

6. A Theoretical Revolution in Time and Space

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With more than eight hours and thousands of miles separating us, I connect with Ramón Grosfoguel in California over Skype, where he is an associate professor at UC Berkeley. Eager to understand more about his critique of dependency theory through the lens of decoloniality, we nevertheless start from the beginning with Grosfoguel explaining how dependency theory emerged in Latin America.

Dependency theory is one of the original paradigms produced by the global South as a response to the Western-centric white social sciences of the global North. The global North at the time was working along the lines of modernisation theory, which basically amounted to blaming the victim. They were trying to understand wealth and poverty in the world in relation to either cultural features of countries, or the policies of the nation state. The culturalist version of modernisation theory said that the reason why people around the world were living under poverty was because they were stuck in traditional culture and that they needed to become modern. What they meant by modern is to become assimilated to Western values, and that if you did not; you would be living under poverty for the rest of your life.

Modernisation theory came about after World War II, when the US was confronting the challenge of providing a model of development that would somehow compete with the Soviet model. As the Soviet Union was accusing the US of being imperialist, the response of the US and the Truman administration in particular, was to say that “we are not imperialists”; our aim is “to help poor underdeveloped countries become developed”, and that what we want to provide is “technical assistance” as well as a “scientific theory of development”. One version of modernisation theory was this culturalist version and the other version was the Rostow version, the famous Anti-

Communist Manifesto from 1960 where Rostow claims that the problem is policies at the level of the nation-state. What is shared by both theories is that they both ground the explanation of wealth or poverty inside the boundaries of the nation-state. They do not consider global structures of inequality or anything similar, or long-term historical structures. They wanted a tabula rasa, overlooking the questions of colonialism and imperialism.

After World War II, the colonial administrations, which had been the primary way through which the North interacted with the global South for over 450 years, entered a terminal crisis. Why? Because during the war, while the First World countries fought against each other, national liberation movements struggled against colonialism in India (British), Indonesia (Dutch), Vietnam (Japanese and French) and China (Japanese). If you just sum up their populations, we are talking about close to half the population of the world at the time. The impact of the end of colonial administrations in China, India, Vietnam and Indonesia by the end of the forties of the last century was huge. It was crucial for the national liberation movements in the fifties, sixties and seventies in Africa, Asia and the Caribbean, where colonialism finally ended its role as a primary vehicle of political relations between North and South. We are speaking here of a major planetary move away from colonial administrations.

The end of colonial administrations was a challenge to the imperialist system. The Truman Administration faced this challenge and produced new innovations attempting to relate with the periphery of the world-economy once colonialism was over. The question Truman faced: How to do business as usual with peripheral countries in a context where colonial administrations are over, that is, where they cannot send "Mister Smith" to run the colony anymore? After 1945, you have the emergence of newly independent national elites coming to power in many of the ex-colonies, now formally independent. So, this challenge of trying to co-opt these elites on the side of the West vis-à-vis the Soviets, was what produced the Truman administration developmentalist package composed of three strategies: foreign aid, military aid and finally the invention of a pseudo-scientific theory to justify what they were doing.

What they were doing was basically opening the doors for foreign capital investments from the West, especially from the USA, in manufacturing industries, but also in agriculture and mining. In exchange, the peripheral State would have to provide tax-free incentives, investments in infrastructure and so on, so that these costs would not be borne by the transnational corporations. This was more or less the model they were trying to sell to the world, and they needed a theory to justify this. That theory was modernisation theory. They were putting forward many different showcases for this,

especially the case of Puerto Rico. At the time, the Puerto Rican model was described by the euphemistic term, “industrialisation by invitation”. This model was extended all over the world through the Point Four program of the State Department in 1950. What they did was to bring elites from all over the Third World to Puerto Rico. The idea was not just that they were supposed to learn technical skills to become industrialised, as the rhetoric suggested. But in addition, it was a kind of propaganda program, as people were brainwashed into the US model of development for the Third World. This meant Maquiladoras, labour intensive industries that open doors for US capital investments, tax-free incentives to foreign capital investments, free infrastructural incentives (free roads, water and electricity subsidized by the peripheral State), offers of cheap labour, and so on. Countries around the world started to imitate the Puerto Rican model, including the Mexican maquiladora program that began in 1964.

