


**RACE, CAPITALISM, AND EUROCENTRISM IN THE THOUGHT OF ANÍBAL QUIJANO** <https://doi.org/10.63330/aurumpub.043-003>**Douglas Barbosa Werneck<sup>1</sup>****Abstract**

This paper discusses the thought of Aníbal Quijano, with emphasis on the coloniality of power, the racial genesis of modernity, and the constitution of the global pattern of power articulated with capitalism and Eurocentrism. It is grounded in the understanding that modernity, far from representing merely a period of historical advancement, was constituted within the conquest of the Americas and produced social classifications founded on the idea of race, thereby reorganizing labor, power, knowledge, and relations among peoples on a global scale (Quijano, 2005; Dussel, 2005). The text examines how the social identities produced in the colonial process, including Indigenous peoples, Black people, mestizos, and Europeans, came to compose enduring hierarchies linked to economic exploitation, epistemic violence, and the inferiorization of non-European cultures and forms of knowledge (Quijano, 2005; Oliveira; Candau, 2013). It further analyzes the myth of modernity as a narrative that positioned Europe at the center of world history and relegated colonized peoples to the past, to irrationality, and to primitivization, thereby legitimizing material and symbolic domination and exploitation (Dussel, 2005; Quijano, 2005). It then discusses the formation of global capitalism in the Americas, with emphasis on slavery, servitude, and commodity production oriented toward the global market, a process that consolidated European centrality within the world-system (Quijano, 2005; Wallerstein, 1999; Ribeiro, 1995). Finally, the paper argues that a decolonial reading offers a path for rethinking Latin America from the standpoint of its memories, its subjects, and its silenced histories, bringing the decolonization of power, knowledge, and being back into debate (Quijano, 2005a; Clímaco, 2014).

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**Keywords:** Coloniality of power, Modernity, Latin America.

## INTRODUCTION

This work is the result of decolonial studies, analyses, readings, and discussions and aims to present the thought of the Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano, with the objective of awakening the reader to a theme so precious and always necessary, which is decoloniality. Aníbal Quijano was born in Yanama in 1928 and died in the city of Lima in May 2018. A renowned Peruvian sociologist and humanist thinker, he was recognized for developing the concept of the “coloniality of power” and for formulating influential studies on postcolonial and decolonial themes concerning Latin America (Clímaco, 2014).

He was a professor at the Faculty of Social Sciences of the Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos, in Lima; he worked in the Department of Sociology at Binghamton University, in New York, at the invitation of the sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein. He served as a visiting researcher at several Latin American universities, including institutions in Chile, Bolivia, Mexico, and Venezuela. In Brazil, he taught at the Institute of Advanced Studies of the University of São Paulo between 1992 and 1993. He founded and directed the “Chair of Latin America and the Coloniality of Power” at Universidad Ricardo Palma, in Lima. He developed in great depth works on the characteristics of Latin America within the capitalist pattern of power, colonization, and modernity (Clímaco, 2014).

Quijano, together with several other intellectuals, formed the Modernity/Coloniality group, with thinkers linked, in part, to Wallerstein’s world-system reflections, seeking alternatives to Eurocentric modernity. Among these names were Enrique Dussel, Walter Dignolo, Ramón Grosfoguel, Catherine Walsh, Nelson Maldonado-Torres, and Arturo Escobar (Oliveira; Candau, 2013, p. 277). This group of authors contributed to the elaboration of a forceful critique of the universalization of the European experience as the exclusive measure of history, rationality, and social life (Oliveira; Candau, 2013).

In the present work, we will see, through the refined thought of Aníbal Quijano, that so-called modernity, situated at the end of the fifteenth century, instituted a new global pattern of power by articulating capitalism, Eurocentrism, and globalization. At that historical moment, races were classified in the modern sense, initiating a great distinction between colonized and colonizers, among Blacks, Indians, mestizos, and Europeans. “Em outras palavras, raça e identidade racial foram estabelecidas como instrumentos de classificação social básica da população” (Quijano, 2005, p. 107). From this formulation onward, race came to form part of the very foundation of the social organization of the modern world, traversing economic, political, and cultural relations (Quijano, 2005).

## **THE RACIAL GENESIS OF MODERNITY**

Alongside the myth of modernity, relations of power between dominators and dominated were established. Unpaid, non-wage labor became associated with races regarded as inferior. Colonized Indians were treated as disposable labor, forced to work exhaustively until death (Quijano, 2005).

