

## **Coloniality and Social Classification**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

In December of 2007 *Financial Times* of London published an op-ed by Phillip Stephens titled “Encounter with History that Resonate Today.” The caricature appropriate for the theme that Candido Mendes selected for this XVII encounter of de l’Académie de la Latinité: “l’interculturalisme en marche.” In fact, the caricature portrays a march in two directions; a literal march toward an inter-cultural dialogue. The Chinese man is waiting; the British or Anglo-American man is walking toward him.

## ENCOUNTER WITH HISTORY THAT RESONATES TODAY



By Philip Stephens

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Why are Chinese yellow? The answer is that they are not. The evidence of their own eyes, however, did not stop countless generations of (white) Europeans from classifying the Chinese, and Japanese, by the supposed hue of their skin. By the same token, Native Americans have never been red; I will come back to that in a moment.

In previous meetings of L'Académie de la Latinité I commented on Immanuel Kant's ethno-racial tetragon. Kant, after Linnaeus was of the opinion that Asians were yellow. Much of Linnaeus' classification did not stand up to the test of time. His classification of primates (the genus that includes humans) was influenced by the rac-

ist ideas of colonialism, and his *sexual classification* of the flowering plants caused much controversy as soon as it was published. His lasting contributions to biological science are the discovery that sexual reproduction is not limited to the animal world but also the most widespread mode of reproduction in plants and the introduction of the binomial classification.

Phillips Stephens, the editorialist of the *Financial Times*, made an interesting observation: those who have been classified as *yellow* by *white men* hardly forget the classification while those who dwell in the memories of those who proposed the classification, paradoxically very often forget. The observation is relevant on several counts. It helps in countering current universalistic claims that differences shall be forgotten because we, humans, are all equal. Generally, such claims are made by white men. If it is not made by white men, the original claim as Linnaeus's classification suggests and Kant's later on backed up, was made up by *Homo sapiens europaeus* and found out—in the process—that he himself was on top of it.

Kant's ethno-racial tetragon owes much to Linnaeus's classification of four human species of the genus primates: *Homo sapiens europaeus*, *Homo sapiens afer*, *Homo sapiens asiaticus* and *Homo sapiens americanus*.

Is all of this relevant today, in a world in financial crisis, a world on fire, increasing pauperization, exuberant advances in biotechnology, planet warming, etc. etc.?

The article in the *Financial Times* suggests that indeed, social/racial classification matters.

What are the conditions under which inter-cultural dialogues aiming at the construction of an equitable world would take place? To start answering these questions I need a little bit of history: the history of the constitution of the modern/colonial world through the social classification—grounded in the control of knowledge—of people and geo-political classification of the planet.

### **GLOBAL LINEAR THINKING AND RACIAL CLASSIFICATION**

German political and legal theorist Carl Schmitt reflected on the history of Europe, after the end of WWII and described an era, the global era, initiated in the sixteenth century and ending in the first half of the 20th century, in between the first and second World Wars. He characterized that era as dominated by global lineal thinking that brought together the legacy of the *nomos of the earth*, in Greek and Latin spirit and vocabulary and the establishment of international law.

The Greek word *nomos*, like the Quechua word *chakra* (and I am sure there are some equivalent concept in ancient Arabic) is not easy to define in terms of analytic philosophy where *definiens* and *definiendum* are clear and logically cut. *Nomos* could be translated as “the law of the land” as far as law is not restricted to written stipulation of a well established administrative organization (we can loosely call “state”). The same with *chakra*.

*Chakra* in ancient Quechua, but still alive today, refers to a piece of land where people work to live (and not live to work), and have a particular nurturing relationship with other living organisms. Gaia means goddess of the earth and mother of time (*Chronus*). *Pachamama* is very similar, “mother earth,” but Pacha means also space time. So that *chacra of the land* very much like *the nomos of the earth*, expresses that complex set of material, spiritual, space, time, life relationship in coordinated behavior that maintain life among living organisms. Among living organism, there two particular subsets, called just for pedagogical purpose, the set of Greek living organisms and the set of Quechua-Ayamra living organisms, that had the possibility, over all other organisms, of defining themselves interacting with other living organisms.

*Chakra* would be one example among many besides Greece. In other words, and turning the table, Ancient Greeks named *nomos* a type of experience that connected human communities with what today we call “environment,” but the Greeks called “cosmos” and the Andean “pachamama.” We invert hermeneutical process and instead of starting from the word and the privilege that today Greek words have over Arabic or Aymara words, we will encounter the basic common ground of communities over the planet, before 1500, at different levels of their socio-historical unfolding (e.g., “degrees of civilization”) forming a polycentric planet.

