The Coloniality of Power: Notes Toward De-Colonization

Steve Martinot
San Francisco State University

The "coloniality of power" is an expression coined by Anibal Quijano to name the structures of power, control, and hegemony that have emerged during the modernist era, the era of colonialism, which stretches from the conquest of the Americas to the present. The notes that follow are a kind of synthesis of ideas from Quijano, Enrique Dussel, Walter Mignolo, and Lewis Gordon, filtered through myself.

A vast movement of the world's people, in the aftermath of colonialism's demise, and fleeing the impoverishment, derailed development, and debt-servitude it left as its heritage, has accelerated toward the heartland of that colonialism: Europe and the US. This diaspora a logical response to the EuroAmerican despoliation of the third world's resources and public assets. The people of post-colonial regions, divested of their economies, and thus of their ability to live, follow their pillaged wealth into the EuroAmerican economies that plundered them. In the US, they face a virulent anti-immigrant machine that combines a racist populism with arbitrary policing and a militarized border.

Yet, under the aegis of corporate globalization, the immigrant laborer should have no different status than the worker who moves to Chicago from a rust-belt city like Youngstown looking for employment. Both are engaged in the same endeavor. If the immigrant reveals the machinery of coloniality that still surrounds the US economy, a similar coloniality, interior to the US border, is reflected in the Youngstown worker's decision to cross state lines. Yet they stand on opposite sides of an ideological boundary, whose many names include "ethnicity" or "national identity." Guarded by the anti-immigrant machine, this differential boundary gives the "citizen-worker," whose economic stature and well-being has been decimated by "runaway" industry, a renewed though meager sense of superiority as an identity replacement. In taking his place at that boundary, the anti-immigrant citizen-worker's participation in guarding the national economy against immigrants is a direct measure of his/her own colonization in the US, his/her conscription into what Anibal Quijano calls the coloniality of power.

We all live within a multiplicity of colonialities; subjected in both body and mind. It is not only our labor, or our sexualities and genders that mark colonial relations; it is not only the wars, the mass murder and death squads organized by imperialist classes, nor the subcolonies formed by women, African-American communities, or ethnic identities; it is also the hegemonic mind, the white, or masculinist, or heterosexist, or national chauvinist mind that constitutes and is constituted by coloniality.

We face a political situation in which an absence of ethics, a stench of death and corruption, surrounds us. Appearing in all domains of US governance and its institutional relations to people and to nations, this corruption presupposes an unspoken permissibility for itself -- for its wars, for mass murder, and for the torture that has appeared all too familiar to this society. We thus face the question of who we are in this mirror. The power of coloniality, as a structure of control, is that it speaks for us so forcefully that we see no recourse but to represent it, to uphold its existence, to ratify its dispensing with ethics and with the sanctity of human life in everything we say and do as labor and resource. It is not only the insufficiency of class struggles or revolutions that beset us, whose results have fallen into debt-servitude by falling for commodification and coloniality. It is the acceptibility of that corruption to those who should most be in opposition to it that strikes hardest, and gives measure to the success of the coloniality of power.

The coloniality of power constitutes a matrix that operates through control or hegemony over authority,
labor, sexuality, and subjectivity -- that is, the practical domains of political administration, production and exploitation, personal life and reproduction, and world-view and interpretive perspective. The forms these have taken are the nation-state, capitalism, the nuclear family, and eurocentrism. Eurocentrism functions as the ideological valorization of EuroAmerican society as superior, progressive, and universal, though it really represents white supremacy, capitalist profitability, and EuroAmerican self-universalization. To throw off this post-colonial form of colonialism, to decolonize today, means throwing off this entire eurocentric system. To understand what this means we shall have to examine the history of its emergence.

1- Conquest and modernism

In the time prior to the conquest, Europe was a poor, rural peninsula on the western edge of Asia, with little of value to offer the world economy. (Dussel) At the center of the world economy, between India and Baghdad, Europeans found themselves hopelessly outcompeted, or ignored. The only means they were able to imagine to gain access to this world economy was conquest: the crusades of the middle ages, the 15th century slave trade from west Africa, the expulsion of the Moors and Jews from Spain, and the conquest of the Americas in the 16th. The project to enslave the American peoples enters the thinking of Columbus on his first voyage among the islands of the Caribbean.