In the long term, the Puerto Rican model failed due to its own success. The model was imitated in other parts of the world and industries that first settled in Puerto Rico left to countries that offered cheaper costs of production. After 25 years of maquiladoras, Puerto Rico suffered an economic collapse and mass unemployment due to the deindustrialisation of the Island. After several decades of Maquiladoras being exported to various regions around the world, today we can corroborate that none of the countries that followed this model of development ever became a so-called advanced industrial economy. The “industrialisation by invitation” or “maquiladora program” was equivalent to peripheral industrialisation, which means your country is industrialised by being super-exploited by transnational capital. The gains for the country are very marginal, as wages and taxes are low and profits are sent abroad.

This introduction explains the context in which we have to understand Latin American dependency theory. Part of what modernisation theory was trying to do was to ignore the consequences of the history of colonialism that preceded the Second World War and the structures of imperialism after that conflict. For example, in India, they would say people are living under poverty because they are stuck in tradition. So, no talk about the two hundred years of British colonialism in India, no talk about the fact that India was the number one manufacturing exporting economy of the world in the 18th century, no talk about how the British destroyed the industrial base of India when they colonised India in the mid-18th century, subsequently stealing technology from India, and starting the industrial revolution in 19th century in England. No talk of this, no talk of British colonialism making the local economy of India an export agrarian economy supplying the need for raw materials, agrarian items and consumption in England. This is what Andre Gunder Frank and other people have called the “development of underdevelopment.” You had a colonial policy that underdeveloped India.

Comparatively, India was an advanced economy by any standards of the West in the 18th century, and then became one of the poorest countries of the world two hundred years later.

Challenging the unit of analysis of both time and space

Then came the dependency theorists who said wait a minute; you cannot understand wealth and poverty in the world without having a longue dureé perspective and a global scope. That means, you need to understand the present situation of wealth and poverty on the planet in relation to the structures of power, violence, domination and exploitation, between core powers and peripheral regions within a capitalist international division of labour that has lasted several centuries. So, the critique by dependency theory is a critique of the unit of analysis in terms of time and space. We need to use a global unit of analysis, rather than focusing on the nation-state in order to understand the present inequalities of the world. Moreover, we need to have a notion of time that is longer than the temporalities of nation-states.

This doesn't mean, and this is part of the stereotyping and misunderstanding of dependency theory, that you shouldn't look at the national level. They are saying you need to articulate the national within the global, and the global with the local. You need to put the two together to make sense of what is going on, and you cannot merely rely on a nation-state boundary to attempt to understand poverty and wealth in the world today. They talk about the international division of labour, core – periphery, as the central structure that is constitutive of capital accumulation on a global scale. Dependency theorists articulate the location of the countries within that structure. It does not just operate beyond the boundaries of the nation-state, but also serves as a logic that is constitutive of and reorganises the local. They are saying that once countries achieve independence, they cannot just erase two, three, four hundred years of colonialism.

If you have been under the colonial structure of mono-export economies, exporting sugar, or coffee, or oil, your economy is already organised and structured along those lines. This you cannot erase a day after independence. You become formally independent, but your economy is still subordinated in the international division of labour. This is what creates the structures of neo-colonialism, as you are still in the periphery, producing for the needs of the global North. In order to provide for the other commodities that you do not produce and that you need for survival, you are forced to import them from the global North. You are dependent on the metropolitan core powers to purchase from you what you produce and to buy from them what you do not produce. This is where the word “dependency” comes in, but they are really talking about

relations of domination and exploitation by the metropolis of the periphery.

It is not just about economic exploitation: it is also and above all about political domination. If a country tries to modify its location in the international division of labour, the response of the global North is a CIA coup d'état, military dictatorships promoted and organised from the global North, military invasions, or commercial blockades. If the periphery attempts to question its role in the international division of labour, they get hell.

This is what dependency theorists were trying to fight and to theorize. The theory was a critique of the concept of space in modernization theory that privileged nation-state units, and it was also a critique of the concept of time, as modernization theory is ahistorical and operates with an episodic notion of time. The concept of time in dependency theory is what Fernand Braudel would call the *longue durée*. Even though dependency theorists were not reading Braudel, they were already doing the *longue durée*. By the way, Braudel has said in interviews, before he passed, that he learnt the *longue durée* approach from Brazilian historians in the 1930s. So the idea of the *longue durée* is something that has been in Latin America for a long time.