Schmitt of course is aware of it and offers the following clear description:

There always has been some kind of *nomos* of the earth. In all the ages of mankind, the earth has been appropriated, divided, and cultivated. But before the age of the great discoveries, before the 16th century of our system of dating, men had no global concept of the planet on which they lived. Certainly, they had a mythical image of heaven and earth, and of land and sea, but the earth still was not measured as a globe, and men still had not ventured onto the great oceans. Their world was purely terrestrial. *Every powerful people considered themselves to be the center of the earth and their dominion to be the domicile of freedom, beyond which war, barbarism and chaos ruled. By the occupied earth (in Greek, the so —called oikonomie), they understood only their own empire.* That was the *nomos* of the earth in the first stage, when men as yet had no global concept of their planet and the great oceans of the world were inaccessible to human power. (Schmitt, 1954, addition to the first print.)

There are of course questions we can ask and affirmations we can dispute. For example: while it is correct to say that “powerful people considered themselves to be the center of the earth and their dominion to be the domicile of freedom beyond which war, barbarism and chaos ruled,” it is not exactly correct to say that “by the occupied earth (that the Greek called *oikonomie*—they understood only their own empire.” This statement lies on two questionable presupposition: that every social organization in the polycentric world before 1500 was an “empire,” like the Roman. The original Islamic caliphate was precisely a caliphate and not an empire. To name the Caliph an Emperor could only be acceptable if one is ready to accept that Julius Caesar was a Caliph

or a Sultan. The second flag we shall place in Schmitt's statement is that each dominion was isolated by the space of war, barbarism and chaos. There was a significant amount of commerce, trade and markets between many "centers" from Fez and Timbuktu to Baghdad; and from Venice and Florence to Calcutta and Mumbai (Abu Lughod, 1989). However, we should agree with Schmitt in that it was a polycentric world. And then the sixteenth century came; the Atlantic opened up, massive amounts of land tempted Europeans beyond gold and silver, and massive slave trade was necessary in order to take advantage of an unusual extension of empty land, of *terra nullius*. A new *nomos* of the earth emerged and during a 500 years process, Schmitt tells us, destroyed "the first *nomos* of the earth"

The first *nomos* of the earth was destroyed about 500 years ago, when the great oceans of the world were opened up. The earth was circumnavigated; *America, a completely new, unknown, not even suspected continent was discovered*. A second *nomos* of the earth arose from such discoveries of land and sea. The discoveries were not invited. They were made without visas issued by the discovered peoples. The discoverers were Europeans, who appropriated, divided, and utilized the planet. Thus the second *nomos* of the earth became Eurocentric. The newly discovered continent of America first was utilized in the same way. The Eurocentric structure of *nomos* extended only partially, as open land-appropriation, and otherwise in the form of protectorates, leases, trade agreements, and spheres of interests; in short, in more elastic forms of utilization. Only in the 19<sup>th</sup> century did the land-appropriating European powers divide up Africa. (Schmitt, 1954, p. 352.)

The concept of *nomos* serves Schmitt well in contributing with three fundamental classificatory maneuvers:

- the first was the reduction to the Geek concept of *nomos* any and all human land-socio-spiritual configuration;
- the second was to locate in time the diversity he has already reduced to one master-concept, *nomos*;
- the third to assume that the second *nomos* of the earth “destroyed” all the rest and set up the rules for the only game in town. In other words, Schmitt describes as a natural historical process what was and became, in reality, a global imperial design.

So, then, when Schmitt affirms that for the Spanish intellectual elite (he uses the example of Francisco de Vitoria at the School of Salamanca in the process of sorting out the rights of the Spaniards and the Rights of the Indians) felt in the middle of the sixteenth century that Christian Europe was the center of the world (and Jerusalem and Rome were two references of that centrality), we should remember the radical changes between, say, 1450 and 1550. If, by 1450, Christian Europeans were one among many centers; one of many *nomos*, by 1550 Christian European intellectual and political elite (related to the church and the monarchy), and not only in Spain, but in Italy, France, England, Holland, Portugal and Germany, were the only ethno-class who knew the real dimensions of the planet. From that knowledge, the consciousness of their centrality



emerged: knowledge, and not military superiority, is what allowed Christians to control and dominate Incas and Aztecs, first and, later on (that knowledge in the hands of Dutch, British and French) intellectuals, officers of the state and merchants.