The Spanish conquest of the Americas provided Europe with a means of entry into the world economy: money. Ironically, the massive influx of gold and silver corrupted and depressed Spain itself. Its vitality fled to the Americas, while the ability to use Europe's new wealth moved north, to the shipping and banking companies of England and Holland. 1700 marks a moment of consolidation of an Atlantic economy: and trans-Atlantic commerce in agricultural goods and metals between the Americas to Europe; the codification of slavery in the English colonies of North America; and English and Dutch control of shipping trade to the east.

In 200 years, the indigenous population of the Caribbean region, and much of Mexico and Peru, had been decimated, and the slave trade that replenished it with Africans had become the most profitable industry in the entire Atlantic economy. The so-called age of enlightenment opened and flourished with the dark groans of dark men and women in the unlit holds of ships, carried to a darker destiny, while pouring untold wealth into the vaults of Europe. It shifted the center of the world economy to the Atlantic. It was not Europe that put America on the map. It was the Americas -- the land of the Americas, the seizure and transformation of that land into European property, the destruction of the societies that had lived on that land, and the seizure of African people to be enslaved on that land -- that put Europe on the map. Modernism wades up onto the shores of Europe drenched in American and African blood, and declares itself the most advanced, the most civilized of societies, a bastion against the barbarism of the rest of the world. The incineration of whole Iraqi families in their cars at US checkpoints in Baghdad during the spring of 2003 is but a distant reflection of Virginia in 1700, or the Spanish administration of Cuba a century earlier.

2- Race

What consolidated the seizure of land, in areas in which indigenous people had no concept of property in land, was race. (Mignolo) When people have lived with the land as ecology and habitat, to separate and alienate them from it as their most intimate means of living, and then bring them back to work on that same land to which they could no longer lay claim, requires a great wrenching of consciousness, a massive indoctrination. One cannot simply impose the name of "owner;" the invention of a discernible distinction, a process of self-superiorization through the inferiorization of others, is necessary. The origin of race is inseparable from land in seizure. Race, slavery, the concept of property in human
beings as wealth itself, are all tied together in the juridical commodification of the land. The transformation of land into property was consolidated socially through the invention of racialization in the colonies.

Racialization occurred in different terms in the Spanish colonies than it did in the English colonies, but the purpose and effect was the same. Its purpose was to create a system of social categorization that differentiated between who could own land and who would be forced to work on it; a distinction in social category between who could define, and who was to be defined. Mere military superiority does not inferiorize; for the most part, it generates resistance. A more inclusive social process is required to consolidate conquest. It involves defining juridical structures, forms of spirituality and religion, and the nature of personhood for others. It is the power to define that divests others of the power to define themselves, to lay claim to juridicality or a spirituality of their own, and eventually results in a concept of racial difference.

This act of divestment, and the social inferiorization attendant upon its accompanying impoverishment, were the indispensable bases for the self-superiorization of those who had seized the land, and defined ownership on it. Coloniality kills those who lead resistance or rebellion, and uses the subsequent leaderlessness to inferiorize those who would have followed. Operation Phoenix (the Vietnam war name for this) begins in the 1530s. It is the source of the myth that Cuba would fall apart if Castro were to be killed.

For the Spanish, racialization emerged as a structure attaching people of different origins to specific economic strata and modes of labor exploitation. At first, the indigenous as such were enslaved. In the Caribbean region, they were quickly decimated by their separation from former means of physical and cultural survival. The starvation imposed on them by their conditions of labor brought them either death for rebellion or death from disease.

When African labor was brought to the Spanish colonies to replenish the deficit, and some Franciscans (particularly Bartolomeo de Las Casas) convinced the king to ban further enslavement of the indigenous, a multi-stratified labor system emerged that became the organizing principle for defining race. Africans were held as slaves, and sold as slaves. Indigenous people were held in encomiendas, then incorporated into a hacienda system, in a form of feudal serfdom. Mestizos, the product of the European seizure of indigenous and African women, filled the artisanal and urban clerical positions of colonial society, and formed an incipient middle class. The criollo, those of colonialist blood, yet born in the colonies, filled the administrative bureaucracies. And the Spanish born, pure in Christian "blood" and ancestry, and granted land ownership by the distant monarchy, constituted the elite, the aristocracy of the colonies. While the indigenous could be considered the first "race," that is, relationally racialized with respect to the Spanish as racializer, the complex economic system of colonial settlement produced a more complex hierarchy, organized according to ancestry, that equated raciality with class. If one was a slave, then one was "black," etc. Because no juridical bans against mixed marriages were imposed, a modicum of class movement between slavery, the serfdom, and the artisanal classes was possible from generation to generation, as the colonial economy developed.