The dependency theorists were creating a theoretical revolution with concepts of time and space that was a direct challenge to what white Western-centric social sciences were using at the time. Although there was a strong school of dependency theory in Latin America, it was not the only place where dependency theory took hold. You have intellectuals in Africa and Asia who were developing analysis within the paradigm of what we call dependency theory. After that came world-systems theory and other paradigms that take for granted that the unit of analysis is the global scale and that we need to take long-term structural views of global processes. But nobody says where that came from. In fact, the most influential school, moving everybody forward in this sense, was the dependency school.

Can we talk a bit about your critique in terms of how the dependency school reproduces certain types of developmentalist thinking, in terms of it being teleological?

There are several problems with dependency theory. One is that there is a contradiction between saying that the problem is globalisation, but the solution is the nation-state. They fell into the trap of what I would say is the modern project; modernity. This idea that when a country takes over the nation-state, and insulates itself from the global economy, it can then become fully independent and build a new society, beyond capitalism and imperialism. This utopian idea comes from Western-centric modernity,

the idea that countries develop, and that the development has to pass through a process of self-determination where you insulate yourself from other forces around you and eventually become a mature society. While dependency theorists were questioning this narrative of progress in their critique of modernization theory's diagnosis of the problem, when it came to solutions, they fell back into that. There was a contradiction between their diagnosis and solution. If the problem is in the global system, you cannot radically transform the system by making a change in a particular nation-state. You can push boundaries of nation-states to a certain extent, but there are going to be constraints and limits as to how far you can go. You need to have, in a sense, a multi-local struggle, that challenges the system and that has consequences on a global scale, because an isolated local struggle is not going to go far enough.

But what about what you say about Cardoso, that in a sense, at least his brand of dependency theory is still trapped within this framework of linear progress, a teleological way of viewing development. Were there dependency theorists who broke more fundamentally with this European denial of coevalness?

There were two versions of dependency theory, one version was the version of Andre Gunder Frank, Theotonio dos Santos, Vânia Bambirra, and Rui Mauro Marini – mostly Brazilians. They were the school known as the development of underdevelopment. They were the more radical school within dependency theory, and that is the school of dependency theory that I identify with the most. They were the ones challenging the unit of analysis, in terms of time and space. On the other hand, you have the version of dependency theory à la Cardoso and Falleto. Their famous book “Dependency and Development in Latin America,” was a classic of dependency theory.²⁵ For them, the international is a weak context under which nation-states operate, but it was not constitutive of the national economies. They put more emphasis on the explanation of wealth and poverty in relation to the power structures and struggles between local actors inside nation-states. In a sense, they shared the premise of modernization theory in that they took the nation-state as the unit of analysis. For them development was equivalent to becoming industrialised. The term dependent development was a term that they coined to talk about the possibility of industrialisation in the periphery. But the other, more radical school argued that peripheral industrialisation doesn't mean you are developed. You are still subordinated because peripheral industrialisation is not going to release you from underdevelopment.

²⁵ Cardoso, Fernando Henrique and Enzo Falleto, *Dependency and Development in Latin America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979).

It is not an accident that all the people who followed Cardoso and Faletto became part of a state developmentalist school in the 1980s and 1990s. They went back into developmentalism, together with some people in modernisation theory. Peter Evans and Theda Skocpol²⁶ were among the dependent development theorists that followed Cardoso and Faletto and became a part of the state developmentalist school. Cardoso himself later became a neoliberal when he became president of Brazil. These were different theoretical and political projects, completely.

The denial of coevalness is much more accentuated in the dependent development school, because they were in a sense defining development in terms of industrialisation, and then analysing some of these economic structures as if they were in different time-space frameworks. The moment you take the nation-state as the unit of analysis, and you just narrow it down to independent units, and then you speak of some countries as advanced and some as backward, you are falling into the trap of the denial of coevalness and modernisation theory. In fact, what the “development of underdevelopment” radical dependency school was trying to do was precisely, a denial of the denial of coevalness. If you consider core-periphery in a relational way, as a global structure, you do not consider poverty in the periphery as something that predates in time the wealth in the core countries; core-periphery, wealth and poverty are mutually constitutive. It’s a zero-sum game. The moment a country becomes developed; it becomes developed at the cost of some other country that is being underdeveloped.

