

**The role of BRICS countries
in the becoming world order:
“humanity,” colonial/imperial
differences, and the racial distribution
of capital and knowledge**

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Summary

My oral presentation will be based on this summary. The narrative that follows the summary substantiates the main points I am putting forward to debate.

In this paper I made two interrelated arguments and present it in three parts. Members of Academy of Latinity are already familiar with the ideas exposed in Part I, so you can go directly to Part II. New participants in this conference may be less familiar with some of the concepts, chiefly that of “coloniality” as a constitutive and darker side of “modernity” and would like to read Parts I and II. This is the first draft, please read it as such.

In **Part III** I develop the main argument that connects “humanity,” “difference” and the politics of “BRICS countries.” The argument is this: BRICS countries have an important role to play—and they know it—in balancing the polycentric world in which we are already living and will further unfold in the near future. BRICS appear to be at the point of no-return. These countries have embraced the economy of growth, development and accumulation (that is, economic coloniality). That aspect is certainly a problem. The politicization of the civil society that is already manifested in several spheres, from the World Public Forum to the “*Indignados*” of Spain and the Occupy Wall Street, is mounting. At the same time, the decolonial legacies of Bandung are reviving in the uprising of Tunisia and Egypt, in the students movements in Chile and Colombia, among decolonial organizations among migrants in Europe from the ex-Third World; among *Latinos/as* and Afro-Caribbean in the US; in the organization denouncing and stopping the open pit mining in South America and Africa; the continuing work of La Via Campesina and Sovereignty of Food, etc. etc. Dewesternization may or may not be able to change the course of history. This is an open question.

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For it is not clear how BRICS states will deal with the limited resources of the planet and the increasing competition for natural resources of Western states (and their supporters) and BRICS states (and their supporters). Furthermore, exploitation of labor and the drive toward consumerism is an essential component of the economy of growth and development. To maintain a society upon the promises

of constant growth and that happiness consists in living to consume rather than in consuming to live, people not only need money and commodities to buy; they have to be convinced that this is the only way to live. There is faith involved in maintaining a market based on economic coloniality (“capitalism” in the liberal and Marxist vocabulary).

The economic success of the BRICS countries comes from the fact that the leadership is engaged in epistemic economic disobedience *vis-à-vis* the IMF and the World Bank, two institutions of global scope and, until now, of local management. Secondly, the economic affirmation leads to the second step taken recently at the Delhi Summit indicates that the group is taking a leadership in global governance and global political coherence. In this respect, the fourth BRICS summit in Delhi was a turning point and a point of no return, in the evolution of a group that had focused on global economic governance issues, but the Delhi Declaration stated that the goal is also to achieve greater political coherence. The Declaration of the Summit, that touches and recommended dialogue to solve the problems in Syria and Iran, at the same time recommended that Iran should continue its peaceful nuclear investigations:

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We agree that the period of transformation taking place in the Middle East and North Africa should not be used as a pretext to delay resolution of lasting conflicts but rather it should serve as an incentive to settle them, in particular the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Part II is devoted to the second argument. I argue that the commonality of BRICS countries goes beyond economic and political interests. Although, to my knowledge, this

44 issue has not been made explicit, there is an ethical factor supporting economic and political orientations and decisions: the five BRICS countries are of and ruled by “people of color.” This is one of the legacies of the Bandung Conference and Sukarno’s clear statement: “This is the first international conference of colored peoples in the history of mankind.” The statement is true with the clarification that before 1500 there were people with different skin color and different communities of beliefs, ethical and/or spiritual, but there was not “people of color” in the sense that expression has meant since sixteenth-century, and mainly, since Linnaeus. In that regard, it was the first international meeting on planet earth since “people of color” were invented by Western men of knowledge and their invention became hegemonic. Colonial and imperial differences were precisely invented around “purity of blood” first, skin color later to which more recently language, religions and nationalities have been added to define the profile of “people of color.” Thus the bottom line, the non-said but I suspect deeply felt, is the colonial/imperial wound that connects the five countries in the history of the modern/colonial world. Nevertheless, and whatever you count, all BRICS countries carry the “stigma” of “people of color,” of non-Western people, even if their skin is white like Slavs in Russia or European migrants to Latin America from the second half of the nineteenth-century. I am myself a result of that migration.

In **Part I** I set the stage and offer the frame for the two arguments I just outlined. I address the topic of this meet-

ing of the Académie de la latinité by assuming that there are “different kinds of difference.” And there is one kind that is crucial to understand the Western concept of “humanity.” I describe it as colonial and imperial difference. These differences do not exist in the world but have been invented in the process of Europeans building knowledge and classifying the world. Colonial and imperial differences are epistemic and ontological. They consist in describing certain people as ontologically and rationally less human. The epistemic difference establishes that certain people are less rational than the norm, and the norm is the concept of rationality of who is making the classification and the ranking. And because some people are rationally deficient, they are ontologically inferior. Colonial and imperial differences are the foundation of modern/colonial racism and the concept of “humanity”: the standard that serves the reference to classification and ranking.

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Part I — Different kind of “differences”

“Difference” is a word that carries several meanings. One among many refers to human affairs like a quarrel in a dispute; it refers also to the foundation for making distinction and classifying. Interestingly enough, both meanings are interrelated for people quarrel about classification. I will focus on “difference” and “classification” as they encroach on the concept of “humanity.” “Humanity” rather than a universal concept to name what certain living organism have in common, it refers to a system of classification controlled by certain organism that see themselves as

part of “humanity” while creating “difference” to identify lesser humans (e.g., Saracen, pagans, barbarians, primitives, communists, underdeveloped, etc.): he who controls knowledge controls classification.

46 Thus, the very concept of “humanity” rests on difference. Two foundational differences are of my interest here. One is historical and the other is logical. “Humanity” is not universal but a historical concept. Or, if you prefer, it is universal only for the people who invented it and consider it to be universal and representative of everybody on the planet. It so happens that most of the people on the planet did not benefit from the concept of “humanity.” Its universality is only regional: it is a Western concept. Its historical foundation rests on the European Renaissance: “humanity” as difference with non-Christian religions and with lesser humans, like “Indians” in the New World and Africans who were enslaved and exploited. “Humanity” served well Renaissance Men to set themselves apart from “anthropos.” “Humanity” and “anthropos” are two Western concepts. There is no such entities beyond Western vocabulary. “Anthropos” is a general term to designate all the “differences” upon which the concept of “humanity” has been built: pagans and Saracens, barbarians and primitives, “white, black, yellow and brown” races, underdeveloped and the rest, etc. “Humanity” is a concept of Western cosmology and Western cosmology has been built on the grounds of two classic languages (Greek and Latin), and six modern European imperial languages: Italian, Spanish and Portuguese (Renaissance)

and English, German and French (from the Enlightenment to the European Union).

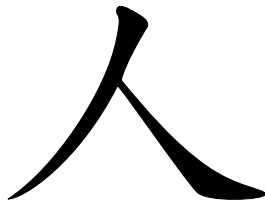
What is crucial to understand here is that both, “humanity and anthropos,” are Western concepts. There is no ontological anthropos beyond a system of classification that invented it as ranked difference. What *there is*, is the enunciation: actors, institutions and categories of thought that invented both categories and find themselves in a position to make them pass as “reality.” Those who invented the terms did not place themselves among the anthropos but, obviously, among the humans who were in control of knowledge (categories of thoughts, imperial languages, institutions). And if you control knowledge, you can allocate meaning; and if you control meaning you can also control the economy and allocate money. I will argue in Parts II and III that one of the consequences of the “humanity/anthropos” distinctions (which is imbedded in the rhetoric of modernity/logic of coloniality), was and is the planetary distribution of capital, labor and knowledge.