And it was from that epistemic edge that Christian Europeans (XVI<sup>th</sup>-XVII<sup>th</sup> centuries) first and Secular European philosophers and scientists later (XVIII<sup>th</sup>-XIX<sup>th</sup> centuries), were able to *control knowledge and to classify a people and regions of the earth*. That classification proceeded in two complementary and self-supporting types of arguments: what Schmitt himself called *global linear thinking* and what I would like to call *global racial thinking*. Both complement each other in different ways: global linear thinking was and continues to be visible through international law (an invention of the sixteenth century responding to the needs created by the “discovery” of the New World). *Global linear thinking* shows the march of history, the march of the *new nomos of the earth*. *Global racial thinking*, on the other hand, is the epistemic device that identifies communities that shall be absorbed or pushed away from the march of the *new nomos of the earth*. In order to control and dominate, it is first necessary to devalue—in relation to the loci of enunciation creating the classification—those who do not belong to the ethno-class that control knowledge and, therefore, is in

a position to classify. *Racism* in the modern/colonial world is nothing else than the devaluation of people and places in order to control and dominate them.

Global racial thinking, in the modern/colonial world, is carried out at two levels: epistemic and ontological. It works by making and remaking the epistemic and the ontological colonial differences. Ontologically inferior beings are epistemically deficient; and epistemically deficient subjects are being classified—by definition—as inferior to the subject doing the classification. As I mentioned in previous papers presented at the conferences of L'Academie de la Latinité, those who were classifying (institutions and persons), were first Western Christians and later on secular philosophers and scientists. In the first case, Christianity was one among many religions of the world, and of course, among people without religions (like the Indians of the New World). Later on, White Europeans were one “race” among several. However, Western Christian and White Europeans were the only ones who constructed the classification which remains contested in its content but uncontested in its logic: the logic of global racial thinking.

The point here is that both global linear and global racial thinking are imperial classificatory devices in the construction of the modern/colonial world. They complement each other to classify and control people and regions (e.g., from where to extract gold and silver, produce sugar, cotton or coffee; to extract natural resources, like

oil and natural gas, etc.). We are already encountering some difficulties for inter-cultural dialogue in the sphere of epistemology and the control of knowledge.

Interestingly enough the two masses of land (*Grossraum*) upon which global linear thinking exercised itself (that is, it became a classificatory device in the very process of classifying), were the New World and Africa. Curiously enough, Africa became the new *terra nullius* in the in the second half of the nineteenth century—shortly after the end of slavery stopped the removal of African people from their kingdoms and communities. Revealing enough, the New World and Africa (Indians and Blacks) were the two new categories at the foundation of secular global racial thinking as we know it today. Muslims and Jews were equally important in the foundation of racial classification but they were not secular but sacred—defined by blood rather than by skin color.

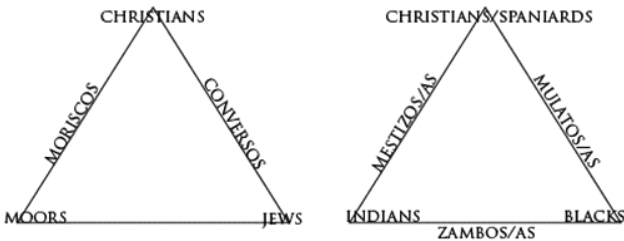
Let's pause for a while to look at the basic racial matrix at the historical foundation of the modern/colonial world

### **"PREDECESSORS" OF LINNAEUS CLASSIFICATION OR WHAT LINNAEUS WAS WORKING ON**

Linnaeus's classification was neither an invention of enlightened men nor an updating of Greek or Roman legacy. The division of the globe in four continents was un-known to Greeks and Romans. The historical foun-

dating of socio-racial classification was an invention of the sixteenth century, and was cast in Christian theology rather than in secular science.

### LET'S IMAGINE TWO TRIANGLES



One of them has Christian Theology/Christians at the upper angle of the triangle and at the base you see Islamic Theology/Muslims or Moors at one end and Jewish Theology/Jews. Then you have “Moriscos” and “Conversos” to designate the “religious mestizaje,” the mixing of Christian and Moorish blood on the one hand and Christian and Jewish blood on the other. That was clear in the Iberian Peninsula, or, if you wish, in the heart of the emerging empire. In the colonies, the situation was different since there was no religious thought and therefore no theological-based knowledge, Christian Theology became more and more displaced by Spaniards or Castilian. And on the lower base on the triangle we have then Indians and Blacks/Africans. Religious blood mixtures that engendered non-existing categories until

then as Moriscos and Conversos, in the Iberian Peninsula, were replaced by Mestizos/as and Mulatos/as in the New World. But while in the Iberian Peninsula the blood mixture between Moors and Jews was not accounted for (and probably physically not very common), in the New World the mixture of Mulatos and Mestizas or vice-versa engendered a new racial category, Zambos and Zambas. From here on, classification multiplied but all of them were displayed under the “purity” of Spanish/Castilian blood (Castro-Gómez, 2007).