Europe named itself the creator and protagonist of modernity beginning with the maritime ventures of 1492, leaving the non-European at a perpetually delayed and inferior level. Within this so-called modernity, Europe is presented as the first in history to possess a globalized world pattern of power, making use of four strategic points of domination and power. First, hegemonic capitalism, involving the control of labor, resources, and products. Second, the bourgeois family, controlling sex, its resources, and its products. Third, the nation-state, with the legitimacy of force, its resources and products, articulated with Eurocentrism in the control of subjectivity. Fourth, a pattern of power directed toward the entire world population through three interconnected elements: the coloniality of power, capitalism, and Eurocentrism (Quijano, 2005, p. 113). In this formulation, modernity emerges as a historical experience inseparable from colonial domination and the unequal organization of the world (Quijano, 2005).

Through the idea of race produced in the Americas, new social identities emerged, such as Indians, Blacks, and mestizos, just as the denominations Spanish, Portuguese, and European also emerged. What had previously been used geographically as a way of identifying an individual's origin came to be a determining characteristic for the construction of new identities. The idea of race became so powerful that it ended up becoming part of the subjectivity of the survivors (Quijano, 2005, p. 107).

These new identities were used for the purpose of forming classifications and hierarchies, thus establishing the role of each "race" within society. Blacks were the racial identity of greatest economic importance, directed toward slavery and the slave trade. Later, with European global expansion, the idea of race separated peoples into Europeans and non-Europeans. This way of differentiating biological structures was and remains a founding axis of domination, as are the intersexual and gender axes (Quijano, 2005, p. 107-108). In this way, racial classification became a historical technology of power capable of organizing places, functions, and values within colonial society and its continuities (Quijano, 2005).

The Americas were invaded, conquered, and colonized by the Iberians, who encountered many different peoples, among them Aztecs, Mayas, Chimus, Aymaras, Chibchas, and others. About three hundred years after colonization, these identities were erased and designated as indigenous. The same occurred with enslaved Africans, violently uprooted from their lands and turned into commodities. Achantes, Yorubas, Zulus, Congos, Bacongos, and others, after the same period, came to be known simply as Blacks (Quijano, 2005, p. 116).

These processes culminated in two results in the history of colonization: the loss of identities and the denial of their place in world culture. These peoples were relocated in historical time as the past, as non-Europeans, and as primitive (Quijano, 2005, p. 116). Such a reclassification of the other into a position prior to Europe provided support for a historical imaginary in which the colonizer appears as the measure of humanity and civilization (Quijano, 2005).

As a consequence of the Eurocentric mentality, the inferior races were treated as non-rational beings, with their bodies placed as close to nature or within nature, according to the level of their inferiorization. In this classification are Blacks, Indians, olive-skinned people, yellow people, and women as “close to nature,” while “Black women,” on this social scale, occupy the lowest position and are found “within nature” (Quijano, 2005, p. 118). Racial hierarchization was thus articulated with other hierarchies, acutely affecting the body, gender, and the production of subjectivity (Quijano, 2005).

Through decolonial studies, Aníbal Quijano and other thinkers present the racial genesis of modernity and show where racism and prejudice gained greater force, worsening over time and becoming institutionalized. In recent times, they remain powerful under often veiled forms, broadening social differences and contributing to the worsening of misery in various fields of social life (Quijano, 2005; Oliveira; Candau, 2013).

It is worth emphasizing that, during much of the period of colonization and slavery, the Black person was treated as a primitive and soulless animal. The Black person had no soul and was thus considered by sectors of the Roman Catholic Apostolic Church itself, an institution that, in many historical moments, was linked to the pursuit of power, possessions, and pleasures offered by Eurocentrism. This context helps us understand how material domination was accompanied by moral, religious, and cultural justifications that reinforced colonial dehumanization (Quijano, 2005; Dussel, 2005).

## **THE MYTH OF MODERNITY AND THE COLONIALITY OF POWER**

The myth of Eurocentric modernity is permeated by the dichotomies European and non-European, primitive and civilized, traditional and modern, by evolutionism from the state of nature to European society, by the idea of race, and by relocation in historical time, with the non-European placed in the past, as primitive and inferior (Quijano, 2005, p. 116). This form of knowledge produced in seventeenth-century Western Europe emerged with the purpose of serving the global pattern of capitalist power

beginning with the constitution of the Americas, with a specific rationality and world hegemony (Quijano, 2005, p. 115).

