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DOSSIÊ: TEORIAS CRÍTICAS SOBRE O AUTORITARISMO CONTEMPORÂNEO

## The nocturnal body of democracies

*El cuerpo nocturno de las democracias*

*O corpo noturno das democracias*

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**Abstract:** This article engages with the contemporary debate about de-democratization and authoritarianism, arguing that these phenomena cannot be properly understood without discussing the roots of modern democracy in colonial capitalism. In the first half of the twentieth century, some voices in social theory drew attention to possibilities for regression inscribed in Western civilization. Nonetheless, the prevailing tone of the postwar era was one of optimism regarding democracy, democratization and democratic consolidation. It was only more recently that discussions about regressive tendencies were placed on the table once again. Though we consider that these analyses have helped to shed light on such tendencies, we argue that they overlook the fact that the bright side of democracy – proudly exhibited in the core countries – was achieved at the cost of a concealed side, which has now returned to haunt the world.

**Keywords:** Democracy. Authoritarianism. Critical Theory. Coloniality. Exception.

**Resumen:** Este artículo dialoga con el debate contemporáneo sobre desdemocratización y autoritarismo, y plantea que estos fenómenos no pueden ser comprendidos adecuadamente si no se discuten las raíces de la democracia moderna asentadas en el capitalismo colonial. En la primera mitad del siglo veinte, algunas voces en el ámbito de la teoría social llamaron la atención sobre las posibilidades de regresión inscritas en la civilización occidental. Sin embargo, en la postguerra, prevaleció un tono optimista respecto de la democracia, la democratización y la consolidación democrática. Solo más recientemente discusiones sobre tendencias regresivas volvieron a figurar en el orden del día. Aunque consideremos que estos análisis arrojan luz sobre tales tendencias, planteamos que ellos no llevan en cuenta que el lado luminoso de la democracia, orgullosamente exhibido en los países centrales, fue obtenido al precio de un lado oculto, que ahora regresa y asombra el mundo.

**Palabras clave:** Democracia. Autoritarismo. Teoría Crítica. Colonialidad. Excepción.

**Resumo:** Este artigo dialoga com o debate contemporâneo sobre desdemocratização e autoritarismo argumentando que esses fenômenos não podem ser compreendidos de forma adequada sem que discutam as raízes da democracia moderna assentadas no capitalismo colonial. Na primeira metade do século vinte, algumas vozes no âmbito da teoria social chamaram a atenção para as possibilidades de regressão inscritas na civilização ocidental. A despeito disso, no pós-guerra prevaleceu um tom otimista em relação à democracia, à democratização e à consolidação democrática. Foi apenas mais recentemente que discussões sobre tendências regressivas voltaram a estar na ordem do dia. Ainda que consideremos que essas análises têm contribuído para lançar luz sobre tais tendências, argumentamos que elas não levam em conta que o lado luminoso da democracia, exibido com orgulho nos países centrais, foi conquistado ao preço de um lado oculto, que agora retorna e assombra o mundo.

**Palavras-chave:** Democracia. Autoritarismo. Teoria Crítica. Colonialidade. Exceção.



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## Introduction<sup>3</sup>

Contemporary debates on the rise of authoritarianism and on processes of de-democratization have largely failed to undertake a critical review of the concept of democracy. Although this concept has universal claims, it expresses the historical experiences of North Atlantic societies and does not take into account the colonial violence that constitutes its other face. In this article, we argue that any discussion of the limits of democracy remains inadequate if it does not consider the broader geopolitical divide that presided over the advent of modern democracy. To contribute to this debate, we reconstruct theories of democratization from the second half of the twentieth century and draw attention to their normativity centered on the North Atlantic. At the turn of the twenty-first century, but especially during the last decade, the debate on democracy shifts, to a large extent, to discussions about threats thereto. Similar to the approaches to democratization, analyses of de-democratization have generally not managed to decenter their perspectives, continuing to derive from the Global North. In the second part of the article, we look into the Eurocentric conception of political modernity through the lens of postcolonial critique, arguing that anti-democratic tendencies lie within democracies themselves. Moving beyond an analysis of such tendencies based on the presupposition that modern capitalism emerges in Europe and then spreads throughout the world, we propose that contemporary regression has its roots in the violence and exception of the colonial situation, which, from the outset, reflected the counterpart of rights, laws and guarantees that the citizens of Europe and North America could enjoy.