A different mode of racialization occurred in the English colonies. Those colonies were not administered by military conquest, nor by land tenure related to a monarchy. Colonial administration, and the apportionment of land, was done through a corporate structure whose goal was productive profitability rather than resource extraction. The land seized was turned into capitalist enterprise, rather than feudal community. The plantations of Virginia were never as large as the Spanish land-grants, and concentrated on mass-production of agricultural commodities for an international market, rather than self-sufficiency as a land-grant complex of communities. The Colonial Council (rather than a land grantee) served as an on-site board of directors, responsible to a London board; and its function, as in all corporations, was to organize production, guarantee a labor supply, and facilitate marketing of the
product. The English plantations were really the first form of large agro-business, and in their accounting, as businesses, the labor they indentured was accounted for as wealth.

Though at first English bond-labor was used on the plantations, the colony shifted to African bond-labor after the 1680s for a number of reasons. As the colonies grew, it became easier for English labor to escape, and blend in elsewhere, which was not the case for the Africans. English labor, though chattel because held by indenture contract, lost its estate value as the laborer's contractual release date approached. The Africans were given no contracts because they were not English, and thus had no protection against arbitrary extension of their term of servitude. Though originally held for customary terms, African servitude was slowly extended by various means, since it represented an immediate enhancement of plantation wealth. The value of the African bond-laborer was assessed through auction markets that developed for the Africans since, in the absence of a contract, transfer required a market place. The auction price became the on-going determination of the laborer's "value," like stock prices in the stock market. In sum, there was economic pressure to codify African labor as slavery (which occurred in 1682 and 1705), and to render the African person wealth as such.

But this did not yet express a racialization. When the English first arrived, they did not see themselves as white, and the terms they used for themselves, for the Africans and for the indigenous, referred to geographical origin ("Negro" referred to Africa rather than "race," for instance). The concept of racialization did not take hold until the 1690s. The English defined a white racialized identity for themselves by racializing the African labor force as slave, other, and finally as black. Racialization occurred through a transformation of color terms from descriptive to racializing, referring to social category rather than bodily characteristic. In terms of social categorization, race must be understood as essentially relational, a social relationality, and not something inherent in the people so racialized.

The contemporary concept of race derives from the English version. It was in the English colonies that the concept of "whiteness," and a notion of "white supremacy" (even a concept of "white nation" as theorized by Ben Franklin, and other independence luminaries) were developed. Its extension to all EuroAmerican thinking as a "natural" division of the human species (by a variety of European theorists, such as Linneaus, Buffon, Gobineau, etc.) has been with reference to whiteness, and the coloniality of white supremacy, as a mode of social identification, and not simply as a link to forms of labor exploitation. Whites did not simply gain racial supremacy within a field in which a number of races already existed; they invented race as a system in which they were already supreme, a field of definition in which other races already inferior. Though "racism" is alleged to exist between other races than the white, all racialization has occurred with respect to white supremacy itself, as the inventor and generator of the concept of race, and thus all racism makes essential reference to "white racism."

But social categorization occurs within a social framework and boundary. The indigenous peoples of Virginia were excluded from the colony from the beginning because they successfully resisted enslavement. As a result, they were criminalized as savage, denigrated as "heathen," and eventually denied even the subhuman status accorded slaves. Private dealings with them of any kind (without Council license) was banned and punished. But in great part, the indigenous were excluded from the colony in order to maintain the sanctity of commodity production, to keep it from being corrupted by the more communal form of production of those indigenous societies. Indeed, English settlers who escaped to the indigenous were recaptured and often killed.

The English colonies also banned mixed marriages, and eventually all sexual relations, between themselves and the Africans, whereas the Spanish did not. In a long series of ever more severe criminalizations of such intimacy, the colony adjudicated a binary categorization for itself, upon which Europe derived a concept of race whose defining characteristic was a "purity" for whiteness.

