Discussing ‘Africa’s Stalled Decolonization’ among “Cepalistas”, “Dependentistas” and “Decolonial Thinking

By:

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In the article “Sixty Years Later: Africa's Stalled Decolonization”, Prof Taylor argues that 1960 marked a turning point for Africa. It went from having 9 to 26 independent states, which is a symbolic indicator of Africa’s emergence from the days of European colonization. However, Taylor points out that, since the beginning of the decolonization process in that period, the leaders of the African continent were not able to subvert the exchange relations with the former European empires that used to control their territories. On the contrary, in this period there was a sort of reorganization of the legal and political architecture, which allowed European countries to maintain certain relationships of exploitation with their former colonies.

Taylor's questions about the inability of African elites to disengage from the European countries that controlled their territories under colonial administrations is partly explained by the provisions of the UN Resolution 1803 of 1962 recognizing the principle of permanent sovereignty over natural resources (PSNR), which allowed the new States to control their natural resources as long as they met certain conditions. The exercise of their sovereignty according to Resolution 1803 was conditioned on the new States joining the world economy, providing raw materials to developed countries and compensating foreign investors whose interests were affected as a result of the resources expropriation and nationalization policies.

The price that the new states had to pay in order to exercise their sovereignty as independent, political entities has been analyzed from different points of view. On the one hand, Emel, Huber and Makene, following Hardt and Negri, have referred to the sovereignty of States in (post) colonial spaces as the "poisoned gift of national liberation". With this idea, these authors highlight the fundamental role of (post) colonial national states in the global organization of the capitalist market and question the scope of certain instruments such as the Resolution 1803 of 1962 to achieve a genuine self-determination of the peoples of the global south in the new sovereign states.

On the other hand, Partha Chatterjee notes that, although sovereignty and national liberation can have certain emancipatory effects against the hierarchies of domination that surround global capitalism, these notions could also contribute to its reorganization and functioning. In this sense, Chatterjee explains that "the conflict between metropolitan capital and the people-nation it resolves by absorbing the political life of the nation into the body of the state. Conservatory of the passive revolution, the national state now proceeds to find for 'the nation' a place in the global order of capital, while striving to keep the contradictions between capital and the people in perpetual suspension. All politics is now sought to be subsumed under the overwhelming requirements of the state-representing-the-nation."

Similarly, Antony Anghie has pointed out that the nationalist struggles that led to the independence of the so-called third world countries were not translated into a true process of decolonization. On the contrary, in the (post) colonial period, the role of the new states as agents of development was fundamental

so that the civilizational structures of the colony could persist. The "development" enterprise represented interests that were presented as universal and prevailing over the interests of broad populations targeted as "minorities", which, in the long run, were absorbed under the developmental logic.

In this sense, the Westphalian vision of sovereignty understood as the autonomous capacity of a State to control its own territory and population without interference from external forces, can also be understood as the category of "territorial trap" coined by John Agnew. This notion suggests that the new states are forced to accept the conditions of private transnational actors in order to attract foreign investment and to effectively allow the extraction of their resources. Thus, given the enormous difficulties that the new independent States must face in order to escape from transnational networks in global markets, Agnew highlights that sovereignty is not limited to a specific territory, but is situated in the networks of global economic relations. In this respect, the apparent tension between global capital and the self-determination of states, understood as independent subjects in a (post) colonial world, highlights the fundamental role of underdeveloped states in capital accumulation processes. It indicates that the sovereignty recognized to the new States was still tied to the rules of the global market and to a view of dominant development, where the developed countries were considered as the main exporters of capital.

From a Latin American perspective, it is important to note the debate between the "cepalistas" and the "dependentistas" that took place in the second half of the 20th century – at the same time the decolonization process was taking place in Africa. Indeed, this "developmental" period impacted not only the new African states. This period also impacted Latin American states who were already independent for more than one hundred years, and had already experienced some attempts at developmental periods, but still remained in a peripheral position in the north-south dynamics of the global economy. However, it is important to note here the difference that arises in the second half of the 20th century between the so-called "developed" countries and the "underdeveloped countries", and had as its breaking point the inaugural address of former United States President Harry Truman on 20th January of 1949. This difference homogenized in the world a discourse of progress and

development, which was supposed to guide the actions of all States to eradicate poverty and achieve world peace.

However, the north-south unequal relations reproduced by this new global scheme, not only between developed and underdeveloped countries, but also within the latter led to the emergence of institutions such as ECLAC (CEPAL, in Spanish language) led by Raúl Prebisch, which tried to correct this relationship inequality through measures such as the imposition of subsidies and tariffs on imports. The so-called “cepalistas”, part of ECLAC school of thought, promoted a series of policies addressed to achieve an autonomous “industrial” development in Latin America. One of the most outstanding policies was the Import Substitution Industrialization (ISI) which responded to the fact that Latin American countries were mere exporters of raw materials under the international division of labor. Under the ISI policy, a series of tariffs and subsidies were imposed to restrict the imports of industrial goods from developed countries and to promote the industrialization at the domestic level in developing countries with the purpose of ending the dependency relationships between north and south.