## Democratization and de-democratization

The decades following the Second World War started to see the debate on transition to democracy and consolidation of democracy

take shape. Lipset (1959) made a pioneering and classic contribution that, using Western democracies as paradigm, links democracy to high levels of economic development. In another classic study, Moore Jr. (1974) explores the driving factors leading to liberal democracy, fascism and socialism. His comparative investigation of the cases of England, France, United States, China, Japan and India concludes that different political paths were determined by the respective countries' social structure and class relations. Using a comparative perspective, Pye and Verba (1965) connect the existing political systems in Japan, England, Germany, Turkey, India, Ethiopia, Italy, Mexico, Egypt and Soviet Union to their particular political culture, defined as a system of beliefs, symbols and values that provide a framework for political action.

From the mid-1970s on, the debate about democracy increasingly focuses on actors and strategies rather than on causes and drivers. In his influential work, O'Donnell (1973) claims that the military coups in the Southern Cone were a result of political conflicts triggered by developmentalist and populist regimes that had carried out processes of import substitution. Instead of democracy, industrialization and economic growth led to what O'Donnell calls bureaucratic authoritarianism, in opposition to the thesis proposed by Lipset. Later, in the period of re-democratization in South America, O'Donnell (1994) argues for the need to differentiate between democratic transition and democratic consolidation. Unlike core countries' representative democracies, new democracies from the 1980s and early 1990s (referring to the cases of Argentina, Brazil, Peru, Ecuador, Bolivia, the Philippines, South Korea, along with some countries from Central and Eastern Europe) are described as delegative democracies. According to O'Donnell (1994, 56), "delegative democracies are not consolidated (i.e., institutionalized) democracies" and still require "the building of a set of institutions that become important decisional

<sup>3</sup> The first author thanks the Swiss National Science Foundation for the fellowship that allowed him to complete this article during his research period at the Albert Hirschman Centre on Democracy at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, Geneva, Switzerland.

points in the flow of political power".

Around this time, Linz (1990) defined a democratic regime as one in which all the relevant political forces consider that there is no other alternative to come to power than the democratic process, and that there will be no constraints to the implementation of the decisions of those who were democratically elected. Looking into different explanations of modernization and democratization, Przeworski and Limongi (1997, 177) argue that democracy does not arise as a result or by-product of economic development. According to the authors, "Idemocracy is or is not established by political actors pursuing their goals, and it can be initiated at any level of development". However, once it is established, the economy serves as a crucial factor for its continuity: democracy's chances of survival are higher if the economy of a country is growing and generating development and wealth. Przeworski and Limongi (1997, 166) state that "democracies are almost certain to survive once they are established in rich countries" and that the "probability that a democracy will die during any particular year in a country with an [per capital] income above \$4,000 is practically zero".

However, both conditionalist theories and those associated with methodological individualism consistently relied on core-country democracies as their normative horizon. Be it by inquiring into the different conditions and paths, or considering the actions, contests and institutions that supposedly lead to democracy or other political forms, these approaches implicitly or explicitly used the exemplary cases of liberal democracies, namely the United States, France and England, as references. Democracy and constitutionalism in core countries are idealized and considered emblems of political modernity, whereas peripheral countries are regarded as backward and dominated by authoritarianism and arbitrariness (Dutra and Ribeiro 2021). As Grosfoguel (2008, 120) provocatively puts it, the idea of "people without

writing" was replaced by the characterization of "people without history", followed by the label of "people without development" and, more recently, "people without democracy".

