Americanity as a concept, or the Americas in the modern world-system

Aníbal Quijano and Immanuel Wallerstein

I

The modern world-system was born in the long sixteenth century. The Americas as a geosocial construct were born in the long sixteenth century. The creation of this geosocial entity, the Americas, was the constitutive act of the modern world-system. The Americas were not incorporated into an already existing capitalist world-economy. There could not have been a capitalist world-economy without the Americas.

In Volume I of *The Modern World-System* (Wallerstein, New York: Academic Press, 1974, p. 38) it is argued that:

> [T]hree things were essential to the establishment of . . . a capitalist world-economy: an expansion of the geographical size of the world in question, the development of variegated methods of labor control for different products and different zones of the world-economy, and the creation of relatively strong state machineries in what would become the core-states of this capitalist world-economy.

The Americas were essential to the first two of these three needs. They offered space, and they became the locus and prime testing-ground of 'variegated methods of labor control'.

But then one might say the same of East-Central Europe and of parts of Southern Europe. There was however one crucial difference between these areas and the Americas, which is why we can speak of Americanity as a concept. In those peripheral zones of the new capitalist world-economy that were located on the continent of Europe (for example, in Poland or in Sicily) the strength of the existing agricultural communities and of their indigenous nobilities was considerable. Therefore, faced with the reconstruction of their economic and political institutions which occurred in the process of peripheralization, they were able to locate their cultural resistance to exploitation in their historicity, a locus that has served them right up to the twentieth century.

In the Americas, however, there was such widespread destruction of the indigenous populations, especially among hunting and gathering populations, and such widespread importation of a labour force, that the process of peripheralization involved less the *re*construction of economic and political institutions than their construction, virtually *ex nihilo* everywhere (except perhaps in the Mexican and Andean zones). Hence, from the beginning, the mode of cultural resistance to oppressive conditions was less in the claims of historicity than in the flight forward to 'modernity'. Americanity has always been, and remains to this day, an essential element in what we mean by 'modernity'. The Americas were the 'New World', a badge and a burden assumed from the outset. But as the centuries went by,

Aníbal Quijano is professor at San Marcos University and Director of the Centre for Social Research, Apartado Postal 140277, Lima 14, Peru. His research and publications deal mainly with power and social and cultural changes.

Immanuel Wallerstein is distinguished professor of sociology and director of the Fernand Braudel Center at Binghamton University (SUNY), USA. He is the author of numerous works, including *The Modern World-System* (1974) and *Unthinking Social Science* (1991).

the New World became the pattern, the model of the entire world-system.

What was this 'newness'? The newnesses were four-fold, each linked to the other: coloniality, ethnicity, racism, and the concept of newness itself.

Coloniality was essentially the creation of a set of states linked together within an interstate system in hierarchical layers. Those at the very bottom were the formal colonies. But even when formal colonial status would end, coloniality would not. It continues in the form of a sociocultural hierarchy of European and non-European. It is important to understand that *all* the states in this interstate system were new creations – from those at the top to those at the very bottom. The boundaries of these states have constantly changed over the centuries, sometimes in major ways, almost always in small ways. Sometimes the boundaries showed some kind of historical continuity with pre-modern political systems; quite often they did not. In the Americas, all the boundaries were new. And for the first three centuries of the modern world-system, all the states in the Americas were formal colonies, subordinated politically to a few European states.

The hierarchy of coloniality manifested itself in all domains – political, economic, and not least of all cultural. The hierarchy reproduced itself over time, although it was always possible for a few states to shift ranks in the hierarchy. But a change in rank order did not disturb the continued existence of the hierarchy. The Americas would become the first testing-ground too of the possibility for a few, never more than a few, to shift their place in the ranking. The exemplary instance was the divergence of the paths of North America and Latin America, beginning in the eighteenth century.