In the eighteenth century, the control of knowledge moved—philosophically—from theology to egology and—geographically—from the theological South (Italy, Spain and Portugal) to the secular North (Germany, England, France). The basic principles and historical foundations of global racial thinking of the sixteenth and seventeenth century was rehearsed from Buffon to Hegel, going through Linnaeus and Kant and these principles and foundations served well the concerted emergence of the social sciences (Gussdorff, 1967; Heilbron, 1995).

Linnaeus (1707-1708) was a Swedish botanist interested in classifying plants. But the concept of class, in the classification, transcended the original field of application. The method of classifications of plants by genus and differentia resulted in the configuration of an object that can be classified by identifying its features. Thus, the metaphor transferred to society (conceived as an organic totality), was useful to *classify people by their standing*

*in the economic scale of society, that is, by social class.* Peruvian sociologist Anibal Quijano reflecting on the underlying logic and hidden ideology of social classification in terms of class, made the following observations and advanced the following arguments.

First, the idea of social class was elaborated (between the end of XVIII<sup>th</sup> century and the end of XIX<sup>th</sup> century) in Europe and on the bases on European socio-historical experience. And European means here mainly the “core” (France, England, Germany and perhaps Holland) defined not by geography but by economy. Or if you wish, Europe here is defined as the geo-economic core of capitalist economy, the consolidation of the secular nation-state and the second wave of imperialist expansion. If for sixteenth century Spanish men of letters, monarchs, theologians and the like, Western Christians felt that they were the center of a planet that to that point only them, at least in terms of control of knowledge, knew, by the nineteenth century there was no doubt whatsoever that Europe was conceived by those who inhabited it as the center of the world, and not just the center of the European domain in Europe. It was by then (end of eighteenth and nineteenth centuries), that the idea of Europeans and the rest, that is, non-European began to crystallize.

It was during this period too that the *racial contract*—hidden now under the visible language of science and no longer under the language of theology and the responsibility of Good—became the materialization of *global*

*racial thinking*. Between Linnaeus and Immanuel Kant regions and people came together in one single racial classificatory maneuver. I have also elaborated on this classification in previous papers presented in the Academie de la Latinité, so I shall be brief here. By the time of Linnaeus and Kant, the reality of four continents was no longer disputed. The skin color that for Linnaeus was a way of classifying people in relation to continents (mobility at that time was scarce; no steam boat, no railroad and of course no airplane). People mostly remained in their continent. Thus, yellow people remained in China, as the vignette at the beginning of this paper; blacks in Africa; Red (Indians) in America and White in Europe. Kant translated the classification into the principles of *the racial contract*. Charles Mills (1997) observes, following the steps of Chukwudi Eze (1997), that

In fact, Kant demarcates and theorizes a color-coded racial hierarchy of Europeans, Asians, Africans and Native Americans, differentiated by their degree of innate *talent*. (Mills, 1997, p. 71.)

I do not have to explain here whose *talent* is the *talent* that Kant is thinking about as a reference point to establish the hierarchy. What I would like to press further are the correspondences and complementation between global linear and global racial thinking. Although during Linnaeus's and Kant's period Africa was not yet up for grabs, and only the New World target of global linear thinking, the fact remains that in Kant's hierarchic classification (as well as in the cartouche of seventeenth

century maps), White at the top are followed by Yellow (generally represented as an Indian from India, woman), and at the bottom of the map, Indians from the New World and Blacks (either in Africa or in the New World).

### **INTER-CULTURALITY AND THE COLONIAL DIFFERENCE**

How do they work in tandem, global linear and global racial thinking? Both have one element in common: they share the division of the planet in four continents. For global linear thinking the seas are also part of the planetary order (and we know that from Hugo Grotius to Alfred Thayer Mahan).

Paul Gilroy captured this complementation between global linear and global racial thinking when he framed *The Black Atlantic* (1995). However, by subtitling his book *Modernity and Double Consciousness*, by putting face to face *modernity* which is the face of global linear thinking with *double consciousness* which is W. E. B. Dubois's de-colonial response to *coloniality* (the hidden side of modernity), Gilroy contributed to global de-colonial thinking and to de-colonization of knowledge. That is, Gilroy allows us to see the imperial (modern/colonial) complicity between global linear and global racial thinking from the perspective of the histories, memories and feelings of the racialized. That is, from the perspective of agencies who have been denied (by imperial discursive agencies celebrating modernity) and disavowed rationality.



We arrived here to the point where the “package” modernity/coloniality/de-coloniality appears as the underlying pattern of the heterogeneous structural-histories of the modern colonial world is disclosed. Power is the consequence of a struggle (control/domination/conflict) shaped by the rhetoric of modernity (salvation and control of lives), the hidden logic of coloniality (exploitation, domination) and the grammar of de-coloniality (de-linking, liberation, modes of re-existence).