In contrast to peripheral societies, from the post-war era until the last decade, core countries were generally regarded as safe havens for democracy, places where an authoritarian regression could not take place – despite dissonant voices from critical social analysis (such as Adorno 2003a; 2003b; 2019; Adorno et al. 1950; Löwenthal and Guterman 1949; Neumann 1957) and dystopias in literature and cinema<sup>4</sup> warning otherwise. Even though there were portents at the turn of the twenty-first century (such as Zakaria 1997; Rosanvallon 2000; Crouch 2004; Brown 2006), it was only more recently – mainly after 2016, when the Brexit withdrew the United Kingdom from the European Union and Donald Trump was elected president of the United States – that alarm bells actually started to ring in the Global North. Discussions subsequently arose around democratic deconsolidation (Foa and Mounk 2016; 2017), the death of democracies (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018), crises of democracy (Przeworski 2019), neoliberal regression (Streeck 2017), the end of progressive neoliberalism (Fraser 2016), authoritarian populism (Morelock 2018) and post-fascism (Traverso 2019), among an already vast literature that continues to expand day after day.

Despite invariably stemming from core countries, these analyses from the past few years have helped shed light on what appears to be new authoritarian tendencies on a global scale. Foa and Mounk (2016, 2017) draw attention to the fact that, in North American and Western European democracies, which are considered to be consolidated, the proportion of the population that believes democratic forms of rule are the only legitimate ones has been decreasing, while anti-system parties and movements have exhibited unprecedented strength and managed to cunningly exploit deep disenchantment with de-

<sup>4</sup> Among twentieth-century dystopias, we can mention *Brave New World*, book by Aldous Huxley (1932) filmed by Burt Brinckerhoff (1980); *1984*, book by George Orwell (1949) filmed by Michael Radford (1984); *Fahrenheit 451*, book by Ray Bradbury (1953) filmed by François Truffaut (1966); *Alphaville*, film written and directed by Jean-Luc Godard (1965); and *The Handmaid's Tale*, book by Margaret Atwood (1985) recently made into a television series by Netflix (from 2017 on).

mocracy. Levitsky and Ziblatt's best-selling book (2018) maintains that violent seizures of power as well as ostensive dictatorships, which marked the Cold War period, have been replaced by the gradual, and even legal, subversion of democratic institutions by elected leaders. While believing a complete collapse of democracy in a country with the per capita income of the United States to be inconceivable, Przeworski (2019) claims, in line with Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018), that current democratic deconsolidation or backsliding is unfolding through the stealthy subversion of democracy, a process that gradually deteriorates democratic institutions and norms in ways that do not necessarily violate the constitution. According to Przeworski (2019), telltale signs of the current crisis of democracy include the fast erosion of traditional party systems, the growth of xenophobic, racist and nationalist parties and attitudes, and a decline in support for democracy among public opinion polls.

Streeck (2017) argues that political regression started with 1970s-era neoliberalism following a period of state regulations established in the post-war period. The era of neoliberal globalization introduced notions of global governance, free trade agreements, privatizations, flexibilization of labor markets, cost reductions and the decline of trade unions and political parties. On account of a decreasing need for human labor that rendered the promises of prosperity for everyone untenable, the neoliberal revolution inaugurated an age of post-factual politics, characterized by lies created to get around the citizens' frustration. Nonetheless, Streeck points out that the losers of globalization have increasingly migrated from the traditional media to social media while, at the same time, storming the polls to express their discontent. The new leaders labelled as populists have been able to channel this dissatisfaction arising in democracies neutralized by capital.