When "modernism" straddled the Atlantic economy, and proclaimed itself the dominant civilization in
the world, it did so as white supremacist. That designation, of its own contrivance, has been used to valorize the destruction it has wrought on the world's non-European peoples, so that its destructiveness would not be called criminality. But it was also a call to solidarity for whites, against all those over whom it pretended and enacted supremacy. The first historical act of white supremacy was the American Revolution, fought by colonists whose identity, and hence allegiance, had shifted from "English" to "white" as a result of their invention of a structure of racialization.

In these terms, one thing that has to be understood about the working class of the US is that it has attained its class identity, as a working class, through the eurocentric concept of whiteness and white supremacy. That is, its identity as working class and its identity as white, are mutually conditioning. In the early 19th century, white workers of the northern states obtained a place for themselves in white society by both opposing slavery and then excluding freed black workers from their organizations and guilds, thereby preserving and advancing white solidarity and white consensus. Racism may be a way in which the working class is divided against itself today, but the reason it works so well is that race and whiteness were the bases on which white workers defined themselves as the working class. As Fanon suggests, white workers do not acquiesce to capitalism in submission, but out of a belief in its (and their) superiority. Indeed, the Marxists in the US before the Civil War opposed abolition, claiming it would "divide the working class;" in so saying, they were signifying that even they saw the working class as white. Marx himself considered the slave to be a "factor of production" rather than a productive worker.

For us, today, racism is not only a subjective mechanism by which white supremacy and white racialized identity maintain themselves; it is also an institutional mechanism by which social institutions preserve themselves as white. To simply contest "racism" does not also constitute opposition to white supremacy itself. It is the structure of racialization, which sits at the core of all social and political structures in the modernist world, and is the common foundation for all the domains of power that constitute eurocentric coloniality, that is the enemy. Ultimately, even the class structures of capitalism cannot be understood, let alone transformed, without understanding how they were built through the operations of the structures of racialization.

3- The corporation, the nation

The Atlantic economy was from the beginning a capitalist economy. The plantations of Virginia were mass-production capitalist enterprises. Their labor force was of capitalized bond-labor, that is, labor used for profit and the profitability of enterprise and colony, but at its lowest possible wage (merest subsistence cost). And the bond-laborers themselves were accounted as wealth, part of the value of the real estate. The slave trade, the central and most critical industry in the Atlantic economy, was a hybrid of the Spanish form of seized resources and of profitability on investment (it was more than merely a transportation industry). Though the Spanish colonial economy was based on resource extraction, its role in founding the slave trade, and in providing Europe with money-metals, was at the center of the development of Atlantic capitalism.

It was the corporate model, developed in the English colonies, that gave form to that capitalism, and spread as a structural norm over the rest of the earth. For the Spanish, the profitability of their mines lay in the substance mined, not the capital accumulation of mining operations. And the large haciendas, guaranteed under a different jurisprudence than the capitalist, achieved a certain communal stasis and self-sufficiency in their operations. Instead, it was the northern European corporate model that took hold, and lay the basis for the nation-state.

To understand the meaning of this, one has to understand the different structures of violence inherent in the two modes of colonial domination. The violence of the Spanish was worse physically than it was
culturally. They regarded African labor as throw-away labor, cheaper to replace than to maintain. For the English, who enslaved bond-labor as wealth, their violence was more cultural and social, rather than mortal. Their debasing of the psyche and sociality of African bond-labor was deeper. As a result, a black culture appeared in the US (in response to enslavement) that is separate and distinct from the white European-derived culture of white corporate society; it was culturally necessary for survival, resistance, and as a buffer against white impunity and gratuitous hostility.

In other words, the oppression of black people in the US is of a special kind. On the one hand, black people sit at the core of white racialized identity, indispensible to its self definition; on the other, they must be continually evicted from the white domain in order for whites to feel autonomous in their identity as white, and to continually revive the sanctity of white supremacist identity from its dependency. Hence, there is an extreme level of arbitrariness and irrationality to white racism; it is devoid of political and economic motivation because it is the foundation of all white political and economic motivation. In its historical longevity, the trauma rendered normal in black life in the US is unequaled in the world. It is the extremity and unspeakability of this social condition that Toni Morrison has sought to represent in all her novels, "Beloved" in particular. And it is the difference between white and black cultures that DuBois never ceased attempting to make intelligible. But it is difficult to see because white and black people walk around each other on the streets every day.