Multiculturalism and inter-cultural relations became, recently, a site where struggles for control/domination on the one hand and liberation/re-existence on the other are being fought. Multiculturalism, in the US and other parts of the world, is part of the rhetoric of modernity and salvation. While the melting-pot in the US was necessary to accommodate Western European immigrations in the US, easy to assimilate, “multiculturalism” was invented when “Third World” immigration can no longer “melt.” Multiculturalism, in other words, expects assimilation without melting.

Inter-culturality, or inter-cultural relations and dialogue, in the sense that the word has been introduced by Indigenous intellectuals in Ecuador, asserts the space of de-colonial epistemic and political (re) claims. Inter-culturality is indeed a double re-claim. On the one hand, it rejects the epistemic colonial difference as a racist epistemic principle of modernity upon which the logic of coloniality is legitimized and could be implemented

in the sphere of political and economic organization of the state (the sphere of knowing). On the other hand, it rejects the ontological colonial difference also as an ontological epistemic principle of modernity upon which the logic of coloniality is legitimized and could be implemented in the sphere of the subject and of the citizens (the sphere of being).

In Ecuador and Bolivia inter-cultural claims (that is, epistemic-political and ontological-subjectivity), had two fundamental outcomes:

1. The foundation of Amawtay Wasi (House of Wisdom) also known as Universidad Intercultural de los Pueblos y Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador. The university's guiding-sentence is "Learning Wisdom and the Good Way of Life." "Good way of life" (*buen vivir*) is a principle that offers a non-capitalist option. As Evo Morales puts it, the point is "el buen vir" and not "vivir mejor que otros" (to live better than others). Amaway Wasi is not presenting itself as THE way of learning that shall replace the National University of Ecuador, The Catholic University of Ecuador, The Universidad Salesiana and the Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar. It just presents itself as another option: a university designed from the perspective of Indigenous ideologies (instead of the Christian ideology that permeates Catholic and Salesiana universities; the national ideology grounded in the Universidad Central del Ecuador; or the Andean vision that prompted the creation of

Universidad Andina with locals in Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Venezuela and Perú.

Like all the other universities, Amawtay Wasi is open to all Ecuadorians. It is not a university FOR Indians although it is a university designed by INDIANS. Similarly, say the Universidad Andina or Salesiana, are not universities only for Andean people and people belonging to the congregation of San Francisco de Sales. Amawtay Wasi is open to Indians and non-Indians alike. Like any other university, it claims that there is no privilege of gender, ethnicity or nationality to be a faculty or a student of the university. Like any other university, faculty and students have to qualify and respond to the needs and the orientation of the university.

Inter-cultural relations here unfold at the level of epistemology, as an epistemological struggle for decolonization of knowledge and of being. In fact, the basic principle of the university is “learning to be.”

2. The re-writing of the constitution in Bolivia and projected in Ecuador (I leave aside Venezuela because it will require the introduction of other factors), have been supported by Indigenous claims for a pluri-national state. A pluri-national state is something different from a “multicultural” state in which the State continues to be structured by *liberal principles in colonial states* (like in all Latin America, India and Africa) while *indigenous or afro-latino nations* have to submit to the demand of the

*liberal state* controlled by the elite of an ethno-class of *Creoles* and *Mestizos*.

Inter-culturality here means inter-political theory and inter-political economy which, of course, for Indigenous people presupposes an institution of higher education, like Amawtay Wasi, in the same way that the construction and transformation of the liberal/colonial state presupposes the canonical universities (e.g., Central, Catholic, Andina, Salesiana, etc.). However, once there is a new player in the field, the field of forces is re-structured. Universidad Salesiana, for example, has much more in common and indeed the inter-cultural (epistemic, political, economic) is already under way.

### **INTER-CULTURALITY AND IMPERIAL/COLONIAL DIFFERENCES**

Inter-cultural relations and dialogue have to confront current assumptions based on the historical foundations and transformation of the colonial and imperial differences. In other words, inter-cultural dialogues have to confront the history and current force of the colonial matrix of power in which Western knowledge has fashioned epistemic and ontological differences with regions, people, languages, religions, ways of life, reason for work, hopes and desires and translated/reduced all of them to, in one expression, the European *nomos* of the earth. Intercultural dialogues, in other words, are claims

emerging from agencies that been cast as some how off the norm: as being “yellow,” for example.