In the same vein, Fraser (2016) claims that Brexit and the election of Donald Trump evinced voters' rejection of a political establishment imposing economic policies that deteriorated living conditions over the past decades. But Fraser

specifies that this was not a reaction to neoliberalism *tout court*, but rather to what she names progressive liberalism. In its US-American form, "progressive neoliberalism is an alliance of 'new social movements' (including feminism), on the one side, and the high-end 'symbolic' and service-based business sectors (Wall Street, Silicon Valley, and Hollywood), on the other" (Fraser 2016, 281). Progressive neoliberalism has dominated the political scene in the past thirty years, its two greatest representatives being Bill Clinton in the United States and Tony Blair in the United Kingdom. Against this background, Trump won the 2016 elections embodying what Fraser calls reactionary populism. According to Morelock (2018, xiv), authoritarian populism "refers to the pitting of 'the people' against 'elites' in order to have the power to drive out, wipe out, or otherwise dominate Others who are not 'the people'", generally involving "social movements fueled by prejudice and led by charismatic leaders that seek to increase governmental force to combat difference". Traverso (2019, 12) speaks of post-fascism, which "emphasizes its chronological distinctiveness and locates it in a historical sequence implying both continuity and transformation". According to Traverso, one fundamental lesson from the history of fascism is that democracy can be destroyed from within. In any case, post-fascism is "a phenomenon in transition, a movement that is still in transformation and has not yet crystallized", so that it "does not have the same status as the concept of fascism" (Traverso 2019, 13).

### Democracy and exception

In the first half of the twentieth century, the First World War, the rise of Nazism and Fascism in Europe that followed it, and the Second World War were at the root of debates about the possibilities of regression. In his text from 1915 on war and death, Freud (1924) argues that the vast reorganization of human drives that guided the civilizing process had not succeeded in limiting the possibilities of regression, as the destruction and violence brought about by the conflict from 1914 to 1918 had shown. Around the period of the



Second World War, authors associated with what would later be known as the Frankfurt School challenged the idea that history is ruled by progress. Benjamin (1991) attacked the conception according to which Nazism was a deviation of Western capitalist society, an exception from its course. Drawing from Benjamin's theses on history, Horkheimer (1987) sustains that liberal capitalism was rather an episode or interlude that suspended or mitigated more direct forms of domination by replacing them by more mediated ones. However, the German author envisioned that monopoly capitalism was leading Western societies back to more direct setups of domination. In the view of Horkheimer and Adorno (1947), Nazi-Fascism, Americanism and the Soviet system represented different constellations of monopoly capitalism. According to them, advertisement, which offers the false freedom of choice, could "finally become the *Fuhrer's* overt command" (Horkheimer and Adorno 1947, 190).<sup>5</sup>

Engaging with Horkheimer and Adorno, Fernandes (2019) discusses authoritarian tendencies as being integral to capitalism. The Brazilian author claims that one should rather speak of modulations of authoritarianism within capitalism:<sup>6</sup> in times of economic crisis or threats coming from the working class, "contract, consensus and political representation are undermined [...], authoritarian relations gain prominence and democracy turns into the privilege of the more equal (or the power elite)" (Fernandes 2019, 52). Specifically referring to peripheral capitalism, Fernandes writes that the bourgeois state functions as a linkage and mediator for structural dynamics that take place between the periphery and core. In order to accommodate international capital and the national bourgeoisie, while concurrently undermining grass-roots forces, the state in the periphery becomes a bourgeois autocratic state, deploying force to neutralize inclusion, universalism and democracy, and better adapting to

"properly instrumental roles for the expansion of private capitalism [...] or the repressive tasks imposed by the new pattern of capitalist accumulation" (Fernandes 2019, 85). Wong (1999, 56) argues that, in the global periphery, "the capacity to bring forth and control stable conditions for regular and predictable reproduction has been denied to individuals and communities". They are hence societies in which risk and exception prevail.