“Here lies the tragedy: all of us were led, whether knowingly or not, whether willingly or not, to see and accept that image as ours and as belonging exclusively to us. In this way, we continue being what we are not. And as a result, we can never identify our true problems, much less resolve them, except in a partial and distorted manner.” (Quijano, 2005, p. 118)

In a more simplified and didactic way, we can state that modernity was consolidated through the ventures of Christopher Columbus in crossing the Atlantic Ocean in 1492. It was the discovery and invasion of the Americas that marked the beginning of the “modern era” and also the idea of the “world-system” developed by Wallerstein (1999) in his text *World-Systems Analysis*. Globalization, capitalism, slavery, Eurocentrism, exploitation, and colonialism are concepts very present in so-called modernity (Wallerstein, 1999; Quijano, 2005).

Enrique Dussel, presenting modernity in a global sense, states that “empirically there was never world history until 1492” (Dussel, 2005). Modernity would be the new “paradigm” of history.

“Modernity, as a new ‘paradigm’ of everyday life, of the understanding of history, science, and religion, arises at the end of the fifteenth century and with the conquest of the Atlantic. The seventeenth century is already the result of the sixteenth; Holland, France, and England represent later development within the horizon opened by Portugal and Spain. Latin America enters Modernity (long before North America) as the ‘other face,’ dominated, exploited, concealed” (Dussel, 2005, p. 28).

The “myth of modernity” places Europe at the center of world history and culture, classifying all other histories and cultures as diminished and peripheral, thereby legitimizing forms of domination, exploitation, inequality, and violence. This is what Dussel will call the “other face” of modernity.

“By denying the innocence of ‘Modernity’ and affirming the Alterity of the ‘Other,’ previously denied as a guilty victim, it becomes possible for the first time to ‘un-cover’ the hidden ‘other face’ essential to ‘Modernity’: the colonial peripheral world, the sacrificed Indian, the enslaved Black person, the oppressed woman, the alienated child and popular culture, etc. (the ‘victims’ of ‘Modernity’) as victims of an irrational act (as a contradiction of the rational ideal of ‘Modernity’ itself)” (Dussel, 2005, p. 28).

Aníbal Quijano (2005) states that so-called modernity brought a new global pattern of power, combining capitalism, Eurocentrism, and globalization. At this historical moment, races are classified in the modern concept, initiating a great distinction between colonized and colonizers, between Blacks, Indians, mestizos, and Europeans.

“In the Americas, the idea of race was a way of granting legitimacy to the relations of domination imposed by conquest. The subsequent constitution of Europe as a new identity after the Americas, and the expansion of European colonialism to the rest of the world, led to the elaboration of the Eurocentric perspective of knowledge and, with it, to the theoretical elaboration of the idea of race as the naturalization of those colonial relations of domination between Europeans and non-Europeans. Historically, this meant a new way of legitimizing the already old ideas and practices of relations of superiority/inferiority between dominators and dominated. Since then, it has proven to be the most effective and durable instrument of universal social domination, because another equally universal, though older one, came to depend on it: the intersexual or gender one: **the conquered and dominated peoples were placed in a natural situation of inferiority, and consequently so too were their phenotypic traits, as well as their mental and cultural discoveries. In this way, race became the first fundamental criterion for the distribution of the world population into levels, places, and roles within the power structure of the new society.** In other words, it became the basic mode of universal social classification of the world population” (Quijano, 2005, p. 107-108, our emphasis).

Relations of power between dominators and dominated were then established. Unpaid, non-wage labor became associated with races regarded as inferior. Colonized Indians were treated as disposable labor, forced to work exhaustively until death, which caused a major Indigenous genocide (Quijano, 2005). It is the anthropologist Darcy Ribeiro who also draws our attention, in his work *The Brazilian People: The Formation and Meaning of Brazil*, to the cruel process of colonization and slavery in the Americas. Ribeiro (1995) states that the Blacks brought to Brazil were separated by ethnicity from the moment they boarded the ships, losing collective references, while Indigenous peoples were enslaved, catechized, and exterminated. Human beings were dispossessed of themselves.

The intellectual elaboration of the process of modernity produced a perspective of knowledge and a mode of producing knowledge that demonstrate the character of the global pattern of power: colonial, modern, capitalist, and Eurocentered. This perspective and this concrete mode of producing knowledge are recognized as Eurocentrism (Quijano, 2005, p. 115).

From this point of view, European knowledge ceased to figure as one among several forms of understanding the world and came to occupy the position of universal measure of legitimate knowledge (Quijano, 2005; Castro-Gómez, 2005). Eurocentrism, modernity, and the coloniality of power form part of an amalgam and function as a mirror that distorts what it reflects, although it preserves some traits of resemblance. We possess traits and proximities with Europeans. However, we are distinct. We were led, knowingly or unknowingly, willingly or unwillingly, to see and accept this distorted reflection as our own and as real (Quijano, 2005, p. 118). In this deformed image, Latin America was often invited to read itself through external parameters, a situation that deepened historical and subjective dependencies (Quijano, 2005a).