Since the Academie of Latinité has engaged in a series of dialogue both in the Islamic world as well as in the Afro- and Indigenous populated areas of South America and the Caribbean; with an excursion into the US to enter in dialogue with the Latino/as population, it may be helpful to start a conversation about the different types of relations that the Islamic world (in the Middle East and North Africa), on the one hand, and the worlds (in plural) of the Americas, have in common. Both geo-historical regions have one thing in common: their tensions, conflicts and dependency/liberation struggle with Western Europe (by that I mean, Greco-Roman knowledge re-cast in six modern-European languages [Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, French, English and German]). At the same time, there are significant differences in the respective histories. To start from the seventh century BC, the Islamic Caliphate, that survived in various Sultanate (Ottoman, Safavid, Mughal) while the Incanate in the Andes and the Tlatoanate in the valley of Mexico, collapsed with the arrival of the Spaniards; African Kingdoms were taken apart by the chase and enslavement of Africans and new communities of Afro-American were formed in South and North America and the Caribbean. The colonial difference was constructed upon the classification (epistemic and ontologic) of the diversity of Indians and the diversity of Africans.

With the Islamic world, however, the problem was significantly different. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, European men of letters, intellectuals and officers of the state, were well aware that the ancient Islamic Caliphate as well as the co-existing Sultanates (Ottoman, Safavid and Mughal) were no place to take by assault, like the Spaniards did in Perú and México and the Portuguese, and the French and British, did in Africa. One has to wonder why, but this is not the place to enter in the why-question. The fact is that Christians, as we saw in the racial double triangulation (Fig. 1, above), established a type of racial epistemic and ontological relation: let's call "imperial difference" the lay out by which Christians mapped the difference with the Islamic world (ancient and contemporary sultanates). Western Christians in the sixteenth century saw themselves as heirs of the Roman Empire. Charles V, after all, contemporary of Suleiman the Magnificent, was Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nations and Charles I, Emperor of Castile. Suleiman the Magnificent in the Ottoman Sultanate as well as the Hungdai of the Ming Dynasty, in China, were not to be captured and killed and their population put to work, as they did with Moctezuma and Atahualpa in the New World. Christians, therefore, built an "imperial difference" with co-existing and comparable organizations like Sultanates and Chinese Huángdi. Curiously enough, Chinese were

not “yellow” in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (before Linnaeus), but today it is as if they have been always “been” (and not made “yellow”). A place like Wikipedia, consulted by many, has this to say:

**Huángdi**, or the **Yellow Emperor**, is a *legendary Chinese sovereign and cultural hero* who is considered in *Chinese mythology* to be the ancestor of all *Han Chinese*.

To make the story short, as I promised, the point is twofold:

1. during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Western Christians fashioned the *colonial (epistemic and ontological) difference* between them on the one hand and Indians and Blacks on the other;
2. Western Christians shaped the *imperial (epistemic and ontological) difference* between them on the one and Islamic caliphates and sultanates on the other; Chinese huángdi and Russian tsarate, which began its formations parallel to the formation of the kingdom of Castile. With time both became the Spanish empire and the Russian tsarate as its equivalent.

By the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, there was a re-configuration of the imperial difference and *Orientalism* was born. In fact, what *Orientalism* meant was the demotion of the Islamic, Chinese and Japanese worlds to a level close to where Indians and Blacks were placed. In other words, *orientalism* meant that the imperial diffe-

rence was overloaded with the colonial difference and, at that point, Chinese and Japanese became “yellow.”

It is obvious that there are enormous differences between the modes of re-existence that defines the Indigenous struggle in the Americas or Australasia; the type of re-existence that defines Islamic struggles in North Africa, the Middle East, East Asia or even inside Europe and the US; and the modes of re-existence that defines the struggle of the Chinese government on the one hand and the vast population who do not necessarily benefit from the economic success of China government. There are layers within a given nation/state and layers between modern/colonial nation-states (like China, Irán, Brazil and India) on the one hand, and the European Union and the US on the other. The European Union and the US have a history that is only partially the history of China, Irán, Brazil and India; and that partial history is the history of encroachment on the one side and acceptance/resistance/re-existence on the other. Inter-cultural dialogues have to confront those local histories. Today the confrontation goes through the articulation of (neo) liberal capitalism in Western nation-states with the articulation of neo-liberal capitalism over modern/colonial states. If it is at all possible today to see the new world order in terms of polycentric-capitalism, that polycentricity is articulated at the level knowledge (epistemology) and being (ontology) by the legacies of the colonial and imperial differences.



The question of education comes to the fore as a crucial space of inter-cultural (inter-epistemic) struggle.