Coloniality was an essential element in the integration of the interstate system, creating not only rank order but sets of rules for the interactions of states with each other. Thus it was that the very efforts of those at the bottom of the rank order to overcome their low ranking served in many ways to secure the ranks further. The administrative boundaries established by the colonial authorities had had a certain fluidity in that, from the perspective of the metropole, the essential boundary-line was that of the empire *vis-à-vis* other metropolitan empires. It was decolonization that fixed the stateness of the decolonized states. The Spanish viceroyalties were carved up in the process of the wars of independence to yield, more or less, the states we know today. Thirteen of over 30 British Crown Colonies fought together a war of independence and came to form a new state, the United States of America. The independences crystallized the stateness of these states as the realm within which the communal sentiment of nationalism could breed and flourish. They confirmed the states in their hierarchy. Independence did not undo coloniality; it merely transformed its outer form.

It was the stateness of the states, and first of all of the states in the Americas that made it possible for ethnicity to emerge as a building-block of the modern world-system. Ethnicity is the set of communal boundaries into which in part we are put by others, in part we impose upon ourselves, serving to locate our identity and our rank within the state. Ethnic groups claim their history, but they first of all create their history. Ethnicities are always contemporary constructs, and thus always changing. All the major categories, however, into which we ethnically divide today in the Americas and the world (Native Americans or 'Indians', Blacks or 'Negros', Whites or 'Creoles'/Europeans, *Mestizos* or other names given to a so-called 'mixed' category) – all these categories did not exist prior to the modern world-system. They are part of what make up Americanity. They have become the cultural staple of the entire world-system.

That none of these categories is anchored either in genetics or in ancient cultural history can be seen by simply looking at the state-by-state and century-by-century variation in the usages in the Americas. The categorization within each state at any given moment was as complex or as simplified as the local situation required. In loci and moments of acute social conflict, the ethnic categories utilized were often reduced in number. In loci and moments of economic expansion, the categories often expanded to fit different groups into a more elaborate division of labour.

Ethnicity was the inevitable cultural consequence of coloniality. It delineated the social boundaries corresponding to the division of labour. And it justified the multiple forms of labour

control, invented as part of Americanity: slavery for the Black Africans, various forms of coerced cash-crop labour (*repartimiento*, *mita*, peonage) for Native Americans, indentured labour (*engagés*) for the European working class. These of course were the early forms of ethnic allocation to position in the work hierarchy. As we came into the post-independence period, the forms of labour control and the names of the ethnic categories were updated. But an ethnic hierarchy remained.

Ethnicity served not only as a categorization imposed from above, but as one reinforced from below. Families socialized their children into the cultural forms associated with ethnic identities. This was simultaneously politically calming (learning how to adapt and thereby cope) and radicalizing (learning the nature and the source of the oppressions). Political upheaval took on ethnic colouration in the multiple slave and Native American revolts. It coloured too the whole movement of the independences in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, as the various movements became ever more clearly the movements of the White settler populations, frightened by the spectres of Black ex-slave republics as in Haiti or rural Native American claims to upsetting the ethnic hierarchy, as in the Túpac Amaru rebellion.

Ethnicity therefore was not enough to maintain the new structures. As the historical evolution of the modern world-system brought about both the ending of formal colonial rule (first of all in the Americas) and the abolition of slavery (primarily a phenomenon of the Americas), ethnicity had to be reinforced by a conscious and systematic racism. Of course, racism was always implicit in ethnicity, and racist attitudes were part and parcel of Americanity and modernity from the outset. But full-fledged racism, theorized and explicit, was a creation largely of the nineteenth century, as a means of shoring up culturally an economic hierarchy some of whose political guarantees were weakening in the post-1789 era of 'popular sovereignty'.

The underlying reality of racism does not always require the verbal or even the surface social acting out of racist behaviour. In the more peripheral zones of the capitalist world-economy, for example in Latin America in nineteenth and twentieth centuries, racism could hide behind the petticoats of ethnic hierarchy. Formal segregation or even lesser formal discriminations were not practised. The existence of racism in such countries as Brazil or Peru is usually staunchly denied.