Because white supremacy resides at the core of EuroAmerican society and culture, as the foundation for its entire mode of coloniality, there is a dependence on racialization at the core of the idea of a nation-state, which then expresses its inherent violence as war and nationalism. That is, if the US invented itself as a nation because the colonists shifted their social identity from being English to being white, it is the violence of white social institutedness which then appeared in the violence of Europe's nationalisms, as that notion of whiteness extended itself to Europe. It is that same violence that has re-emerged in the many anti-immigrant movements that have been sweeping Europe -- and indeed, imparting to it new forms of racialization. The hatred that has come so naturally to US soldiers against Iraqis, spawned by even the slightest gesture of resistance to the occupation, as well as by the destruction that the invasion itself has wrought, is only a further extension of white supremacist nationalism in the disguise of an American messianism.

Because they are based on white racialized identity, and a structure of racialization, both corporate mode of socio-economic organization and the modern nation-state have to be understood as white. Both are reflections of Europe's colonialism, an extension of how Europe was constituted and given identity by its domination of the Americas, and through which it developed its capitalism. It does not matter the color of the people who fill elected, administrative, or bureaucratic positions. The structure itself is "white" in its operations, in its paranoia, and its demand for social solidarity, which were inherited from colonialist origins. It is white because it is the way in which people are separated from the land of their ancestors, are given wage-labor jobs, by which the commodification of the land is maintained and guaranteed. To paraphrase Fanon, these structures are white because they direct all others to the ways of white people. The form violence takes in the nation-state is order; the form social consensus takes is anti-subversion; and the form paranoia takes is white patriotic chauvinism.

Insofar as the nation-state is eurocentric, and thus white (supremacist), its having been imposed on decolonization movements and independence rituals in former colonies imparts a constraint on them that links them to the EuroAmerican coloniality of power. This imposition has been accompanied by the claim that it is the most rational, the most progressive form of state or political organization. But that is because it represents the eurocentric colonialist source of its self-definition; and it brings with it connections to EuroAmerican capitalism. While it claims to represent, it cannot claim to be necessarily democratic; even military dictatorships claim to represent the nation. The political effect on the third world of having accepted the nation-state as an organizing principle has been the massive debt-
servitude in the third world, a eurocentric subjectivity that has imprisoned indigenous communality in a subject-object ontology of individualism and commodification, and an overlay of objectified sexuality upon indigenous narratives of intimacy.

It is not sufficient (and in some cases not even relevant) to understand the nation-state through a class "analysis" of nationalism as such. Not all nationalism is eurocentric, or linked to the foundation of a nation-state; an anti-colonialist nationalism can go in other directions (cf. Cabral or Nkrumah). To understand the nation-state, apart from its nationalism, one must understand its whiteness, that is, its ties to coloniality, and thus its role in maintaining the realm of eurocentric political authority within that.

It is no accident that, though every Latin American anti-colonialist revolution has promised agrarian reform, only Cuba, which understood the nation-state as already colonialist, wholly implemented such a reform. They didn't do it because they were socialist; they became socialist because they implemented the agrarian reform. The participatory implementation of agrarian reform, though it zigzagged a bit, is what stood between the Cuban Revolution and the adoption of a eurocentric nation-state, because it laid the basis for both urban reform and the pilot projects that invented new forms of governance altogether.

4- Sexuality, motherhood, and the family

In the 17th century, the Virginia Colonial Council passed legislation concerning sexuality and motherhood (anti-miscegenation and matrilineality). Not only did these acts eventually play an important role in creating a structure of racialization (by providing a ground upon which to consider race biological), but they formed part of a structure of thought control.

In the plantation economy of Virginia, the first (of many) anti-miscegenation statute was passed in 1662, which made it illegal for English and Africans to marry. Its passage marks a moment when the colony shifted its plantation labor force from English to African, and was an attempt to divide English from African bond-laborers. It also meant that mixed offspring could not be legitimate, divesting them of rights to inheritance or property. In the same year, matrilineal servitude was legislated. This meant that the offspring of mixed relationships would take the servitude status of the mother (countermanding the central precept of patriarchy). It meant that all women, but African women in particular, were to be carefully regulated in their personal lives. For African women, it meant that any children they had would add to the wealth of the landowner for whom they worked.