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“Humanity” is the Western version of the self-consciousness that certain living organisms have of themselves and can express in sign systems. What is common to all known communities on the planet, past and present, is precisely the self-consciousness of themselves as a group, as a community and as an individual within the group that share the memories of the group. When a community at certain stage of its organization reaches the point of collective self-consciousness, the community builds narratives of a common heritage. What is “universal,” then, is not the

concept of “humanity” but the self-consciousness of communities themselves as “people:” what could be considered universal (I would better say “global”) is the self-consciousness and the enunciation upon which the classification is enacted. I have been talking with my colleagues at the Advanced Institute about the topic and asked how Chinese describe themselves, how the self-consciousness of a common heritage is built. I was informed that in Mandarin, there is a concept “Ren” (just in passing, in Quechua there is the concept of “Runa” equivalent to “Ren” and “Humanity”), visibly expressed as

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“Ren” was the self-consciousness of people who inhabited the center of the nested rectangles, according to territorial imagination in Ancient China (Incas modeled the territory as diagonal of an open square. There is more to say about the five nested rectangles and who inhabited them. But I will not go there. The point is to note that the nested rectangle was invented by people who inhabited the center. That is also a “universal” or global features of communities building narratives of their heritage and spatial organization of their territoriality.

- “Dongyi,” referred to people outside the center, inhabiting the lands where the sun rises (dong);

- “Nanman,” referred to people outside the center who inhabited the land to the left from where the sun raises (nan);
- “Xirong,” referred to people outside the center who inhabited the land where the sun sets (xi means);
- “Beidi,” referred to people inhabiting the lands to the right from where the sun sets: barbarians in the north (bei);

We could go around and make similar observations based on ancient Arabic language, Nahuatl and Aymara, Hindi and Bengali, Wolof and Bambara, etc. etc. I won't pursue these analogies here. I wanted to name them to remind you that “humanity” is one among many regional concepts that communities built to express the consciousness of themselves as people and their genealogy). The problem is that “humanity” is the only concept that is at once local and became global (or universal) and in so doing demoted the “centrality” that other civilizations have of themselves. The point is that once “humanity,” as the self-referential concept of the newest civilization on the planet (Western Civilization is only 500 years old) came into the picture, it managed to project its own regional self-consciousness into a planetary one. The “success” in universalizing the concept of “humanity” was devastating, for it is upon it that modern/colonial racial classification was founded. As we know, racial classification is tantamount to racism. Why I am saying that the concept of “humanity” was the foundation of racism? Because racism is not a question of skin color or the purity of your blood, but a classificatory system

that takes a definition of the “human” and “humanity” to rank “lesser” beings in need of be lifted up: Christianized, civilized, developed, organize themselves in multi-party system and built a civil society that votes, etc. etc. Western “humanity” became the exemplar of the species at the same time that was set up to classify and rank people of the world taking the idea and the ideal of “humanity” as point of reference. Thus, the global age and the concept of humanity are two sides of the same coin: the historical foundation of global coloniality.

50 There are of course in every community, large or small, the ones who classify and those who are classified. But, for the moment, I am talking about a classification that became planetary (imperial) and that the people on the planet had to deal with since 1500 of the Christian era, even if they had their own system of classification, like Chinese, Quechua and Nahuatl, Islam, Africans, etc. The polycentric and pluriversal enunciations (the first *nomos* of the earth if you are familiar with Carl Schmitt), was colonized by the monocentric (second *nomos* in Schmitt’s terminology)¹ universality of the Western concept of “humanity.” Thus, “ren” in Chinese or “runa” in Quechua were subordinated to “humanity.” The colonial and imperial differences operate under the same logic. The “difference” between both is in form and content, rather than in logic, whether people classified in reference to “humanity” were directly colonized

1 I analyzed Schmitt at length in *The darker side of Western modernity: global futures, decolonial options*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2011.

or they were subjected to the logic of coloniality. Africans were not colonized until the late nineteenth-century, but coloniality and the colonial difference, demoted them in the chain of “human” being to naturalize them as “slave” when, in reality, they were “enslaved”: meaning, captured because classified as “lesser human.” The New World was colonized and so later on India, for example, but not China and Japan. Neither of them however escaped the logic of coloniality under the guise of the progressive logic of modernity. Thus, it means also that they did not escape the “colonial difference” of being a lesser human; but this time not through direct colonization but through coloniality and “imperial difference.”

The idea of the “global age,” like that of “difference” and “humanity,” depends on the universe of discourse in which it is being used. Neoliberals exploited the term “globalization” to advance the goal of breaking away barriers that were cumbersome to free trade. Postmodern thinkers were also enthusiastic about the “borderless world” (Miyoshi), and liberal cosmopolitans were also celebrating the overcoming of nationalism and nation-state restrictions (Nussbaum). The “global age” could be also dated back to 1500. That is what Mexican thinkers of Irish descent, like Edmundo O’Gorman and Catholic Germans like Carl Schmitt did in the 50s at “different” ends of the colonial difference. O’Gorman belonged to the one classified; Schmitt to those who classified. Both saw the Eurocentered character of the European regional claim to universality. It was back there and then (toward 1500) when the globe was for

the first time in the history of human kind, explored and mapped. And those who mapped the world were not Africans, Asians or New World people. There are two types of narrative that accepts this starting point. One is Eurocentered (literally: centered in Europe). This is the narrative provided by Carl Schmitt in his *The nomos of the Earth in the International Law of the Ius publicum Europaeum* (1950). The term “eurocentered” is used by Schmitt to underline the fact that global linear thinking and international law divided the planet according to European interests. The people involved in global linear thinking were not only “humanists” but they defined themselves as “humanity.” Global linear thinking was not only a legal and geographic way of thinking; it was also the self-legitimization of a self-consciousness that legitimized the global linear thinkers to create law to their own interests because they conceive themselves as “humans” and “humanity” and at the top of the species. From that self-ontological and epistemic enunciation, it was then possible to classify the rest of the “humanity.” O’Gorman unveiled the fact that “America” was never discovered because it did not exist as an entity to be discovered, but was a European invention. There you have already one strong pillar of “colonial differences.”

“Colonial differences” were drawn with people directly colonized. Not O’Gorman, of course. He was embodying the legacies and the consequences of such invention. “Imperial differences” were drawn with people, places and cultures that were not colonized; however, no one could escape the Western logic of coloniality. Today, dewesternization and

decoloniality are responding by delinking from imperial domination—more specifically from colonial and imperial differences at all levels of the colonial matrix of power. However, dewesternization—which is delinking at the level of international relations—has not been able yet to avoid the reproduction of the same logic within the frame of national-states.

Colonial and imperial differences—it shall be remembered—were not created and fixed forever in the sixteenth-century. The logical principles remain constant, but the form and content changed. The changes could be detected in the mutation of Western imperial leadership: Christian catholic in Spain, Protestant in England, secular scientists in France, England or Germany, liberals and neoliberals in the US, etc. For example, in the sixteenth- and seventeenth-centuries, Indigenous people in America and Africans were cast at the bottom of the human chain of beings. The difference here was not just cultural (as popularized by the vocabulary of multiculturalism). It was racial. And that is what colonial and imperial differences were and are for: to justify racial classifications. The visual imaginary of the colonial difference appears in much of the cartography of the seventeenth-century: Africans and American Indians appear at both lower corners of the printed map. On the two top corners, you find Europe on the upper left and Asia on the upper right. The distribution is not casual. In a cosmology where alphabetic writing is the norm, the most important element on a flat square or rectangle appears on the upper left. Whatever appears in the lower corners is less

relevant. Once the colonial and imperial differences were created and implemented, directly or indirectly, it impinges on people around the planet in relation to their ranking and in relation to how their ranking over-determined the behavior of those who ranked. So the question is not only how Aymaras, Iranians, Chinese or Indians respond to how they have been allocated in the ranking of “humanity” but, above all, how those who ranked act and react in relation to them.