The nineteenth-century United States, on the other hand, after the formal ending of slavery, was the first state in the modern system to enact formal segregation, as well as the first country to park Native Americans in reserves. It seemed to be precisely because of its strong position in the world-economy that the United States needed such legislation. In a country in which the size of the upper strata was growing much larger as a percentage of national population, and in which consequently there was so much individual upward mobility, the more informal constraints of ethnicity seemed to be insufficient to maintain the workplace and social hierarchies. Thus formal racism became a further contribution of Americanity to the world-system.

The post-1945 ascension of the United States to hegemony in the world-system made it ideologically untenable for the United States to maintain formal segregation. On the other hand, the very same hegemony made it necessary for the US to permit widespread legal and illegal migration from non-European countries such that the concept of the 'Third World within' was born, once again a contribution of Americanity to the world-system.

Ethnicity still needed to be buoyed up by racism, but racism now had to take on a subtler face. Racism took refuge in its seeming opposite, universalism and the derived concept of meritocracy. It is in the debates of the last 20 years that we find this latest contribution of Americanity. Given an ethnic hierarchization, an examination system inevitably favours disproportionately upper ethnic strata. The extra added plus is that a meritocratic system justifies racist attitudes without the need to verbalize them. Those ethnic strata who perform more poorly do so because they are racially inferior. The evidence seems to be statistical, hence 'scientific'.

This brings us then to the fourth contribution of Americanity, the deification and reification of newness, itself a derivative of the faith in science which is a pillar of modernity. The New World was new, that is not old, not tied down to tradition, to a feudal past, to privilege, to antiquated ways of doing things.

Whatever was 'new' and more 'modern' was better. But more than that, everything was always defined as being new. Since the value of historic depth was denied morally, its use as an analytical tool was dismissed as well.

It was the independence of the Americas which represented the political realization of newness that was deemed to be better. From then on, as North America diverged from Latin America, its advantage was ascribed by most persons to the fact that it better incarnated 'newness', that it was more 'modern'. Modernity became the justification of economic success, but also its proof. It was a perfectly circular argument, which diverted attention from the development of underdevelopment. The concept of 'newness' was thus the fourth and perhaps more efficacious contribution of Americanity to the development and stabilization of the capitalist world-economy. Under the appearance of offering a way out of the inequalities of the present, the concept of 'newness' encrusted them and inserted their inevitability into the collective superego of the world-system.

Thus, Americanity was the erection of a gigantic ideological overlay to the modern world-system. It established a series of institutions and worldviews that sustained the system, and it invented all this out of the American crucible. Yet Americanity was its own contradiction. Because Americanity has existed longest in the Americas, because its circuitous consequences have led to so much politico-intellectual turmoil over four centuries, Americanity has exposed itself to critical regard, and first of all in the Americas. It was no accident that core–periphery analysis was propelled onto the world intellectual scene by the Economic Commission for Latin America. It was no accident that anti-racist political mobilization received its earliest and greatest impulse in North America.

II

Historically separated during the colonial period, the Americas have developed direct relations only since the nineteenth century, eventually coming to constitute a specific part of the world-system in a structure in which the United States was the hegemonic power. From the late fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries, it was the Iberian colonies whose products were most varied and richest and whose society and culture most deeply rooted and dense. However, this situation became inverted around the mid-eighteenth century. By the end of the century, the South was peripheralized, and the first independence project with real decolonizing potential, that of Túpac Ameru in the viceroyalty of Peru, was defeated. The North, the United States, won its independence, and since the nineteenth century, its power has continually grown until it became the first truly worldwide power of history.