These acts marked the creation of profoundly personal social and juridical distinctions (at the level of their emotional being) between the African and English bond-laborers. Before that, they had made common cause in escaping their servitude, as their primary mode of resistance. The colonial enactments separated them into different social categories. And it was through this legislation of sexuality and motherhood that the colony codified English purity.

The purity concept is an indispensible factor for the definition of race. Because human coloration exists on a continuum, there are no natural divisions in its spectrum. Between any two people of differing color, a third can be found whose color would lie between them. And there is no uniformity of color in any human community. The purity of English parentage became the mark of the first division in the color continuum, the basis on which, after 1690, the English defined themselves as "white," through their definition of others as non-white.

Punishment for miscegenation formed an indispensible barrier between defined groups, and matrilineal servitude status gave those groups different social meaning as categories in the white conception of colonial society.

The English (white) role as definers of race thus already contained an inherent pretense to superiority. The power to define is the power to objectify, and thus inferiorize; by defining an otherness for the
Africans as property and wealth, the English defined themselves as superior. In defining others as non-white, they defined themselves as white. But in defining Africans as subhuman slave labor, whites also defined them as a threat, against which white society had to unite in solidarity, for the preservation of which any violence was permissible apriori as defensive violence. Thus, whiteness emerges as a structure of paranoia, social consensus, and violence, each of which generates the others.

White society developed around practices of continual gratuitous violence against black people; that is, violence against black people became the very source of whites's sense of well-being. This cultural paradigm was codified by the Dred Scott decision. It took the form of Jim Crow and debt-servitude after slavery was abolished; and now, in the wake of Jim Crow repeal, it has the form of police profiling, a prison-industrial complex, and felonized disenfranchisement. In Iraq, it is those who killed four mercenaries who were to be brought to "justice" in Fallujah, through absolute and arbitrary violence, for which 600 civilians were killed, and not the US soldiers whose very presence in Iraq is a crime against humanity.

In short, violence is the outcome of the form of social purity that anti-miscegenation establishes, once it becomes a cultural norm. The whites who were willing to work with black people after the Civil War, in Reconstruction governments, or later, were killed by the white supremacist paramilitary gangs (like the KKK), because they were seen as breaking solidarity with whiteness, thus undermining its indispensible purity. The sin was betrayal, not racial mixing; but the charge was racial mixing, the blurring of social categorizations, the most intimate disruption of how white people thought of themselves.

As a profoundly insidious outcome to the legislation of sexuality, one can say it conditions systematic thought control. The legislation of sexuality provides a definition of permissible intimate relations. But if sexual prohibitions determine who can be intimate with whom, then they also determine who can befriend, or be friends with whom. Sexual prohibitions constitute the framework determining who one can associate with, which people can speak with each other, or construct dialogues and common social perspectives. In this sense, to determine who a person's friends can be is tantamount to a form of thought control. It delimits the range of alternate perspectives one is allowed, as well as which thought systems one can enter in one's interpretation of the world.

The coloniality of power, in all its forms of nation-state political structures, of capitalist control of labor, and of the social atomization represented by the control of sexuality and the nuclear family, depends on its structures of racialization first and foremost. And intimately interwoven into the racialization and open violence that underlies the matrix of control, that maintain its dimension of authority and subjectivity, are the bigotries of racism, heterosexism, eurcentric nationalism, and a criminalization of poverty. It is the system of these bigotries that mark the practice, in its many dimensions, of the hegemonic mind.

5- The hegemonic mind

The eurocentric concept of the nation-state has long been a trap for those seeking liberation and a participatory, democratic form of self-governance, whether inside EuroAmerica or in the post-colonial world. It was nationalism that sidetracked socialist movements of the 19th and 20th centuries. It was the concept of the nation-state that led national liberation revolutions to build independence out of the terms of former dependence (rather than their own sense of autonomy), replacing subservience with debt-servitude to the IMF.