### CAPITALISM AND MEANS OF PRODUCTION

Quijano presents that, in the future Americas, slavery and all other forms of domination had as their main objective the production of commodities for the purpose of supplying the world market:

“In the Americas, slavery was deliberately established and organized as a commodity in order to produce commodities for the world market and, in this way, to serve the purposes and needs of capitalism. Likewise, the servitude imposed on Indians, including the redefinition of institutions of reciprocity, served the same ends, that is, to produce commodities for the world market. And finally, independent commodity production was established and expanded for the same purposes. This means that all these forms of labor and of labor control in the Americas not only operated simultaneously, but were articulated around the axis of capital and the world market. Consequently, they were part of a new pattern of organization and control of labor in all its historically known forms, together and around capital. **Together they configured a new system: capitalism**” (Quijano, 2005, p. 115, our emphasis).

In this sense, new forms of labor control emerged to guarantee, first, the organization of commodity production. Second, the joint action between capital and market. Third, the fulfillment of new

functions, developing traits and new configurations. The joint action between control of labor, resources, and products founded world capitalism (Quijano, 2005, p. 118). The constitution of this historical arrangement shows that the coloniality of power was present at the very birth of capitalist relations on a global scale (Quijano, 2005).

Racial differences served as a method of social classification and distributed roles in the new structure of labor control. Racist classification endured throughout the entire colonial period. With European expansion, new races emerged, adding yellow and olive-skinned peoples, each new identity with a previously established place within labor control (Quijano, 2005, p. 108).

The wealth of the Americas and their geographical location allowed whites access to gold and silver. The forced labor of the enslaved, with their unpaid labor, allowed colonizers to enter the world market, taking control of the markets of China, India, Ceylon, Egypt, Syria, the Middle East, and the Far East, thus expanding colonial domination to other peoples (Quijano, 2005, p. 109). The Americas, in this movement, appear as the material axis of accumulation and as a central territory in the reorganization of world power (Quijano, 2005; Wallerstein, 1999).

“This coloniality of the control of labor determined the geographical distribution of each of the forms integrated into world capitalism. In other words, it determined the social geography of capitalism: capital, in the social relation of control over wage labor, was the axis around which all the other forms of control over labor, its resources, and its products were articulated. This made it dominant over all of them and gave a capitalist character to the totality of such a structure of labor control. But at the same time, this specific social relation was geographically concentrated above all in Europe, and socially among Europeans throughout the world of capitalism. To that extent and in that way, Europe and the European were constituted as the center of the capitalist world” (Quijano, 2005, p. 110).

Europe incorporated the rest of the planet as its “world-system.” World capitalism governed by Europe reconfigured the cultural histories of dominated countries, such as Africa, Asia, and Oceania, through its hegemony of control over knowledge and control over production. Through the dispossession of colonized civilizations, new geocultural identities were formed through the repression of forms of knowledge production (Quijano, 2005, p. 111). This process affected memory, symbols, knowledge, and

ways of naming the world, imposing exogenous references on the reading of the historical reality of subjected peoples (Quijano, 2005; Castro-Gómez, 2005).

Within the European world-system, ethnocentrism developed, making modernity and rationality European products. In European ethnocentrism, there exists the “other” in a complete state of nature and the “self” as the result of evolution, with the European as the modern being to be attained (Quijano, 2005, p. 111-112).

Eurocentrism and capital-centrism took over so-called human relations along with the artifact of globalization. In every corner of the planet, peoples suffered and continue to suffer from the domination, imposition, and power of the European world-system. We came to see the world, the human being, and their relations through the eyes of the dominators. We came to disbelieve in cultures, medicines, ways of living, and ancestral values. We came, finally, to be market and merchandise, product and consumer (Quijano, 2005; Escobar, 2005).

And, as Aníbal Quijano rightly told us, “consequently, it is time for us to learn to free ourselves from the Eurocentric mirror in which our image is always, necessarily, distorted. It is time, finally, to stop being what we are not” (Quijano, 2005, p. 126).