**Part II — The Bandung Conference:
“people of color” take the field
and respond to planetary racial classification**

54 The concept of “humanity,” forged during the European Renaissance to distinguish Christians from Moors and Jews, from New World Indigenous and Africans and from Asians, became hegemonic; and when not hegemonic mutated into domination. If Nahuatl speakers named “Chichemecas” (people who did not spoke) good Nahuatl and were outside the confines of Anahuac; and Chinese dynastic elite named “Dongyi,” “Nanman,” “Xirong” and “Beidi” the people who did belong to the center of the nested rectangles, Europeans named “Saracen, pagans and barbarians” the people who did not fit the mold of the center: human and Christian. To start with, the division of the planet into four continents, which came into place in the sixteenth-century, was built on an already hierarchical division of the planet based on Christian cosmology. It was for Christians and for Christians only that the planet was

divided into Asia, Africa and Europe and each continent “belonged” to one of each of Noah’s son. You can guess to what son each continent was assigned. I give you a hint: Europe was a Phoenician woman of high lineage that inhabited the pantheon on Greek mythology. The etymology carries on the meaning of “wide” or “broad” or high intelligence, qualities that also were in the profile of Japheth. Europe was the region to the West of Jerusalem assigned to Japheth.

From the sixteenth- to the nineteenth-centuries, the racial distribution of the planet (for were not only people racialized but continents as well) went hand in hand with the geopolitical and racial distribution of capital and knowledge. It was not in the classification but in the ranking of the classification where the colonial and imperial differences were at work, while the consequences of the classification rebound on the changes in the implementation of both. Indeed it was in the ranking that colonial and imperial differences were built, at the same time the classification became dependent itself on colonial and imperial differences. Both were simultaneous processes that contributed to establish imperial ontology and epistemology: people of color were ontologically inferior and therefore less rational, and because they were rationally deficient they were ontologically inferior.

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The ontological and epistemic criteria have primacy over economic criteria during a period of four and a half centuries, from 1500 to 1950. In 1950 the US was taking over the leadership of the world and displacing England, and France

56 intellectually, who had been dominating for two and a half centuries. Before that Spain, Portugal and Holland prepared the terrain for for England to take over the control of the seas while France and Germany took over the management of Europe (like in today EU): as Carl Schmitt pointed out, the balance between European countries after the Peace of Westfalia was possible because England controlled the seas and did not allow for international balance. President Harry Truman changed the criteria for ranking and classification: people and regions were inferior because they were underdeveloped. The same logic that applied before for the Christian and civilizing missions, to upgrade epistemically people who are ontological lesser or the other way around to up lift ontological lesser people by upgrading them epistemically: the civilizing mission. Truman instead put the accent on the economy. And from there on, we are still on the primacy of the economic criteria. But something has changed in the three spheres: epistemically and subjectively (which includes religions, aesthetics, gender/sexuality and racism), ontologically and politically-economic.

When the awareness that racism was from the very foundation of Western civilization an epistemic strategy to make people feel inferior, to humiliate and control them, the reaction to reclaim their dignity began to unfold. Although it would be possible to find specific moments before 1950 where such responses were advanced, it was around 1950 that the responses began to take collective form, institutional shape and intellectual force. The independence of India in 1947, for example, was a significant

event that contributed to the confidence of other struggles for decolonization in Asia and in Africa.

A single moment of the awakening was in my view the Bandung Conference, called by Indonesian Prime Minister Sukarno. Like any event, interpretations vary and the variations depend on where you put the accent and where is the historical narrative that allows you to decide where to put the accent and sustain your interpretation. My interpretation is based on some of Sukarno's statements in the opening address and, previous to the conference, on the effect that the announcement that such a conference will take place had in Richard Wright, an Afro-American intellectual, writer and activist from Detroit who was not of course invited to the conference because the invitees were officers of 29 state-governments from Asia and Africa.²

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The Bandung Conference took place from April 18 to 24 of 1955 and the inaugural speech was delivered the first President of independent Indonesia: Sukarno. The meeting was organized by Indonesia, Myanmar (now Burma), Ceylan, Sri Lanka, India and Pakistan. A total of 29 Asian and African countries attended. The common concern was that neither Western capitalism nor Russian or Chinese

² The conference was attended by 29 Asian and African countries besides the five countries mentioned above, namely, Afghanistan, Cambodia, China, Egypt, Ethiopia, the Gold Coast (Ghana), Iran, Iraq, Japan, Jordan, Laos, Lebanon, Liberia, Libya, Nepal, the Philippines, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Thailand, Turkey, the Vietnam Democratic Republic, South Vietnam (later reunified with the Democratic Republic of Vietnam) and Yemen (Republic of Yemen).

communism offered hopes for their own future.³ Both capitalism and communism were (rightly) considered as different forms of colonialism. And indeed both are legacies of the European enlightenment. They are different manifestations of the logic of coloniality hidden under the rhetoric of modernity (peace, salvation, development, dictatorship of the proletarians, etc.). The future of these countries needed, in the voices of their own leaders, a new vision, and that vision soon received a name: neither capitalism nor communism, but decolonization.

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As it could be expected, when the process of decolonization progressed in Africa and Asia, and the contenders in the Cold War fought for their zone of influence, the goals set up by the conference and the solidarity among states, deteriorated. However, it was never abandoned. It survived until today through the Non-Aligned Countries Movement, inaugurated in Belgrade in 1961. The spirit of Bandung, however, survived not in the communities of the States, but in the emerging global decolonial political society. In retrospect, the legacies of Bandung spread in three different trajectories:

- The struggle and the vocabulary of decolonization continued in Asia and Africa.
- In 1961, Mariscal Tito organized in Belgrade the first conference of the Non-Aligned Countries. There was

3 See speech of Primer Minister Nehru at the Bandung Conference, http://www.openspaceforum.net/twiki/tiki-print_article.php?articleId=293.

a mixture here between Non-Aligned Countries of Eastern Europe (caught in the First and the Second Worlds) and the countries outside Europe who were already classified as the Third World.

- The third legacy is dewesternization, to which Part III is devoted.

We are familiar with the histories of the second wave of decolonization [the first took place in the Americas between 1776 and 1830, with the Haitian Revolution in between (1804)]. The problems consisted of native elites taking advantage of decolonization to establish their own little kingdoms and betraying the spirit of decolonization. The first wave of decolonization in the Americas was not very dissimilar, with the exception of the US that went further and took over the leadership of the world. The recent events in Tunisia, Syria, Egypt and Libya showed some of the different consequences of the failure of decolonialization. However, the failure of decolonization as well as the failure of communism may or may not go away easily. By the 1990s decolonization was redefined as decoloniality, and decoloniality conceived as an epistemic and ethical issue: without decolonizing knowledge and therefore being, decolonization cannot take place. Decoloniality means first and foremost to delink from the categories of knowledge, principles and belief systems built upon Western epistemology, from Christian theology to secular philosophy, science and technology (I will come back to this issue in Part III). The spirit of decolonization was swept

away in many of the initial 29 countries (India and China were among them), and the spirit of capitalism began to set in. Thus, the two main legacies of Bandung outside of the ex-Third World were dewesternization and decoloniality. Let's remember some of the relevant moments of these double legacies.