What are your thoughts on why dependency theory failed to take into account the historical patterns of oppression based on race and gender?

There were some exceptions. One exception you can find in André Gunder Frank, where he entangled core-periphery with racial hierarchies, when he talked about internal colonialisms. Internal colonialism was a concept used in Latin America to call attention to racial issues, that is, the entanglement of race and class in the political economy. In addition to core-periphery relations between the global North and the Global South, they conceived of core-periphery happening also inside the North and inside the Global South itself. For example, the relation between the Northeast and Southeast of Brazil is a core-periphery relationship. The South is the dominant part and the Northeast is the subordinate part. What Gunder Frank is trying to show is how the process of extraction of wealth goes from the local to the global, and it passes from a rural area to a city, then from that city to another region in Brazil, and then to São Paulo or Rio. From there it goes to England, USA or France. He shows this core-periphery relationship in a dynamic

²⁶ See Peter Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer and Theda Skocpol, *Bringing the State Back In* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985). Also see Peter Evans, *Dependent Development: The Alliance of Multinational, State, and Local Capital in Brazil* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979).

way as a nested hierarchy, but he also entangles it with questions of race, as he points out that areas of Brazil that have large black populations are super-exploited compared to other regions.

But most of dependency theorists were focussing on the question of class. I think it is because they had a very strong Marxist formation, and in Marxism, especially in those times, class was the last instance, it determined almost everything in that paradigm. So, they lost sight of the entanglement of class, race, gender and other issues. 90% of the world proletariat today are women of colour in the Third World, so that entanglement of class, race, and gender is not an accident because it is constitutive to the production of a cheap labour force. Usually the Marxists think about racism and sexism as superstructures, and what determines all of that is the infrastructure that is class, or the economy. What we are trying to do in the decoloniality perspective is to decolonise those paradigms, and bring in gender, racism and sexism as organising principles of the political economy. That is, the international division of labour is organised from within, by questions of gender and race. Gender and race are not superstructures, but are infrastructures that are constitutive of the political economy. What you do in terms of labour, and how much you earn for what you do is organised from within, by questions of gender and race.

In your paper²⁷ you also spoke about how Quijano's notion of decoloniality of power accounts for the racial hierarchies.

Dependency theorists were mostly focused on class, and they were in a sense class reductionists, which is another critique of mine. What Quijano is doing, is basically bringing in what he calls the coloniality of power. This idea precedes Quijano, as you can see it in the work of people like Frantz Fanon. Fanon argued that in the colonies, racism is infrastructure, not superstructure, so he was challenging the Marxists on that point. You could find the same thing in Cedric Robinson, as he was talking about racial capitalism before Quijano. He was an African-American scholar that wrote a book entitled *Black Marxism* and he talks about racial capitalism, way before Quijano. You can see other people in the Americas talking about the concept of internal colonialism, again with the same idea as coloniality where the idea of race becomes an organising principle of the international division of labour. You could see that in a sense with Andre Gunder Frank and other people. You could see also the idea and the same phrase in Immanuel Wallerstein's work when he says that racism and sexism are organising principles of political economy. In a sense you can see this in Angela Davis's work when

²⁷ Ramón Grosfoguel, "Developmentalism, Modernity, and Dependency Theory in Latin America," *Nepantla: Views from South* 1, no. 2 (2000): 349.

she was looking at the question of gender in relation to black women; she was saying that gender is a privilege of white women, because black women were not perceived as women. They were perceived by the masters, not as women but as female; that is, as animals, particularly during slavery. As a critique of the white feminist, she was challenging the idea that gender is universal. She shows how race is an organising principle of political economy and an organising principle of gender domination. So, you could find a variety of people, especially among black thinkers, but also among indigenous thinkers before Quijano, articulating these ideas.

These ideas of the coloniality of power bring more complexity to the picture painted by the dependency theorists that were working within the Marxist paradigm and focusing on capital accumulation and class struggle. They are not throwing away the contribution of dependency theory, but are making it more complex. It is a corrective.