How do we explain such different trajectories in the history of the Americas? The fundamental explanation is to be located in the differences in the way power was constituted and in its processes, in the context of each successive historical moment. To start with, coloniality in the Ibero–American zone, did not consist only in the political subordination to the Crown in the metropole, but above all in the domination of Europeans over Indians. In the British–American zone, on the other hand, coloniality meant almost exclusively subordination to the British Crown. This meant that the British colonies constituted themselves initially as European-societies-outside-of-Europe, whereas the Iberian colonies were societies of European and Native Americans. The historical processes would therefore be very different.

This derives from the well-known differences in the Native American societies in the two zones. But it was more than this fact alone, as is quite evident from the realization that the British called the Native American societies 'nations'. To be sure they were subordinate ones, but as nations outside the various societies constituted by the British, they were seen as providers of furs and other raw materials as well as allies in wars against other Europeans. After independence, the North Americans preferred to exterminate rather than to colonize the Native Americans.

The Iberians, on the contrary, had heated debates as to whether the 'Indians' were really human and had 'souls', while they were precisely in the process of conquering and destroying highly advanced Native American societies. They enslaved them, and in the first decades almost exterminated them. Above all, they used

them as discardable labour power. As for the survivors, on the slagheap of these societies, they were placed in a position of exploitation and subordination, and the colonial societies were constructed on the basis of their domination.

We must therefore turn our attention to the colonizing societies to locate other factors in colonial history. Let us remember, first of all, that the conquest, colonization, and baptism of America by the Iberians at the end of the fifteenth century occurred at the beginnings of the world market, of capitalism, and of modernity. The arrival of the British to the northern parts of America more than a century later took place when this new historical process was already fully underway. Consequently, the colonizing societies were radically different from each other, as would be the modalities of colonization and its implications for the respective metropoles and colonial societies.

When Spain first came into contact with America, she had just completed the *Reconquista* and was only beginning the process of creating a strong central state. The establishment of a colonial empire under these conditions had particular consequences for Iberian society. During the sixteenth century, the Crown continued the centralization of the state with a seigniorial model of power, while destroying the autonomy, the democracy, and the production of the bourgeoisie in order to subordinate them to the rule of the noble courtiers. The Church incarnated the Counter-Reformation and was dominated by the Inquisition. Religious ideology legitimated the expulsion of Mozarabite and Mudijar cultivators and artisans, as well as of Jewish merchants and financiers. This did not keep colonial wealth from stimulating the diffusion of the materialist and subjective practices of mercantilism. But the transition from merchant to industrial capital was blocked in the Peninsula, a blockage that was aggravated during the European crisis of the seventeenth century.

The consequence was that the social practices of the merchant and entrepreneurial classes coexisted but were incompatible with the formal values of the Iberian seigniors. This situation has been captured in the greatest historical image of European literature – Don Quixote believes he sees giants and gets ready to assail them, but for no apparent reason it is windmills he attacks and knocks down.

All this would not perhaps have been possible without the acquisition of the immense metallic wealth and the virtually inexhaustible free labour of colonial America which permitted the replacement of local production and the local producing classes. Furthermore, the Crown sought to expand its European power more for reasons of dynastic prestige than for commercial profits. The enormous expenses incurred were supported by colonial wealth. But as local production stagnated, this wealth was transferred to central European bankers and to British, French, Dutch, and Flemish industrialists and merchants. As a result, in the seventeenth century Spain lost the European struggle with England, and Iberian societies entered into a long phase of peripheralization.

The implications of all this for the shape of colonial society were decisive. The Iberian *conquistador* carried with him in his mind concepts of power and social values that were seigniorial, despite the fact that his acts and motives in the conquest were commercial in origin. Thus, in the first period of organizing colonial power, behind the 'Indian *encomienda*' and the *encomendero* we can discern the shadow of the feudal lord. But in the dismantling of the *encomienda* system, soon thereafter, and in the imposition of a political-bureaucratic centralization of the colonies under the authority of the Crown, we see the impact of commercial necessities.