However, despite the emancipatory purposes of the ISI policy, its implementation caused counterproductive effects and a deeper inequality between developing and developed countries. The policy, instead, led the Latin American countries to become dependent on capital and the inputs and technological processes of the so-called first world countries in order to develop industrial processes and transform the raw materials that the so-called third world countries extracted from their own territories.

In response, the “dependency theory” emerged, among whose exponents are Samir Amin, Fernando Enrique Cardozo, Enzo Faletto, André Gunder Frank, Aníbal Quijano and Theotonio Dos Santos. The “dependentistas” questioned the categories of “progress” and “modernity” immersed in the ISI policy as promoted by ECLAC, arguing that said policy was insufficient and contrary to the purpose of the Latin American countries emerging from a peripheral position in the world economic order. According to the “dependentistas”, the State project promoted under the ISI policy was problematic because it was inspired by the theory of modernization and aimed to follow the “path to progress” traced by the developed countries, ignoring the particularities and

context of each country.

However, dependency theory did not completely detach from some ideas of modernization theory such as “national development” or “autonomous development” as a way to achieve “progress” through the rational organization of society. The “dependentistas” approach presupposed that each nation-state could achieve autonomous national development through free and sovereign control of its own destiny. However, this could only be achieved, unlike what the ECLAC members pointed out, outside the capitalist system.

The dependency theorists then proposed as a solution to the center-periphery subordination relations in the form of the establishment of a socialist system in each State, in order to carry out the rational organization of autonomous national development. This proposal responded to the idea that it was possible to detach oneself from the capitalist world-system from a project led by and within the nation-state itself.

In response to the dependency theory, a new theoretical approach emerged from the Latin American (post) colonial theories. This approach better known as “decolonial thinking”, pointed out that the approach of the “dependentistas” was in turn insufficient to change the location in the capitalist world-system of the peripheral states, in a context of “global coloniality”.

The “decolonial thinking” questions to what extent it is possible to achieve the transformation of a system that operates on a global scale, through actions promoted from the nation-state. They argued that the “rational” control of the state is insufficient to modify the location of a country within the framework of the global international division of labor and of the colonial and hierarchical division of the world.

In this regard, Ramón Grosfoguel states that although it is important to promote political actions with emancipatory aspirations from the nation-state, these actions are not enough to subvert the peripheral position of the global south states because, in the best of cases, the states could be relocated in a semi-peripheral position of the world-system as long as its idea of development corresponds to the idea of progress promoted within the global capitalist system.

Decolonial thinking criticizes the fact that the ethnic/racial hierarchies built during the European colonial expansion, which remain through the “coloniality of power” in Latin America, have not been radically problematized. In this sense, this theoretical approach questions the extent of the possibilities of actions rationally promoted from the nation-state to generate long-term transformations of a system that operates on a global scale, that responds to a hegemonic idea of development, and that sooner or later ends up pulling countries that have managed to climb to a semi-peripheral position to their initial subordinate position.

Taylor’s description of the economic global dynamics of the African states does not differ much from the (neo) colonial context that Latin American countries have had to face. Various features highlighted by Taylor have persisted in the Latin American continent – the maintenance of the global south states in a subordinate position within the global system, their impossibility of accumulating the required capital to generate self-centered growth, the transfer of surplus capital abroad, the supremacy of the core over the peripheral countries, the unequal exchange, the failed aspirations to become autonomous states and the looting of these countries with the collaboration of their elites, which in both continents have played a fundamental role in the maintenance of the colonial hierarchy of the world. They have also allowed the incorporation of certain ideas of “modernity” and “progress” within their states according to the economic demands of the global order, which in turn is directed by transnational actors from the global north.

Finally, it is important to note that in Taylor's approach, which is strongly influenced by renowned “dependentistas” such as Samir Amin, the problematization of some categories such as the development is not entirely clear. Importantly, the questions posed by decolonial theorists to the “cepalistas” and to the “dependentistas” to rethink the influence of racial hierarchy built during the European colonial expansion, which sustains the subordinate position of the global South in global capitalist economy, have not been radically problematized. Taylor’s analysis misses how ethnic/racial hierarchies built during the European colonial expansion continue to affect development opportunities in Latin America, Africa and elsewhere.

From this point of view, decolonial thinking urges us to go beyond questions of public / private dichotomy, in which key transnational private actors for the

global economy participate. Instead, decolonial thinkers suggest the need to transcend the notion of “development”, which continues to influence the actions of the global south and permanently reinserting them into a subordinate position within the “Euro-American capitalist / patriarchal-modern / colonial world-system”. This is because under such limited view of the world, the Global South will continue to be seen as territories that still can be exploited, devastated and reconfigured in according to the demands of the global economic order.

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