So what do you think of the possibilities to break with coloniality of power in that more complex framework?

Part of the problem is how we conceptualise the system. While we tend to think of the problem as being economic, and the rest as derivative, it is the other way around. We are living in a civilisation that already has multiple structures of power, not just one, and those structures of power are entangled with one another and are constitutive of the economy. The economy is already organised from within by the civilizational logic of modernity.

Why is capitalism a socially destructive system in terms of life on the planet? The answer given by many Marxists is that capitalism is a system where the aim is to make profit, so capitalists do not care about anything else, they don't care about the environment. In the past, there were many civilisations that existed, but none of them were as destructive of life on the planet as this one. Why is that so? It is not enough to say that it is because there is a profit aim here. There is something else, and it has to do with the cosmology. We are living under a Western dualistic Cartesian cosmology that thinks of nature as exterior to the human, and nature is conceived as inferior to the human. So, nature is always a means towards an end, which means you can destroy it to achieve another end and it will not affect human life, because it is dualistically and ontologically independent from human life. Any technology you build along that dualistic rationality has the rationality of the destruction of life. We have been building technology along that rationality at least since the 1600s with the European colonial expansion, and the emergence of this dualistic way of thinking, particularly in the mid-17th century. Technology is not neutral to cosmology; technology always has cosmological principles embedded in it. What about building technology with a different

cosmology? What about building technology with the holistic cosmology of Pachamama in the Andes, of Ubuntu in Africa, or of Tawhid in Islam? They don't think about the nature versus the human ontological dualism, those are Western categories. They think about a cosmos with multiple, coexisting forms of life. With such holistic cosmological principles you can produce technology that has the rationality of the reproduction of life.

Over the past five hundred years, especially, when this system started expanding after 1492, the European colonial expansion that created world capitalism destroyed all the other civilisations. There are no more civilisations outside of this one, so today we are in a planetary capitalist, patriarchal, modern colonial, Western-centric, Christian-centric world system. I prefer to use a long phrase like that to name the system we are in, rather than the short phrase, world capitalism or global capitalism or the capitalist mode of production. If you name it with a long phrase like this, you put on the table everything that is at stake. We are talking not about an economic system, but about a civilisation that has an economic system, and that the current capitalist economic system is already organised from within with civilizational logics. You cannot disentangle the way capitalism operates today from Western cosmology and from Christian patriarchy, so all of these are already organising principles for the way that capitalism works. It could have been otherwise of course. But that's the way it evolved because the upper hand of the formation of this global system was the European colonial expansion and Western Europeans carried these multiple structures of domination all over the world. So we need to be very precise about what happened historically. The epistemology that was carried over was Western epistemology, Western world-views and cosmology. The European colonial expansion globalized the Cartesian paradigm with the scientific project. Positivism was globalized. And now, because they destroyed all the other civilisations, there is no outside to this one planetary civilisation. Then we are in a sense at a dead-end, because this system is not producing anything good, it is just accelerating the destruction of life on the planet. This has political consequences.

To transform the system, we need to think about becoming viruses of intersectionality. What I mean by that is that we need to struggle against the multiplicity of oppressions that are embedded in this civilisation. We cannot think of the transformation of this system by just thinking of it as an economic system, where you just transform it by pursuing class struggle, and then produce a new utopian world. That approach did not work in the 20th century and it is not going to work in the future. If you organize against capital, reproducing all of the civilizational logic of modernity such as racism, patriarchy, eurocentrism, cartesianism, ecologicide, epistemicide, etc., then the outcome of the struggle against capital is going to reproduce all of the oppressions you are fighting against. The means produce the ends. The struggle against capital got corrupted

the moment you reproduced the civilizational logic of modernity. This is why it is not an accident that 20th century socialism ended up reproducing colonialism, imperialism, state capitalism, sexism, heterosexism, eurocentrism, ecologicide, racism, etc. We need to think in terms of a civilizational crisis, and in terms of a struggle towards the formation of a new civilisation. We need to move beyond the civilisation of Western-centric modernity. That new civilisation has to be pluriversal, not universal, it has to transcend modernity and not reproduce modernity. The goal we are moving towards should be like the Zapatistas say: A world where many worlds are possible, beyond the current world where only one world is possible.