The political order was centralized and bureaucratic, and in that sense not feudal. But at the same time it was seigniorial, arbitrary, patrimonial, and formalist. The structure of production was geared to the external market and was imperfect for the internal market (not being the same as internal consumption, which was to be sure very great, especially that of the seigniors and the ecclesiastics, but which for the most did not go through the market). Seigniorial privileges were exercised particularly in relation to 'Indians' and 'Negros' with all the attached sociopsychological implications (disdain for labour, especially manual labour; concern with social prestige, 'honour', and its correlates; obsession with appearances, intrigue, gossip, discrimination).

The arrival of the Bourbon dynasty in the eighteenth century was not helpful to the colon-

Sketch by Chapuis, in 1886, of a statue of Christopher Columbus in Colon, Panama. Roger Viollet

ies. The new geography of Spanish colonial administration served in practice the interests of English Atlantic trade. It disarticulated the structure of production, bled the rich areas financially to pay for the Crown's wars, and limited manufacturing in favour of imports from European industry. It thereby led to the peripheralization of previously productive regions. There is little doubt that it laid the basis for subsequent 'balkanization' of the former colonies in the nineteenth century.

In contract, when the first British settlers disembarked in North America, in the beginning of the seventeenth century, all the social and intersubjective tendencies of capitalist transition were in place and led to the first specifically bourgeois political revolution in Europe (Cromwell) as well as to the first properly speaking political–philosophical debate of European modern history, the product of a marriage of power and intelligence. From the end of the sixteenth century, England's domination of the seas and of the world market were in full expansion.

British-American colonial society was not the result of conquering or destroying Native American societies. It was organized as a society of Europeans on American soil. Above all, it represented the exceptional case of a society which shaped itself, from the outset, as a capitalist society without those groups and social interests, institutions, norms and symbols which corresponded in Britain to feudal history, as well as with quite abundant natural resources. Production was primarily for the internal, not the external, market. It was articulated to the metropole not only as the provider of new materials but as part of the process of industrial production. The state regulated and established the norms, but did not control, nor was it the owner of the resources, nor of the productive enterprises, as in the Iberian case. In British America no Church was all-powerful, no Inquisition held off modernity and rationality, as in the case of Ibero–America before the Bourbons.

Even the slave structures were being operated as part of the system of capitalism. It is true they permitted seigniorial social relations but these were constrained by the need to treat everything as commodities (even the slaves) to produce goods from which to obtain profits. These structures did not oppose but rather stimulated the technological innovations that were part of the industrial revolution, quite the opposite of Iberian structures based on free 'Indian' labour power, which was not commercially produced.

The independence movements had distinct logics and consequences in the two zones. The Ibero–American colonies at the end of the eighteenth century had stagnating economies, with their social and political patterns in crisis. With the defeat of the Túpac Amaru movement in 1780, the independent revolts corresponded only very partially to an 'Indian' anticolonial movement or to the needs of capitalist expansion and its rational control. In fact, in the principal colonial centres, independence only occurred when the dominant seigniors decided they wished to get out from under the liberal regime of Spain at the beginning of the nineteenth century. It was far from a revolution. When Iberian colonialism came to an end, there were no hegemonic social forces in the former colonies capable either of articulating or directing coalitions to preserve political unity in the Ibero–American zone, or of establishing and sustaining local states. The case of Brazil was special. But its independence movement occurred later.

On the other hand, the former British-American colonies established the United States of America, with a political regime based on a clear hegemonic social order, with a strong state, but also with a civil society having the mechanisms to regulate its relations with state institutions. Independence combined the needs of national capitalist development and those of the political debate organized around the new bases of modernity and rationality. It is therefore not at all surprising that North American independence had the sense of a revolution, the American revolution.

The two Americas began the nineteenth century in very unequal conditions and pursued quite distinct paths. The United States followed a pattern of development, of the new and unusual. It constituted itself as a nation at the same time as it was developing an imperial role as a hegemonic power. Thus, 'manifest destiny' was a quite appropriate ideological slogan.