Perspectives such as that of Freud or the Frankfurt School authors, which first and foremost take Europe into consideration, and especially authors who look into peripheral countries, bring us to call into question innocent images of modernity and democracy emerging from "apparently happy social relations that graced post-Enlightenment life in Paris, Berlin, and London" and to raise "awkward questions about the limits of bourgeois humanism" (Gilroy 1993, 44). They allow us to ask ourselves whether, after all, "we can speak of post-democracy in contexts where the very notion of liberal democracy has been largely threatened by authoritarianism, inequality and violence" (Ballestrin 2018, 161). Such considerations open the possibility for re-orienting the debate on democratization and de-democratization, the normative content of which stems from Europe and North America and that is generally short-sighted regarding the relations of difference and complementarity between core and periphery. In this vein, Ballestrin (2018, 161) writes that "post-colonial societies cannot display post-democratic realities, but rather only showcase democratic deviations and exceptions through their long, oscillating and vulnerable histories in search of democracy".

One of the most original contemporary approaches seeking to cope with what he calls the inversion of democracy is that taken by Mbembe (2016). He argues that the process of pacification of customs which led to contemporary demo-

<sup>5</sup> In this excerpt of *Dialectic of enlightenment*, Horkheimer and Adorno are specifically referring to the radio. Just as the radio was an extremely important platform for Nazi-Fascism in the first half of the twentieth century, digital media have been pivotal for political agitation carried out by the new authoritarian leaders worldwide. For a discussion of this topic focusing particularly on the Brazilian case, see: Cesarino (2020a; 2020b).

<sup>6</sup> An interesting analysis of this topic can be found in Silva (2020).

cracies is inseparable from the production and reproduction of violence elsewhere. Referring to Elias' works (1983, 1997a, 1997b), the Cameroonian author posits that the mainstream narrative distinguishes democratic societies from societies of warriors by sustaining that, in the former, unbridled drives and brutality give way to self-control and civility. In these societies, physical violence is supposedly replaced by the power of symbolic forms through the establishment of widely accepted rituals. According to Mbembe (2016, 30), "the strength of modern democracies has always rested on their capacity to reinvent themselves and constantly invent, not only their form, but also their idea or concept" while, on the other hand, this "was done at the cost of concealing their origins in violence".

The violence which Mbembe identifies at the origins of modern democracy is that set in motion by colonial capitalism. He argues that the outsourcing of violence to the colonies went hand in hand with pacification within European societies: "civil peace in the West depends to a large extent on violence committed far away" (Mbembe 2016, 35). Whereas the rule of law prevailed in the metropolises, Mbembe, in line with Wong, considers that colonies were the locus of exception. Distinction and separation between colony and metropolis that Mbembe, as Quijano (2000) before him, regards to be based on the racialization of populations, decisively contributed to Europe's economic transformation as well as the pacification of its civil life. As Mbembe (2016, 34) states, "the 'civilization of customs' was rendered possible thanks to the new forms of enrichment inaugurated by the colonial adventures". The setting up of unequal exchange relations between Europe and the colonial world has led to both the refinement of the former as well as the predation in the latter. That was the logic behind colonization in the vast majority of the colonies: the exploitation of natural resources for the benefit of the European commerce (Prado Júnior 1996).

Thus, modern colonial capitalism engendered two worlds: the plantation regime based on slavery and ruled by violence and predation, on the one hand, and bourgeois civility, with all the associated culture and 'good customs', on the other. While different and forcefully separated, these two sides are complementary and inextricably intertwined. As Mbembe (2016, 39) states, "Idemocracy, plantation and colonial empire are concretely part of the same historical matrix". Democracies consolidated in the West at the same time that Western countries were carrying out their colonial enterprises, so that the seemingly antithetical relation between colony and democracy is, in fact, one of mutual – yet contradictory – belonging. Even if Mbembe (2016, 39) was not the first to scrutinize this historical matrix that concurrently binds and separates colonies and metropolises, what chiefly interests us here are the conclusions he draws from this process for the "historical comprehension of the violence of the contemporary global order". In order to reflect upon democracy and its contemporary tendencies of inversion, Mbembe asks us to conceive of its intrinsic contradictions as a double-sided image: a diurnal body, which celebrates civility and rights, and a nocturnal body, which conceals violence and exception.