60 There are several versions of Sukarno's inaugural speech available on the web.⁴ I will work, however, with the report provided by Richard Wright, apparently his own transcription of Sukarno's speech. There are several reasons to use this indirection, and not the published version, in books and on the web. I am interested, first, not only in what Sukarno said but also in his way of saying it. This is precisely what Wright picked up in his report. Sukarno was known for the uses of words and intonations, accentuation and rhythm in getting the message across. That dimension is lost in any of the available archival documentation. Not only do they differ from Wright's report, but they are also mute about the way of saying, only transcribing the said.

The fact that an Afro-American writer and intellectual from Detroit, residing in Paris at the time and doing research in Spain, was so impressed by the news of a conference in Bandung that at the moment of reading the news he decided to attend, uninvited, deserves serious consideration.

4 Sukarno, <http://www.international.ucla.edu/eas/documents/indo-550418.htm>; <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1955sukarno-bandong.html>. See also, for reflections on the present significance of Bandung, particularly on racial issues, <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2011/04/29/the-1955-bandung-conference-and-its-present-significance.html>.

Isn't this a global intellectual story of sensing, knowing and believing celebrating that 29 states put race and religious forward in the struggle for liberation? But let's listen to Wright:

In order to spend Christmas with my family, I'd returned to Paris from a long, tiring trip in Spain where I'd been gathering material for a book (...) Idly, I picked up the evening's newspaper that lay folded near me upon a table and began thumbing through it. Then I was staring at a news item that baffled me. I bent forward and read the item a second time: *Twenty-nine free and independent nations of Asia and Africa are meeting in Bandung, Indonesia, to discuss "racialism and colonialism"* (...). What is this? I scanned the list of nations involved: China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Burma, Egypt, Turkey, the Philippines, Ethiopia, Gold Coast, etc. My God! I began a rapid calculation of the populations of the nations listed and, when my total topped the billion mark, I stopped.⁵

So Wright went, attended, listened and finally reported on Sukarno's speech itself, including a paragraph that cannot be found in the written version circulating on the web. After describing the tension of waiting for the inaugural speech, Wrights says:

At last Sukarno, President of the Republic of Indonesia, mounted the rostrum to deliver the opening address (...). From the very outset, he sounded the notes of race and religion, strong, defiant: before he had uttered more than a hundred syllables, he declared *This is the first international conference of colored peoples in the history of mankind*.⁶

This opening is difficult to find in the existing documentation. Then Wright continues:

⁵ Richard Wright. *The color curtain*, Jackson, Mississippi, Banner Books, 1956.

⁶ Wright, p. 136.

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He then placed his finger upon the geographical gateway through which the white men of the West had come into Asia: “Sisters and Brothers, how terrifically dynamic is our time. I recall that, several years ago, I had occasion to make a public analysis of colonialism, and I drew attention to what I called “the life line of imperialism.” This line runs from the Strait of Gibraltar, through the Mediterranean, the Suez Canal, the Red Sea, the Indian Ocean, the South China Sea and the Sea of Japan

It is not only what Sukarno *said* that counts but the *way he said it*. Here again we are into the enunciation, in the realm of sensing, believing and knowing that overwhelms knowledge and what it is said. Wright reports that in the third paragraph of his address, Sukarno paid tribute to the genealogy of thought that made it possible to be gathered at that point, in Bandung. Following up on the first paragraph of the inaugural speech, Sukarno continues

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I recognize—he said in Wright’s transcription—that we are gathered here today as a result of sacrifices. Sacrifices made by our forefathers and by the people of our own and younger generations (...). Their struggle and sacrifice paved the way for this meeting of the highest representatives of independent and sovereign nations from two of the biggest continents of the globe.⁷

The “sacrifices” are not just deeds but thoughts. There are intellectual histories behind those “sacrifices;” for intellectual histories cannot be limited to the documents one finds in archives, written in alphabetic languages, and based in the classical tradition of Greek and Latin.⁸

7 Wright, p. 137.

8 I have addressed this issue a couple of decades ago, “On the colonization of Amerindian languages and memories: Renaissance theories of writing and the discontinuity of the Classical tradition,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, n. 34, p. 301-30, 1992.

Sukarno put forward not just the right to speak, but to dispute the control of knowledge for if speaking when there is only one game in town means that the subaltern cannot speak. Sukarno was pointing toward the question of knowledge and genealogies of thoughts that have invented people of color in order to prevent them from producing knowledge and, therefore, to be decided rather than to participate in decision-making processes:

For many generations our peoples have been the voiceless ones in the world. We have been the un-regarded, the peoples for whom decisions were made by others whose interests were paramount, the peoples who lived in poverty and humiliation. What can we do? The peoples of Asia and Africa wield little physical power. Even our economic strength is dispersed and slight. We cannot indulge in power politics (...). Our statesmen, by and large, are not backed up with serried ranks of jet bombers (...). We, the people of Asia and Africa, 1,400.000.000 strong, far more than half of the population of the world, we can mobilize what I have called the *Moral Violence of Nations in favor of peace*.⁹

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And where is that “moral violence” in favor of peace coming from, Wright asks? And I repeat the question after him. Sukarno had an answer to that question that is not rehearsing the French Revolution ideas of democracy, for the goals shall be peace and equality rather than imposing an idea of democracy that served well France, Western Europe and the US but that became an intruder beyond those realms. “Democracy” was a natural outcome of the modern history of Europe, not of world history. For that reason Sukarno points out that:

9 Wright, p. 139.

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Religion is of dominating importance particularly in this part of the world. There are perhaps more religions here than in other regions of the globe... Our countries were the birthplace of religions.¹⁰

64 Now, the reader can object that religions could be dangerous because they may lead to religious fundamentalism. Certainly. But so can secular nationalisms and liberalism, secular states founded in defense of the nation and supporting national fundamentalism; and so could be capitalism, for the defense of an economy that favors the entrepreneurial elite could lead to capital fundamentalism and the dispensability of human life. Wherever you mention the danger of fundamentalism, fundamentalism is knocking at your own door while you are recommending awareness of fundamentalisms. Briefly: there is no safe place; that is why decolonizing knowledge and being are a necessary condition toward a pluriversal world. That is why, let's say it in passing, decoloniality is an option and not a mission.¹¹ Secularism is no longer an excuse to avoid fundamentalism, for secularism has ended up in national, state and economic fundamentalisms (called "capitalism"). Pluriversality is only possible in a world of options, not in a world of missions. For this reason there is something else that shall be considered and Sukarno was not blind to it. That "something else" is what the majority of people on the globe, in Asia (including Central and West Asia), Africa, South America and the Caribbean and within the US

¹⁰ Wright, p. 139.

¹¹ I elaborate this argument in more detail in *The darker side of Western modernity: global futures, decolonial options*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2011.

(Native Americans, Afro-Americans, Chicano-Latinos), have in common: “Almost all of us have ties to common experience, the experience of colonialism.”¹²

Today we will say “coloniality,” but it is a question of clarifying concepts. The idea was already there. The point is that the Bandung Conference was the signpost of the two main trajectories that are unfolding today, and one that still remains anchored in the memories of the Cold War and the Third World. The two trajectories—dewesternization and decoloniality—have one element in common: they are both led by “people of color,” people who still carry—and people who will continue to carry for while—the marks of the colonial and imperial wounds (humiliation facing arrogance) and therefore of the colonial and imperial differences. The legacies of the Bandung conference spread all over the non-European world, and is now unfolding in Western Europe (all that Europe that divided among themselves the entire African continent after the Berlin Conference in 1894) and the US: in Europe mainly by migrants from Asia and Africa and in the US mainly by migrants from South America and the Caribbean.

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Let’s now concentrate on dewesternization and leave decoloniality for another occasion.