## **FINAL CONSIDERATIONS**

We will conclude this work by making use, once again, of the thought of Aníbal Quijano, now in his article *Don Quixote and the Windmills in Latin America*, published in 2005, emphasizing that the question of identity in Latin America constitutes an open, dynamic, and heterogeneous historical project, with no fixed loyalty to a single memory or a single past:

“What we today call Latin America was constituted together with and as part of the currently dominant pattern of world power. Here, coloniality and globality were configured and established as the foundations and constitutive modes of the new pattern of power. From here departed the historical process that defined the historical-structural dependence of Latin America and gave rise, in the same movement, to the constitution of Western Europe as the world center of control of that power. And in that same movement, it also defined the new material and subjective elements that founded the mode of social existence that came to be called modernity” (Quijano, 2005a, p. 9).

From this understanding, it becomes possible to perceive that Latin America occupies a central place in the formation of the modern world, even though this place was inscribed under the sign of exploitation, racial hierarchization, and historical subordination. In Quijano, modernity emerges intertwined with coloniality, and this linkage helps explain why the organization of world power was carried out through the racial classification of the population, the appropriation of labor, the expropriation of knowledges, and the imposition of a Eurocentric imaginary upon colonized peoples (Quijano, 2005; Quijano, 2005a). In this direction, Latin America appears as a space of historical violence, but also as a territory of critical elaboration and the production of other horizons for reading the world (Clímaco, 2014; Oliveira; Candau, 2013).

Throughout this work, we have seen that the coloniality of power formulated by Quijano (2005) makes it possible to understand that the process of colonization went beyond the plane of territorial occupation and economic domination. It reached the ways of being, knowing, naming, and organizing social life. The racial classification of the population, the framing of the non-European as inferior, the centrality attributed to Europe, and the articulation among labor, capital, and the world market make up one and the same historical movement, whose persistence continues to traverse the Latin American experience. For this reason, the critique of the coloniality of power reaches the field of economy, politics, culture, and subjectivity, producing a profound reading of the historical formation of our societies (Clímaco, 2014).

The myth of modernity, by presenting Europe as the center of world history and as the universal measure of rationality and civilization, produces the concealment of other historical experiences, other forms of knowledge, and other ways of life. Dussel (2005) contributes to this debate by presenting Latin

America as the “other face” of modernity, marked by exploitation, sacrifice, and the concealment of subjects and cultures subjected to colonial violence. In dialogue with this reading, Quijano (2005) shows that coloniality does not constitute an episode closed in the past, but rather a persistent logic inscribed in social relations and in the ways by which we still see ourselves and are seen.

This persistence helps explain why so many memories were silenced, so many knowledges were debased, and so many identities were pushed to historical margins; Indigenous peoples, Black populations, and distinct Latin American groups had their trajectories subjected to a continuous process of inferiorization, dispossession, and erasure, while Europe consolidated its material and symbolic centrality (Quijano, 2005; Ribeiro, 1995). Epistemic violence, in this context, walked side by side with material violence, instituting an order in which European knowledge came to figure as the dominant reference for reading the world and humanity itself (Castro-Gómez, 2005).

For this reason, the decolonial perspective acquires political, historical, and intellectual density within this debate and calls Latin American thought to revisit its trajectories, memories, conflicts, and subjects, opening the way to other forms of existence and historical interpretation. In Oliveira and Candau (2013), decolonial pedagogy appears as a possibility of resistance, re-existence, and reconfiguration of formative processes, bringing back into scene historically subalternized subjects and long-disauthorized knowledges. This path reinforces that the critique of Eurocentrism equally involves the construction of other ethical, political, and epistemological references for thinking Latin America.

Many truths, many memories, and many pasts were silenced; many Latin American paths still call for journeying, listening, and sharing. In this line of reasoning, the recovery of historically erased Latin American identities must travel the roads of decolonization, the decoloniality of power, and liberation. It is a matter of bringing back into debate subalternized voices, historically unauthorized experiences, and horizons of existence produced from Latin America (Quijano, 2005a; Oliveira; Candau, 2013).

To revisit Aníbal Quijano, therefore, is to revisit a forceful critique of the historical foundations that sustained Eurocentric modernity and global capitalism; his thought provides elements for

understanding the persistence of inequalities, racial hierarchies, and forms of domination that continue to bear upon the bodies, territories, and knowledges of our peoples. To the same extent, his reflection offers instruments for thinking the liberation from the Eurocentric mirror and the affirmation of other ways of living, knowing, and sharing the world (Quijano, 2005; Quijano, 2005a; Clímaco, 2014).

Let us repeat: “consequently, it is time for us to learn to free ourselves from the Eurocentric mirror in which our image is always, necessarily, distorted. It is time, finally, to stop being what we are not” (Quijano, 2005, p. 126).

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