, of economy, of people (subjectivity, gender, sexuality) and of knowledge

**39** Anghie, op. cit., p. 103 (emphasis added).

**40** See the cogent argument, on this issue, by Donald Preziosi, 'Brain of the Earth's Body: Museums and the Framing of Modernity', in Bettina Messias Carbonell (ed.), *Museum Studies. An Anthology of Contexts*, London: Blackwell, 2004, pp. 71–84.

**41** See Mahubani, op. cit., note 9, and also his provocative arguments under the heading of 'Can Asians Think?' (http://dir.salon.com).

**42** For example, *Modernity in Central Europe*, *1918–1945* is one of those exhibitions that 'enhances' Western Europe by embracing modernity. National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C, 10 June – 10 September 2007.



has been played out in building the mono-centric world order from 1500 to 2000; and how that order is being transformed into a polycentric one.

Now what is exactly the colonial matrix of power/coloniality? Let's imagine it in two semiotic levels: the level of the enunciated and the level of the enunciation. At the level of the enunciated, the colonial matrix operates at four interrelated domains interrelated in the specific sense that a single domain cannot be properly understood independently from the other three. This is the junction between conceptualisations of 'capitalism' (either liberal or Marxist) and the conceptualisation of the colonial matrix, which implies a de-colonial conceptualisation. The four domains in question, briefly described, are (and remember that each of these domains is disguised by a constant and changing rhetoric of modernity (that is, of salvation, progress, development, happiness):

**1)** Management and control of subjectivities (for example, Christian and secular education, yesterday and today, museums and universities, media and advertising today, etc.)

**2)** Management and control of authority (for example, viceroyalties in the Americas, British authority in India, US army, Politbureau in the Soviet Union, etc.)

**3)** Management and control of economy (for example, by reinvesting of the surplus engendered by massive appropriation of land in America and Africa; massive exploitation of labour starting with the slave-trade; by foreign debts through the creation of economic institutions such as World Bank and IMF, etc.);

**4)** Management and control of knowledge (for example, theology and the invention of international law that set up a geo-political order of knowledge founded on European epistemic and aesthetic principles that legitimised the disqualifications over the centuries of non-European knowledge and non-Europeans aesthetic standards, from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment and from the Enlightenment to neo-liberal globalisation; philosophy).

The four domains (the enunciated) are all and constantly interrelated and held together by the two anchors of enunciation. Indeed, who were and are the agents and institutions that generated and continue to reproduce the rhetoric of modernity and the logic of coloniality? It so happened that, in general, the agents (and institutions) creating and managing the logic of coloniality were Western Europeans, mostly men; if not all heterosexual, at least assuming heterosexuality as the norm of sexual conduct. And they were — in general — mostly white and Christian (either Catholic or Protestant). Thus, the enunciation of the colonial matrix was founded in two embodied and geo-historically located pillars: the seed for the subsequent racial classification of the planet population and the superiority of white men over men of colour but also over white women. *The racial and patriarchal underlying organisation of knowledge-making (the enunciation) put together and maintain the colonial matrix of power* that daily becomes less visible because of the loss of holistic views promoted by the modern emphasis on expertise and on the division and sub-division of scientific labour and knowledge.

Global futures need to be imagined and constructed through de-colonial options; that is, working globally and collectively to de-colonise the colonial matrix of power; to stop the sand castles built by modernity and its derivatives. Museums can indeed play a crucial role in the building of de-colonial futures.