Part III — The BRICS: dewesternization and the racial distribution of capital and knowledge

There are some semantic difficulties in the fact that the word for “orientation” [to “set yourself in a good direction”

¹² Wright, p. 139.

(to orient yourself)] or to “update your direction demanded by the point where you has arrived,” has as its millenarian points of reference the sunrise. To orient yourself meant to put yourself with your back to the sunrise, your face toward sunset, and then determine your left and right sides. But when Pope Alexander the VI in 1594 (Tordesilla’s Treaty) and Zaragoza’s Treaty (1529), divided the planet between “Indias Occidentales” and “Indias Orientales,” the rules of the game had been set—the conditions for Orientalism were set by the men, categories of thoughts and institutions who inhabit Occident. Once again, Occident and Orient, West and East are basically Western epistemic-geographic inventions from the late fifteenth- and early sixteenth-centuries. The rules had been established: the Orient, where Spirit emerged (according to Hegel’s story) a long time ago, was the land of yellow people that remained stuck in the past.

66 Something has drastically changed in the first decade of the twenty-first-century. When you notice changes, it doesn’t mean that they are just happening in the moment you notice them. They have been unfolding, someone was noticing them, others not; and sometimes the actors involved in the process are not aware of the process involving them/us. But there is a moment in which the confluence of several factors makes the antecedents visible: the antecedents are always re-constructed from the way we sense and understand the present. Perhaps dewesternization was not perceived during the Cold War because the interpretive options were two: either capitalism or communism. So when

Deng Xiaoping turned Mao Zedong's cultural revolution into a market oriented economy, the interpretation in the West was that China turned capitalist. And by the nineties, the interpretation was that China was not only capitalist but also neoliberal. Which of course, it is an interpretation that not only is Eurocentered but that is basically absurd: if one of neoliberal goals was/is to minimize the state and to let the market rule, how can be neoliberal the political-organization in China that is strongly regulated by the state? Now we can say that Deng Xiaoping was indeed following up on the steps of the Bandung Conference, although in a direction that was not clearly expressed, and perhaps not yet conceived, during the conference itself: dewesternization.

If the Bandung Conference set the stage to think that neither capitalism nor communism were the roads to the future, now (sixty seven years later), we see that the conditions for dewesternization were there but not seen or at least not clearly articulated.¹³ Based on the cases of China and Singapore, what was rejected was not the economy of growth, but the liberal and neoliberal agenda that was part of the package of Western economic and political control. Perhaps the possibilities of detaching capitalism from liberalism/neoliberalism were not yet clearly perceived. Dewesternization, as self-conscious of leading a process, was

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13 At the time of the Conference the division in three worlds did not yet existed. The "Third World" was a concept that originated in France shortly after the Bandung Conference. One can be sure that being "Third" was not a classification that originated in the countries classifying themselves as "Third."

born when the development and growth was detached from how to do it according to the IMF and the World Bank. Latin America in the sixties was subjected to the project of modernization and development. Theory of dependency was clear in denouncing the un-viability of the US project of modernization and development. They were not heard, the project failed. In the seventies and eighties through the nineties Latin American countries were increasing their debt while China and Singapore were increasing their own pockets. China, Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore disobeyed and delinked from the Western institutions surveying development. In Latin America the process of disobeying and delinking began in the twent-first-century.

68 Brazil is leading the way. It was misinterpreted as a “turn to the left” and in some cases, like Bolivia, as a “decolonial turn.” Now it is clear that the turn is toward dewesternization, which is neither left nor right. That is precisely, another feature of dewesternization: making Western categories traditional and obsolete.

Back to Deng Xiaoping in China and Lee Kwan Yew in Singapore, started a process that embraced the economy of accumulation and growth they embraced the idea of “development” but not the politics of the IMF and the World Bank. That means that Xiaoping and Kwan Lew accepted the content and the form of development but not the enunciation that controls how development shall be conducted. Would Xiaoping and Kwan Lew had followed the enunciation of the World Bank and the IMF we would not have had an “Asia Miracle” and the concept of “the

Asian Century,” to profile the twenty-first-century, would not exist. The “miracle” of the Asiatic Tigers cannot be explained by saying they adapted themselves to “development and neoliberalism” in a prudent way (which was of course), as Joseph Stiglitz distinguished the success of China and the crash of the Soviet Union.¹⁴ It was not Stiglitz however who advanced arguments toward dewesternization. That would have been much to ask. For reasons explained above, colonial and imperial differences, it is expected that someone who is not based in the US, Germany, France or England would take that step. And indeed it was Kishore Mahbubani, Dean of the School of Public Policy Lew Kwan-yew at the National University of Singapore.¹⁵

Now, if we go back to the years of Deng Xiaoping, and think of the Soviet Union lead by Mikhail Gorbachev, the Perestroika looks, in retrospect, like a move toward dewesternization that was stopped half way through and did not delink and did not try to dewesternized. On the contrary, they unreflectively adopted the neoliberal rules of the games and destroyed the Perestroika: in retrospect, what Gorbachev may have had in mind was precisely a process of dewesternization similar to the roads Xiaoping and Kwan Lew initiated. We will never know. What we do know is that Vladimir Putin is, but by different means

14 Stiglitz, *Globalization and its discontent*, NY, Norton, 2002.

15 Kishore Mahbubani, *The new Asian hemisphere*: “For centuries, the Asians (Chinese, Indians, Muslims, and others) have been bystanders in world history. Now they are ready to become co-drivers.” For more, see <http://www.mahbubani.net/book3.html>.

(but perhaps necessary), moving to re-orient Russia toward dewesternization. That is why, precisely, Russia is one of the five BRICS countries. Corruptions and immaturity of leadership stop a process that today I would call dewesternization, sunk the Russian population in a decade of despair for the majority while for the first time in its history Russians were able to show to the world that the country also had a good number of billionaires, successful and efficient business who showed the life style ethics that capitalism promotes. Paradoxically enough, it seems that it is Vladimir Putin who is reworking what Gorbachev initiated and that Boris Yeltsin destroyed. If Russia is one of the BRICS, there are reasons to believe that Putin's international politics matches that of the other four BRICS countries.

All that to say that the unavoidable next step—for better or worse—is dewesternization: the opening up of political, epistemic, ethic, artistic, scientific, subjectivity in the dispute for the control of economy (e.g., trades, labor, finances): a common economy and the end of unilateralism. The painful case of Syria seems to be a sign of the time, after the unilateral decisions in Iraq and Libya and the impasse of Israel/Palestine, explicitly mentioned in the Declaration of the Fourth Summit, in Delhi, in April of 2012.¹⁶ In the sphere of the economy, will be the conflictive co-existence of rewesternization with dewesternization that

¹⁶ <http://search.yahoo.com/search?p=Brics+summit+delhi&ei=UTF-8&fr=moz35>.

extends beyond the core countries of either trajectory: for the first, US and the core countries of the European Union (in which for example, Hungary, Poland or Lithuania have not much say) and the core countries of dewesternization (the BRICS countries). At the time of writing these lines, the government of Spain is behaving like a colonizer that it once was, requesting support of the European Union and lifting their fingers and rising their voice to recall “their once vassals from South America,” that Argentina has no right to nationalize oil because it belongs to a Spanish private company, Repsol.¹⁷ This is indeed a text-book case of the conflicts we will see growing when more and more countries start to delink from the US and EU’s effort to rewesternize the world and to keep it under their control.