This pattern has successive historical stages and modalities: (1) the violent territorial expansion that permitted the US to double its area

in less than 80 years, absorbing the 'Indian' territories in the West plus half of Mexico; (2) the imposition of a quasi-protectorate over the countries of the Caribbean and Central America, including the 'rape' of Panama and the building and control of the Panama Canal, as well as of the Philippines and Guam; (3) the imposing of economic and political hegemony over the rest of Latin America following the First World War; (4) the imposition of world hegemony after the Second World War, which integrated the US in a world power structure.

Two decisive factors must be noted in this regard. One is the rapid capitalist development of the US, which already at the end of the nineteenth century was able to compete with Europe and especially with the UK. The second is the hegemonic association with the UK in the inter-war period in relation to both Europe and Latin America, an association that would in the end bring British support to US world hegemony.

During this same period, Latin America 'balkanized' itself. There were bloody frontier wars and civil wars all over. Power was organized on seigniorial-mercantile bases. The development of capitalism and its correlative social bases stagnated. Modern thought, under these conditions, suffered the Kafkaesque torture of internal exile or utopian flight. The dominant classes, Euro-centric, adopted the European mystifying model of the nation-state for societies whose foundations remained the colonial stratification between the European and non-European, and the liberal model of a political system for societies that were dominated by mercantile-seigniorial strata. Everything ensured the persistence of the dependent character of the pattern of its historical development and its subordination first to European then to North American imperialism.

During the twentieth century, Latin America remained for the most part imprisoned in the historical nexus formed by the imbrication of the issues of nation, identity, and democracy – questions and problems that elsewhere, in Europe, had been treated not simultaneously but successively. The disentanglement or cutting of this nexus seemed to begin with the Mexican revolution. But the defeat of the national-democratic revolution in the other countries not only failed to resolve the problem but created an unresolved crisis of power, whose most exact expression is the persistence of that peculiar and specifically Latin American political creature, populist-developmentalist-socialist nationalism, whose components are juggled differently in each country.

III

The Americas are preparing to begin the twenty-first century with virtually the same inequalities as those with which they began the nineteenth. With one difference however: they will not begin it separately or follow separate paths, but as part of a single world order in which the US still occupies top place and Latin America a subordinate place, and is affected by the gravest crisis of its post-colonial history.

In the future perspective of the Americas, certain processes should be underlined. First, there is a trend to a more systematic articulation of the Americas under the hegemony of North America (including now Canada, in a secondary way). This includes the growing migratory flux from south to north and especially to the US. Secondly, there is a greater internal articulation within Latin America, despite the contrary pressures of global capital, Europe, Japan, the US. Thirdly, there is a growing decolonization of the production of culture, of the arts, and of scientific knowledge. In short, the Americanization of the Americas is coming into full bloom.

The Americas are the historical product of European colonial domination. But they were never merely an extension of Europe, not even in the British-American zone. They are an original creation, which have taken long to mature and to abandon their dependent posture *vis-à-vis* Europe, especially in Latin America. But today, if one listens to the sounds, the images, the symbols, and the utopias of the Americas, one must acknowledge the maturation of an autonomous social pattern, the presence of a process of reinvention of culture in the Americas. This is what we are calling the Americanization of the Americas, which is sustained by the crisis of the European pattern.

The creation of the US as a directly capitalist society was the basis there of a utopia of social equality and individual liberty. These images veiled of course very real social hierarchies and

their articulation with power. But they also hindered their legitimation, maintained the space for debate, and offered society the possibility to regulate the power of the state. In Latin America, the persistence of a Native American imagery under conditions of domination was the basis of a utopia of reciprocity, of social solidarity and of direct democracy. And in the present crisis, some of the oppressed have been organizing themselves in this way within the general framework of the capitalist market.

Sooner or later, these American utopias will be joined together to create and offer to the world a specifically all-American utopia. The movement of peoples and culture among the Americas and their gradual integration into a single power framework is or may become one of its most efficacious underpinnings.