Amawtay Wasi, as well as other similar institutions being created in the Andes as well as the scholarly and intellectual production of Indigenous intellectuals in the Americas, New Zealand and Australia, is one particular sphere in which the problem of inter-cultural relations at all levels have been shaped by the particular kind of relations between indigenous people in different parts of the world and the particular monarchy-empire (Spain, Portugal) or nation-state/empire (England, France, the US in the West; Russia, China, Japan in the East), as well as the inter-relations between imperial formations: e.g., the US and China, as in the vignette above; or Irán the US.

Let's leave it there, since the issue is much larger than what we can accomplish in this meeting.

### **SOCIAL CLASSIFICATION, INTER-CULTURAL DIALOGUE AND THE DE-COLONIAL OPTION**

The de-colonial option is a mode of thinking and (re-existing) that starts from the analytic of modernity/coloniality. That is to say from the basic assumption that coloniality is constitutive and not derivative of modernity. Modernity, therefore, carries with it the specter of coloniality without which modernity cannot be what it is: a discourse of salvation as a uni-versal project.

Inter-cultural dialogues are difficult to be truly enacted if we are within a uni-versal project. In the best of all possible worlds, intercultural dialogue in a universally projected world, would be that every party involved would have an effective say in the march towards the future. Now, since modernity/coloniality provides the interpretive frame for the inter-action in the sphere of economy, it is in the discourse of modernity/coloniality where the struggles take place. The de-colonial option, while recognizing existing options for dialogue within the uni-versal project of modernity, proposes to imagine de-linking from the uni-versal project and to open up to a pluri-versal or multi-versal world in which the imperial and colonial differences (constitutive of modernity, because they are different aspects of coloniality), will cease to exist. Which means that an inter-cultural dialogue in a pluri-versal project of *humanity* de-links from the uni-versal project of *modernity*.

Let me take several of these points one at the time:

**a) De-Linking from Social Classification Based on Eurocentered Epistemic Principles** — If we remain within the parameters that take for granted a detached observer, the knower, who is able to observed, described, analyze and classified the known, the observed, we will remain within the uni-versal conception of knowledge as the only game in town. To limit oneself to insisting that it is necessary to historicize the question of social class, for example, to refer it to the concrete history of people

instead of maintaining an a-historic or “static” view of social classes, or to put Weber in place of Marx or to explore their viable interweaving as tends to be done in scholarly sociology, all of these approaches are today unproductive. “*In each and every one of these options*, Peruvian sociologist Anibal Quijano asserts, it is only a question of classifying people according to some of their given differential characteristics, and nothing fundamental is gained if it is merely a question of which characteristics are selected, or ought to be selected so that the classificatory operation is less “ideological” and more “objective” (Quijano, 2000). For all these reasons, Quijano continues,

It would be pertinent for us to leave the *Eurocentric theory of social class* and move toward an *historical theory of social classification*. In this proposal, the concept of social classification refers to the long-term processes within which people fight for control of the basic arenas of social existence, the result of which configures a model of power distribution centered on relations of exploitation/domination/conflict among the population of a society within a particular history. (Quijano, 2000.)

What is, more specifically, a “Eurocentric theory of social class”? That it refers

only and exclusively to one among many spheres of power, the control of labor, its resources and its products. This is specially notable in Marx and his heirs, since despite the fact that their formal proposition is to study, understand and change or destroy power in society, all other instances of social existence in which power relations form between people are absolutely ignored or are considered to be derivative of and determined by the “relations of production.” (Quijano, 2000.)

**b) The Forgotten Co-Existence of a Multi-Versal World** — The fact is that in the non-European sphere co-existed at that moment (the XIX<sup>th</sup> century), all other forms of labor and of social control in which racial classification served to the stratification of society and to the control of non-waged labor in the sense that waged labor had in Europe:

In Europe there had already formed or were in the formation “modern” institutions of authority: the “modern nation-states” and their respective (national) “identities.” But in non-Europe only tribes and ethnic groups were perceived to exist as a “pre-modern past” to be replaced at some point in the future by nation-states-like-there-are-in-Europe (...). The rational subject is European. Non-Europe is an object of knowledge. Subsequently, the science that would study Europeans would be called “sociology.” That which would study non-Europeans would be called “ethnography.” (Quijano, 2000.)

The end result and its consequences was the consolidation of what Colombian philosopher Santiago Castro-Gómez described as the epistemology of the zero-point: an epistemology in which the observer cannot be observed and the control of knowledge was guaranteed by the uni-versality of the epistemic observer. Objectivity was at its turn guaranteed by the un-observed observer.

**c) Epistemic De-Linking Presupposes To Change Epistemic Terrain** — Consequently, the very foundation of inter-cultural dialogue has to start by epistemology and be conceived as inter-epistemic dialogue. From there co-existing subjectivities, histories, memories, political and economic organizations should be thought out.