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Dewesternization (as the location of BRICS countries show) is not a geographic but a political concept and refers to all those States (corporate states, for sure) that are consolidating their economies without following the dictates of the US, the EU, the IMF or the World Bank; and that are also confronting the unbalance of the UN. Delinking here doesn’t mean delinking from “the type of economy” (e.g., from capitalism, as Samir Amin argued), but from the instructions of the World Bank and the IMF and similar institutions. The delinking is basically in the sphere of authority. Let’s remember that it was President Harry

17 I have addressed this issue in an op-ed: “La desoccidentalizacion es irreversible: la renacionalizacion de REPSOL-YPF,” <http://waltermignolo.com/2012/04/17/la-desoccidentalizacion-es-irreversible-la-renacionalizacion-de-repsol-ypf/>.

Truman that introduced the word “development”: US foresaw that the wave of decolonization by Indonesia in 1945 and followed up by India in 1947 would not stop there. In 1949 Truman foresaw the Asia, Africa and South America were formed by underdeveloped countries. Thus, the politics of development became tantamount with the politics of modernization and with the recasting of the already existing idea of progress, very much in use during the hegemony of the British Empire. The US appointed itself to lead the world toward development and modernization. The first step was already taken by the US in 1945 with the creation of the Bretton Woods agreement signed by delegates of 44 nation-states (at the time). As it is known, Bretton

72 Woods was established to regulate the international monetary system. From the agreement emerged the IMF (International Monetary Fund), the IBRD (International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, which mutated into today’s World Bank. Other regional banks were created later, like the IDB (Inter-American Development Bank). The ascending control of finances, economy and international politics by the US from the end of WWII to 2000, allowed it to unilaterally end the convertibility of the dollar to gold. The dollar became the ungrounded currency for all international transactions.

Well, this short story was necessary to underline that dewesternization is in the process of ending the international dependency to the legacies of Bretton Woods and of the dollar as the ungrounded currency for international transactions. On March 28-29, 2012, the BRICS countries met

in New Delhi. Two points are important for this conversation: BRICS have, as critics say, very different local histories and are located in different parts of the world. What they do not say is that BRICS countries have in common Western coloniality impinging in their territories and that their lives, at different moments, in different ways, and in different local Western empires. For example, Brazil was colonized by the Portuguese, South Africa and India by the British, China and Russia were never colonized but they couldn't avoid Western entanglements: China since the Opium War and Russia by self-inflicted westernization in the hands of Peter and Catherine the Great first and then by the mutation of the Russian Czarate into the Soviet Union. Different local histories, for sure, but all entangled by the same global design: Western global era since 1500.

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The second point of interest is the radical critics of the IMF and the proposal for a new international monetary organization to counterbalance the unilateralism of the IMF. Point 13 of the resolution is the following:

13. We have considered the possibility of setting up a new Development Bank for mobilizing resources for infrastructure and sustainable development projects in BRICS and other emerging economies and developing countries, to supplement the existing efforts of multilateral and regional financial institutions for global growth and development. We direct our Finance Ministers to examine the feasibility and viability of such an initiative, set up a joint working group for further study, and report back to us by the next Summit.¹⁸

¹⁸ The full text of the declaration can be found in <http://www.ibtimes.com/articles/321440/20120329/brics-delhi-declaration-russia-china-india-brazil.htm>.

Well, here we have a clear case of delinking from unilateralism in economic and financial decisions. That is, we have here a dewesternizing argument. It is not delinking from the economy of growth (which in decolonial vocabulary will be “economic coloniality” and in liberal and Marxist vocabulary will be “capitalism”). When you read the Declaration of the Fourth Summit it is clear that the “idea of development” is not questioned; what is called into question is who makes the decisions regarding the politics of development. Delinking, consequently, is at the level of the control of authority, which implies also control of economic decisions. This I will call economic-political delinking.

74 BRICS countries have two options at this point. One would be to demand participation within a world order whose rules have been set for a long time. This option would be to concede and join the project of **rewesternization** lead by the US, with the support of the European Union and some countries around the world (e.g. Colombia is one of them, and for that reason organized the conference of business people of Latin America in Cartagena and invited President Obama to inaugurate it. Cuba was not invited, and Rafael Correa from Ecuador sent a letter to the President of Colombia, Santos, declining the invitation because Cuba was not invited). The other option is **dewesternization** and this seems to be the orientation that BRICS countries are taking and Brazil is leading the way in Latin America. There is more than meets the eye in what seems to be a firm platform that BRICS countries are setting for the future.

To start with, beyond clause #13 quoted above, the BRICS are pushing for the democratization of international institutions (UN, World Bank, IMF). This is a call that we hear more and more from scholars and public intellectuals “of color.”¹⁹ What do I mean by that and why would this matter for BRICS? You must be thinking that I have been derailing and this is the point of catastrophe. It may be, but remember that I am building my arguments on the colonial and imperial differences, both epistemic and ontological.

Let’s parse BRICS countries, looking at how imperial and colonial differences “made them” “people of color” through five centuries. Categories such as barbarians, primitives, uncivilized and underdeveloped are not categories applied in general to white people but to people of color, even if they are white. You see what I mean? Russian governments from the Czars, to the Soviets of the Russian Federation and the population considered national, where and are in its vast majority, ethnically Slavs. And Slavs have white skin. Even more significant: who may be whiter than the people from Caucasus, the Caucasians? However, in Russia, Caucasians are Black and in the West they are not—like Latin Americans of European descent—properly white or white enough. They/we seem to be a sort of off white. But that is not enough for the imperial classification of

19 See Jayati Ghosh, “We need a New World Order at the World Bank,” *World Public Forum*, Feb 10, 2012, <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2011/04/29/the-1955-bandung-conference-and-its-present-significance.html>.

Western modernity. Slavs are also Christian Orthodox; the Orthodox Church originated in Greece and went through Istanbul (which as we all know was Constantinople and that was where Emperor Constantine integrated Christianity to the Roman Empire). Furthermore, they have a Cyrillic alphabet that next to Orthodox Christianity set them apart and below people who are “properly” Christian (Catholic or Protestant) and have a Latin alphabetic writing. Russia was never colonized like India, but did not escape coloniality through the imperial difference. The work of Peter and Catherine the Great through an entire century consisted in an effort of auto-westernization. Saint Petersburg is perhaps the most visible sign of Russia wanting to be part of the West and the second was to change their designation from Czars to Emperor and Empress. They did not convert to Western Christianity nor adopted the Latin alphabet. Vladimir Lenin reconverted secular Western civilizational ideals into Western socialist ideals. The Soviet Union was the socialist side of Western secular narratives after the enlightenment. It was not dewesternization but westernization from the Left, following the distinction between secular Left and secular Right that emerged from the French Revolution. Vladimir Putin has been steadily moving toward dewesternization (as I suggested above): embracing capitalism but delinking from the political and ideological hegemony and dominance of the West. That is, again, why Russia is now one of the BRICS countries.

China, like Russia and unlike India, was never colonized. However, the Chinese did not escape the imperial

difference and consequently the colonial wound—that is, the humiliation that through racism and colonization was projected to people of color all over the world and that Sukarno (Kusno Sosrodihardjo) made everyone remember. As I pointed out in a previous section, the British were, for Chinese, the lesser people inhabiting the far away territories where the sunsets. As people of the Celestial Empire, Chinese saw themselves superior to all people in their surroundings. That was common to every existing civilization. The humiliation came into being the day when the lesser people from where the sunset invaded the Celestial Empire and enforced agreements that were disadvantageous for the Chinese. It took perhaps three centuries for the Chinese to realize that Matteo Ricci's (the Italian jesuit) flipping the world map around and putting the Pacific instead of the Atlantic, at the center of the map, so China was more toward the center and not in the upper right corner, was not disconnected to the Opium War.