The two great wars fought in Europe in the twentieth century had colonial roots in at least two senses. Firstly, they were inter-imperialist wars that revolved around the control of colonial territories and their wealth. Additionally, the colonial experience constituted a privileged field for experimenting with technical developments and population management that paved the way for the advancement of highly destructive warfare and, ultimately, extermination camps. As Césaire (2004, 14) states, Nazism "applied colonialist procedures to Europe, which, until then, had been reserved exclusively for the Arabs of Algeria, the coolies of India and the blacks of Africa".<sup>7</sup> Ever since, with the formal end of colonialism in the decades following the Second World War, Wes-

<sup>7</sup> Gandesha (2020, 2) underlines that fascism's "real point of origin was, as Aimé Césaire had pointed out already in 1950, Europe's colonies. These were the original laboratories for Italian and German forms of fascism".

tern democracies have continued to outsource violence by means of war, interventions such as coups d'état, and other forms of government destabilization, in which privileged access and control of resources in the global periphery is at stake. With colonial roots akin to the Nazi extermination policy, apartheid in South Africa also left its mark on the twentieth century. Both of these experiences are, according to Mbembe, emblematic expressions of the principle of separation, which has colonial origins and ultimately can lead to the annihilation of the Other.

It is true that, during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, democracy's violence and injustices came under criticism. Political currents such as socialism and anarchism sought to challenge and overcome bourgeois democracy by resorting to strikes, direct action and unleashing revolutionary processes. But Mbembe (2016, 38) points out that critiques that regarded democratic societies as class societies usually operated "as if the history of modern democracies were limited to a history within Western societies". Considering that the principle of separation existed at the inception of colonial enterprise, and therefore of colonial-capitalist modernity and of democracy as the political form it acquired in the core countries, makes it possible to shed light on the nocturnal body of democracies, which, nowadays, emerges not only in the global periphery, but in the core as well. The prevailing affective zeitgeist of our time is defined by the desire for separation, for an enemy, and by the phantasy of extermination. According to Mbembe (2016, 65), "our age is decisively characterized by forms of separation, hate movements, hostility, and, above all, the struggle against enemies. As a result, liberal democracies that are already considerably eroded by the forces of capital, technology and militarism are now being drawn into a colossal process of inversion". Nowadays, "the idea of universal equality, which until recent times allowed for opposing substantive injustices, has been gradually replaced by the projection, usually violent, of a 'world without'" (Mbembe 2016, 58): without Muslims, non-white people, refugees, foreigners, the poor and the like.

The current process of inversion of democracy is marked, Mbembe argues, by a discourse of restriction or even suppression of civil rights, guarantees and freedoms, which is paradoxically justified by the need to protect law and freedom. In more than one way, the last decades of neoliberalism have uncovered antidemocratic tendencies lingering within democracies. The inversion of the meaning of freedom and law shows that truth became something personal, a question of opinion or belief. In contemporary democratic societies, "truth is not what concretely happened, but what one believes in" (Mbembe 2016, 48). Self-centered individuals and a new politics of self-conviction act as the counterpart to an era of large-scale, global and abstract transactions, incomprehensible for regular people (Comaroff 2009). In this line, Mbembe (2016, 76) writes that "the accelerated expansion of the algorithmic reason (which is pivotal for the financialization of the economy) goes hand in hand with rising mythical-religious thought". In the 1940s, amidst the imperialist war triggered by Nazism, Horkheimer and Adorno (1947, 22) put forth a proposition that would leave a mark on twentieth-century critical theory: "Just as myths already entail enlightenment, with every step enlightenment entangles itself more deeply in mythology". According to the German authors, this happened because the process of enlightenment in the West took place under the value-form and commercial exchange. Going beyond this, twenty-first century critical theory must be able to address the colonial foundations of modernity and capitalism. This entails clarifying that the "West never actually conceived its own finiteness" – if it has always intended that its horizon was global and universal, then we have to understand universal here as "the name given to the violence of the victors of wars which are, by definition, conflicts over predation" (Mbembe 2016, 91).