Objectivity without parentheses was the consequence of the hegemonic idea of knowledge. Objectivity without parentheses leads, as Chilean neurobiologist and philosopher Humberto Maturana has pointed out, to an epistemology of obedience, to a closed political system open to be taken by totalitarian regimes, and to an economy in which increases of production and wealth take priority over human lives and life in general. Intercultural dialogue, or inter-epistemic dialogue between epistemologies based on the premise of objectivity without parenthesis is, on the one hand, limited within a given system and, on the other hand, could be deadly when agencies defending opposite objectivities without parenthesis, confront each other. Dialogue becomes unsustainable.

Objectivity-in-parentheses, on the other hand, opens up the doors for true inter-epistemic (and intercultural) dialogues. Its realization, however, had the difficult task of overcoming objectivity without parentheses. In a world where objectivity-in-parenthesis is hegemonic, the observer accepts explanatory paths, politics organization, economic philosophy that are secondary to life, human lives as well as life in general. *If* the final horizon is the flourishing, creativity and well being and not the control of authority and control of economy which are predicated as the primary ends to insure the flourishing of life, *then* objectivity-in-parenthesis would be the necessary path to

insure true inter-epistemic and intercultural dialogues. I quote Maturana:

There are two distinct attitudes, two paths of thinking and explaining. The first path I call *objectivity without parentheses*. It takes for granted the observer-independent existence of objects that—it is claimed—can be known; it believes in the possibility of an external validation of statements. Such a validation would lend authority and unconditional legitimacy to what is claimed and would, therefore, aim at subjection. It entails the negation of all those who are not prepared to agree with the “objective” facts. *One does not have to listen or try to understand them. The fundamental emotion reigning here is powered by the authority of universally valid knowledge.* One lives in the domain of mutually exclusive transcendental ontologies: each ontology supposedly grasps objective reality; what exists seems independent from one’s personality and one’s actions. (Maturana, 2004, p. 42, italics mine.)

Bringing together Castro-Gómez and Maturana, objectivity without is the epistemology of the zero point. The other attitude is defined as *objectivity in parentheses*. In this attitude:

(...) the emotional basis is the enjoyment of the company of other human beings. The question of the observer is accepted fully, and every attempt is made to answer it. *The distinction between objects and the experience of existence is, according to this path, not denied but the reference to objects is not the basis of explanations, it is the coherence of experiences with other experiences that constitutes the foundation of all explanation (...)* We have entered the domain of constitute ontologies: all Being is constituted through the Doing of observers. If we follow this path of explanation, we become aware that we can in no way claim to be in possession of the *truth* but that there are numerous possible realities (...). ***If we follow this path of explanation, we cannot demand the subjection of our fellow***

*human beings but will listen to them, seek cooperation and communication.* (Maturana, 2004, p. 42; emphasis added.)

It will take too long to explore the political and ethical consequences of a world in which objectivity and epistemology in parenthesis will be hegemonic. But I could add that Maturana's reflections from the sphere of sciences, states in a different vocabulary the Zapatistas's dictum: a world in which many worlds would co-exist. The realization of that world, built upon intercultural dialogues, will require the hegemony of an epistemology in parenthesis.

### **CLOSING COMMENTS**

I have attempted to map the complementary trajectory of global linear and racial thinking in the formation and transformation of the modern/colonial world. The formation of the modern/colonial world was, simultaneously, the formation of a type of economy—the Atlantic economy of the sixteenth century—later on described as capitalist. It was a new type of economy in relation to existing ones, which were based on tributes and storage and service-labor (but not exploitation in the sense in which the Indigenous population of the New World and enslaved Africans were). The complementary trajectory of global linear and racial thinking contributed to engender, at the “other side” of geo-political divisions and racial ranking of human beings (with the ethical and

political consequences: de-humanization, violence to human dignity, control and management) a variegated type of responses. I conceived these responses as de-colonial thinking (Mignolo, 2007). Its manifestation varies as well as its range that can go from dogmatic anti-colonial violence to sophisticated epistemic and philosophical responses to imperial rationalities.

De-colonial thinking locates the struggle at the level of epistemology. And, I argued, epistemological conflicts are, today, the terrain where inter-cultural dialogues become, indeed, inter-epistemic dialogues-in-conflict. If, as Quijano suggested, the struggle of/for power in the modern/colonial world takes place in the conflict between the drive toward domination, regulation and exploitation and, on the other for emancipation, liberation and de-colonization, epistemology becomes the terrain of contention. Inter-cultural and inter-epistemic dialogue, in the last analysis, shall be understood as a conflictive terrain in the struggles for regulation, on the one hand, and emancipation, on the other.

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