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As a matter of fact, it was the first step. Ricci was asked why if China was the Middle Kingdom he placed it in the upper right corner? Ricci who already knew the difference between geometric and ethnic centers, had no problem in turning the map around and placing the Pacific at the center, Europe to the left and Americas to the right. He knew that the center, any way, was already in Rome, no longer even in Jerusalem: Rome became the center when Pope Alexander VI divided the world between *Indias Occidentales* and *Indias Orientales*: the West and the East were determined in relation to Rome, the Center. Let's say in

passing that when the British moved to dispense with all vestige of theology, even in its abstract-geometric formulation, they appropriated the center of the World and planted the Greenwich Meridian. Matteo Ricci's move and the Opium War were two distant moments connected by the logic of coloniality and the making of the imperial difference. The first was not humiliating for the Chinese they hardly paid attention to it. They should, for if they had, the Opium War may not have taking place. China now is not only an economic "success" without Western assistance (as Robert Zoellick had no choice but to recognize in his presentation of the joint report "China 2030"). On the contrary, it was a "success" in spite of the West. Why? There is an ethical and ethic dimension to it that has to do with racism.

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Dewesternization is, in a way, a process contributing to a certain degree of political deracialization although racism will continue as far as the economy of growth and development continues: racism is connected to the exploitation of labor, expropriation of land, disregard for the environment and the immediate consequences for the population living in the zone affected by the extraction of natural resources (oil, mineral, metals). I suspect that the "return" of Confucius and Mencius may have to do with the "return" and not the "rise" of Asia, and that the bottom line is not just economy and politics but pride after racism and the global humiliation (not just national) infringed upon "people of color." The connector with the other four BRICS countries resides precisely in the commonality of diverse local histories, and their entanglement with the West through colonial and imperial differences.

Brazil and South Africa, like India, were colonized countries. Brazil is a consequence of the first moment of Western consolidation and expansion, the Renaissance moment; the second the consequence of the Enlightenment moment. Brazil, like Hispanic South America and Caribbean, as well as the French, Dutch and British Caribbean, is part of the formation of the “New World.” New World not because the continent did not exist until all confused Christopher Columbus landed on it, but because it became a New World by the coexistence, from 1500 to 1800, of people from three ethnically diverse but identifiable groups—identifiable not by blood, but by history. The diversity of people who were living in Tawantinsuyu, Anahuac, Ayiti, Abya-Yala and other territoriality and that extended from Southern Chile (Mapuche region) to the First Nations of Canada. In languages, beliefs, social organization, historical rhythms (e.g., in the Andes and Meso-America complex and sophisticated socio-spiritual-economic-architectonic. Second, the increasing diversity of Europeans who invited themselves to the New World and, without passport or visa, began to build their own institutions.

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If during the sixteenth-century Europeans in the New World were mainly Iberian, from the early seventeenth-century on Dutch, British and French began to flock in. All of them contributed to the transportation and exploitation of enslaved Africans to the New World. That is the demographic platform of the Americas, the demographic foundation during three centuries. Brazil is the largest country in South America and obviously of any of the

Caribbean islands. The indigenous population is low, of the order of 1% of 2% of the total population of about 180 million. The population of African descent is larger, although difficult to determine demographically. What is undeniable the force of African cultures in music and dance (*Capoeira*) and spirituality (*Candomblé*). Brazil, like any other South American country have been ruled, with some exceptions like Menem in Argentina, Abad in Ecuador and Morales in Bolivia—by people of Iberian stock, and of Spanish, Portuguese, British, French and German education. However, and this is the point connected to my argument, people of Iberian descent in South America are not—obviously—European. And not only that, but in the case of Ibero-

80 America, the consequences of colonial and imperial difference have had a long lasting effect. How come?

While being of Iberian stock means to descend from the conquerors and the colonizers, it means also being Creole, that is, people born and raise in the New World. The Creole became the target of the mutation of colonial difference (as we see in Buffon and in Hegel) that, until then, was projected on Indians and people of African descent. However, the Creole appropriated the colonial differences and projected it on their own, instead of the European colonizers, on Indians and Blacks. Things got worst when South American and Caribbean countries became part of the “Third World.” In Latin America the visible Third World people were not so much Indians and Blacks (which were invisible at the time), but the Creole and *Mestizos* of European descent. Now we are already in familiar terrain: a renovated Left detached

from the communist party emerged in several countries in the early years of the Cold War. At the same time, the translation of Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth* in 1962 brought the discourse of decolonization in Africa, Asia and refugees and migrants in Paris, back home to Latin America. If the renovated Marxist Left and the growing decolonizing consciousness occupied the second half of the twentieth-century and continue in the early twenty-first-century, the "novelty" of the twenty-first-century is the decisive turn toward dewesternization. The leading figure of that turn was Inácio Lula da Silva, particularly during his second term.

Now we have arrived at the point of connection between Brazil and the other four BRICS countries. At stake there is more than being a big country with a strong economy—there are the traces of the colonial wound common to countries that endured the experience of direct colonization and its legacies (Brazil, India, South Africa), and traces of the colonial wound inflicted through imperial differences (like in the case of Russia and China).

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India was indeed colonized by the British. As a matter of fact, it was the largest British colony in modern/colonial history (that is, from 1500 to today). Indian people and territory were the "marked" ones in Western view of the non-Western world. In seventeenth-century cartography, the four corners of the map on flat surfaces were filled with icons referring to the four continents. The upper left corner is the most important in a culture that read and writes from left to right and from bottom down. A well dress lady appears generally seating on an elephant. Why not the Chi-

nese and a dragon instead of an elephant, is something I will not address now. What matters is that Indian was by Linnaeus's classification and the Indians that the British favored were those who distinguish themselves as "Hindi" in contradistinction with "Islamic," predominant in the Mughal Sultanate. The Mughal Sultanate was formed at the beginning of the sixteenth-century, and the British took over formally in 1858. Gandhi led the second significant decolonial movement in India. The first two took place in the Andes, from Taky Onkoy in the sixteenth-century to Tupac Amaru in the late eighteenth-century. Since Gandhi, the decolonial option has entered the history of India. However, in the late twentieth-century the government increasingly opted for dewesternization. There is then a history of the colonial difference that made Indians, to the eyes of Europeans, brown and inferior. It would be hard to understand whether the history of the colonial wound, of the imperial humiliation that Indians endured through British colonization, is forgotten even if India now mutated from Gandhi's decolonial struggle, to Nerhu nationalism to the actual corporate Hindi State as Arundati Roy describes it. However, the Hindi Corporate State may make the difference with, for example, the Laic and Neoliberal French State or the Corporate Liberal (in conversation with Neoliberal projects) US State. The first is a State of people of color; the last two of white people. The fact that the President is Black doesn't alter the fact that the State in the US of America is a Corporate Liberal State, and secular liberal states are not a peculiarity of people of color. The

“Hindi” in the corporate state explains why India belongs to the BRICS and not to the G7.