### Final remarks

By going beyond the classical topic of the incompatibilities between capitalism and democracy, the current debate on de-democratization



stands to be reformulated by taking into account discussions about the colonial roots of capitalism and the outsourcing of violence to the colonies as requisites for social pacification of the metropolises, which permits modern democracy to thrive in the latter. Such a consideration does not merely constitute a revisiting or re-interpretation of the past. The emergence of the nocturnal body of democracy, which governs the contemporary process of its inversion, explicitly exposes tendencies that have always been integral to modern colonial capitalism: the principle of separation, the friend/enemy relation, a hatred for Others, racism, xenophobia. Under neoliberalism, the promises of which ring hollow after over forty years, and with the expansion of digital networks, hatred, desire for separation and violence have invaded the spaces where hope and desires for equality and transformation once flourished.

In Europe, the European Union continues to unveil its main purposes: an institution that protects the equals (white Europeans) – just as its walled cities did in the past – and serves the interests of capital.<sup>8</sup> Violence and xenophobia are nowadays the common language of authoritarian leaders and movements that engender the Other as a scapegoat for the unfulfilled promises of capitalism in its neoliberal phase. They represent a radicalization of the colonial principle of separation, reinforcing a logic purporting that “people who in reality share the common political heritage of empire are now represented as ‘immigrants’ within their metropolises and are seen as threats to the nation’s solidarity and social contract” (Bhambra and Holmwood 2021, 213). In the United States, a country that started as a “democracy with slaves” and a “community of separation” (Mbembe 2016, 32), the twentieth-century integration of black people into a society that had excluded them since its founding never managed to leave racism and marginalization behind. Just as in Europe, violence and xenophobia are also exerted over immigrants from the Global South, most coming

from Latin America.

Latin America continues its meandering path, with persistent obstacles to social integration and democracy, which cannot be properly understood without taking into account the history of its colonial capitalism. At the domestic level, its elites have largely succeeded in avoiding major disruption to their social and racial hierarchies, which reinforce that each one should remain in their place. Externally, the structural dependency on the core countries represents a massive constraint to undertaking political and economic projects in an autonomous manner. Its history has been one of such obstacles and constraints in the form of coups d’état<sup>9</sup> and the de-stabilization of governments. Both usually take place via intertwinement of the domestic and external levels, with the local elites serving as conveyor belts between the former and the latter. In Africa and South and Southeast Asia, dependency has been accompanied by the ruins of European colonialism, which produced civil wars, genocides and never-ending ethnic and religious conflicts. Specifically in Africa, many countries “can no longer claim a monopoly on violence and on the means of coercion within their territory”, as coercion itself has “become a market commodity” (Mbembe 2003, 32). Alongside the state, “[u]rban militias, private armies, armies of regional lords, private security firms [...] all claim the right to exercise violence or to kill” (Mbembe 2003, 32). These “war machines”, as Mbembe (2003, 32-33) calls them, “forge direct connections with transnational networks” in order to “fuel the extraction and export of natural resources located in the territory they control”. All of this, however, is to a great extent rendered invisible: among other reasons because good-hearted democrats the world over spend their time deploring the lack of democracy in China and Russia. What actually lies at the root of all such outcries, however, is the struggle for present and future hegemony in the world capitalist system.

<sup>8</sup> As Traverso (2019, 17) writes, EU “implies the complete submission of *the political* to *the financial*. In short, it is a state of exception that establishes a sort of financial dictatorship, a neoliberal Leviathan”.

<sup>9</sup> Recently, Latin America contributed with a novelty to the repertoire of coups d’état: the parliamentary coup (Santos 2017).

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