Like Brazil, South Africa is a state within a larger continent—the Americas in the first case, Africa in the second. Like Brazil, South Africa belongs to the “southern” part of the continent, Sub-Saharan Africa. There are two crucial historical moments or historical markers in this modern/colonial history of Africa: the triangular enslaved trades that devastated Africa for three centuries and, secondly, the consequences of the Berlin Conference, in 1884, which opened up the doors to all Western European countries to the partition of Africa to their own benefit. By 1900 Africa was a continent of different colors on the map indicating to which Western European countries the region belonged. British and French had the largest portion, and South Africa was one of the regions under the wing of the British Empire. The recent history of South Africa is too well known to repeat it here. What shall be underlined is that Africa became the “dark continent” and, once again, that was not a self-description by Africans, but a degrading and humiliating description inscribed in the knowledge that Europeans built around themselves, defining themselves through inventing differences structured by the logic: the logic of coloniality and its two corollaries: imperial and colonial differences. The African continent, from Algeria and Tunisia to Congo and from Egypt to South Africa and Tanzania, were involved in the struggle for decolonization during the first half of the twentieth-century. Decolonization failed, mainly because the ruling elites took two wrong steps: one

was to play the game established by the colonizers with the difference of doing it by themselves but not questioning the rules of the game. The second was to let many of them be carried away by the opportunities of political and economic corruptions that capitalism encourages. Now South Africa is leading the way toward dewesternization and that means taking steps to correct the two wrong steps taking by the leading elite of decolonization: not changing the rules of the game and engaging in politico-economic corruptions. The corrections being advanced by dewesternization are, then, to change the terms of the conversation and the rules of the game settled by the colonizers. This is precisely what BRICS countries are apparently projecting. The second is to engage in serious efforts of regulations to avoid corruptions. The much talked about “Confucianization” of the State in China and Singapore, seems to focus on the struggle against corruption. Coming back to South Africa, it has in common with Brazil and India the traces of the colonial wound inflicted through direct colonization.

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In her presentation at the Ninth Rhodes Forum, Lotin Welly Marguerite, President of the NGO “Associazione Interculturale Griot” (Italy) made three points of interest for my argument. The first is that African countries shall follow the lead of South Asia as a member of BRICS countries. Second, that African countries shall follow the BRICS model and find association of cooperation and mutual strengthening. And third, that in the future,

I believe that the most important partner for Africa will be Brazil with whom we have to develop a more intense synergy and cooperation. Brazil does not look for raw materials or land to buy for an intensive

exploitation to produce agriculture products. Brazil is already very rich of natural resources, water and land. Brazil is looking for an expansion of its industrial capabilities in some sectors, like the technologies related to the raw material exploitation, to enlarge its market. This can become an important example for the industrial modernization of Africa. The Latin American country also employs African labour force.

But the most relevant thing is the sharing of many aspects of the same culture. Over 90 millions Brazil citizens have some African origin.²⁰

In sum, Africa and Brazil have been connected indeed since the sixteenth-century through the Portuguese trade of enslaved Africans. Certainly the Portuguese were not the only ones, although perhaps the pioneers in enslaved trades. But it was through the Portuguese that Brazil and Africa were connected in the very foundation of the colonial difference. Other European monarchies participated as well. In similar fashion of will happen four centuries later as a consequence of the Berlin Conference, the trade of enslaved Africans was enacted by Portuguese, Spanish, French, Dutch and English. If the subcontinent has specific ties with Brazil because of demographic factors, the Republic of South Africa has the colonial wound with Brazil and India (inflicted through the colonial difference) and with China and Russia (inflicted through the imperial difference). Decoloniality is not an experience common to Chinese and Russians, as it is for South African, Indians and to Brazil. The strength that decoloniality and dewesternization have at this moment is related to local histories of entanglements between the West

20 www.wsp.Africa%20,file:///Users/wmignolo/Desktop/Africa%20Brics%20886-solidarity-economy-for-africa.htmlBrics%20886-solidarity-economy-for-africa.html

and the Rest. Common to the five BRICS is the colonial wound, either through the colonial or imperial differences.

IV — Conclusions and opening up

I shall repeat here—for the readers who went through the narrative—what I said in the abstract. In this paper I made two interrelated arguments and present them in three parts.

In **Part III** I develop the main argument that connects “humanity,” “difference” and the politics of “BRICS countries.” The argument is this: BRICS countries have an important role to play—and they know it—in balancing the polycentric world in which we are already living and will further unfold in the near future. BRICS appear to be at the point of non-return. These countries have embraced the economy of growth, development and accumulation (that is, economic coloniality). That aspect is certainly a problem. The politicization of the civil society what is already manifested in several spheres, from the World Public Forum to the “*Indignados*” of Spain and the Occupy Wall Street, is mounting. At the same time, the decolonial legacies of Bandung are reviving in the uprising of Tunisia and Egypt, in the student movements in Chile and Colombia, among decolonial organizations among migrants in Europe from the ex-Third World; among *Latinos/as* and Afro-Caribbean in the US; in the organization denouncing and stopping the open pit mining in South America and Africa; the continuing work of La Via Campesina and Sovereignty of Food, etc. etc. Dewesternization may or may not be able to change the course of history. This is an open question.

For it is not clear how BRICS states will deal with the limited resources of the planet and the increasing competition for natural resources of Western states (and their supporters) and BRICS states (and their supporters). Furthermore, exploitation of labor and the drive toward consumerism is an essential component of the economy of growth and development. To maintain a society upon the promises of constant growth and that happiness consists in living to consume rather than in consuming to live, people not only need money and commodities to buy; they have to be convinced that this is the only way to live. There is faith involved in maintain a market based on economic coloniality (“capitalism” in the liberal and Marxist vocabulary).

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The economic success of the BRICS countries comes from the fact that the leadership is engaged in epistemic economic disobedience *vis-à-vis* the IMF and the World Bank, two institutions of global scope and, until now, of local management. Secondly, the economic affirmation leads to the second step taken recently at the Delhi Summit indicates that the group is taking a leadership in global governance and global political coherence. In this respect, the fourth BRICS summit in Delhi was a turning point and a point of no return, in the evolution of a group that had focused on global economic governance issues, but the Delhi Declaration stated that the goal is also to achieve greater political coherence. The Declaration of the Summit, that touches and recommended dialogue to solve the problems

in Syria and Iran, at the same time that recommend Iran should continue its peaceful nuclear investigations, states:

We agree that the period of transformation taking place in the Middle East and North Africa should not be used as a pretext to delay resolution of lasting conflicts but rather it should serve as an incentive to settle them, in particular the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Part II is devoted to the second argument. I argue that the commonality of BRICS countries goes beyond economic and political interests. Although, to my knowledge, this issue has not been made explicit, there is an ethical factor supporting economic and political orientations and decisions: the five BRICS countries are of and ruled by “people of color.” This is one of the legacies of the Bandung Conference and Sukarno’s clear statement: “This is the first international conference of colored peoples in the history of mankind.” The statement is true with the clarification that before 1500 there were people with different skin color and different communities of beliefs, ethical and/or spiritual, but there were no “people of color” in the sense that the expression has had since sixteenth-century, and mainly, since Linnaeus. In that regard, it was the first international meeting on planet earth since “people of color” were invented by Western man of knowledge and their invention became hegemonic. Colonial and imperial differences were precisely invented around “purity of blood” first, skin color later to which more recently language, religions and nationalities have been added to define the profile of “people of color.” Thus the bottom line, the non-said but I suspect deeply felt, is the colonial/imperial wound that connects the five countries in the history of the modern/

colonial world. Nevertheless, and whatever you count all BRICS countries carry the “stigma” of “people of color,” of non-Western people, even if their skin is white like Slavs in Russia or European migrants to Latin America from the second half of the nineteenth-century. I am myself a result of that migration.

In **Part I** set the stage and offer the frame for the two arguments I just outlined. I address the topic of this meeting of the Académie de la latinité by assuming that there are “different kinds of difference.” And there is one kind that is crucial to understanding the Western concept of “humanity.” I describe it as colonial and imperial difference. These differences do not exist in the world but have been invented in the process of Europeans building knowledge and classifying the world. Colonial and imperial differences are epistemic and ontological. They consist in describing certain people as ontologically and rationally less human. The epistemic difference establishes that certain people are less rational than the norm, and the norm is the concept of rationality of who is making the classification and the ranking. And because some people are rationally deficient, they are ontologically inferior. Colonial and imperial differences are the foundation of modern/colonial racism and the concept of “humanity”: the standard that serve the reference to classification and ranking.