The "white" EuroAmerican nation-state, whether democratic or not, in substituting representation for participation, preserves land as commodified property, and renders the citizen an object for which the system of representation is the political subject. The nation-state, as the expression of white supremacy,
and a political form of subject-object (eurocentric) ontology that preserves the subject-object relation between state and citizen as well as between economic or social strata, is an indispensable buttress to the maintenance of other forms of chauvinism or bigotry, such as racism, sexism, homophobia, and intellectual sectarianism. Nationalism takes its place as the archetype for other systems of derogation and violence. That is, the hegemonic mind obtains (and constructs for itself) its most generalized institutionality in the nation-state, as a matrix and a source of permissibility.

If the nation-state is the basis on which individual actions can express the institutional subjugation of others, it is the hegemonic mind that the institutional subjugations call upon for expression, as individual control or violence. It is the basis on which racism maintains its familiarity and effect on both individual and institutional levels, on which the prohibition of alternate sexualities invokes violence, and on which ethnic conflict can always be instigated. Mob violence, police riots, redlining, housing and employment discrimination, domestic violence, violence against women, anti-immigrant vigilantism, etc. -- all of which have murder as one of their permissible ends (for the coloniality of power) -- occur as reflections of eurocentric nationalism. The nation-state is the arena on which all bigotries step forth.

And this is important. The hegemonic mind is the way in which institutional subjugation or oppression expresses itself at the social, street, individual level. That is, the hegemonic mind is the way in which hegemonic persons (white, male, heterosexual, etc.) are colonized to maintain and effect the hierarchies and their inferiorizations. In exchange, they colonize the oppressed through their hegemonic operations, relying on the institutional matrix from which they get the scripts they enact. That is, the hegemonic mind is both colonizing and colonized, yet sees neither of these to the extent s/he thinks the hegemony s/he lives out as "natural," or obedient to a cultural universal. It is a result of being both colonizer and colonized that bigots become and remain angry and violent, unable to be themselves as colonized, watched to assure they enact the script properly, and then blame those they oppress.

Bigotry is a collocation in one act of judgment of speaking for others, generalizing them, gratuitously denigrating or assaulting them in so doing, being hypocritical in the act, and acting in bad faith. This is its structure. It doesn't matter whether it be anti-semitism, anti-black racism, homophobia, misogyny, redbaiting, or intra-movement polemic. It is always assaultive in its denigrations, dependent in its need for a threat, and gratuitously contemptuous toward its target. It is important to recognize this structure, because the political thinking of a person who finds this structure permissible, however progressive it may pretend to be, is suspect to the extent it contains a bigotted drive as its motivation.

Two things have held back all movements that have sought social justice as workers, as women, as racialized communities, as defense of the planet against corporate despoliation: a faith in the nation-state as a valid matrix for their ends, and the operation of the hegemonic mind within their own ranks.

Examples of the hegemonic mind are legion in the many bigotries that beset us. But unfortunately elsewhere as well. The black power movement took few steps against its own masculinism; feminism has tended to be dominated by white middle class women, and has tripped continually at relating to third world feminism; queer identity movements have not transcended their own commodification; and social justice movements have rarely transcended their own nationalism (for instance, the anti-immigrant stance of many radical ecologists). While the anti-corporate movements, and the World Social Forum, have taken some steps toward putting all these struggles together, they have not yet conceptualized an alternate socius in which global contestation of the hegemonic mind can be given political reality.

One thing the hegemonic mind can do to dismantle or decolonize the structure of its hegemonism, and thus to free itself from its own colonization, from the scripts institutional oppression gives it to enact, is to see itself through the eyes of the other. This would be an inversion of the DuBoisian notion of double
consciousness. Double consciousness, according to DuBois, is the consciousness of the racialized, of having to see oneself always through the eyes of another, in the dominance and derogation of a hegemonic group. For decolonization, it is the hegemonic mind that must see itself through the eyes of those who see it as hegemonic, to see what it looks like to them, and to see what it means to them -- and thereby to confront dominance or hegemony in one's own person.

The coloniality of power expresses itself most basically as the hegemonic mind; this is the form of eurocentric thought control. As coloniality is a unified system of control, so the three levels of colonialism -- EuroAmerican domination of all others, the operation of subcolonal subjugations within the EuroAmerican framework (women, racialized communities, alternate sexualities, etc.), and the hegemonic mind -- must be fought all together.

This implies the necessity of producing modes of alternate political culture, so that one is not contesting these levels of control from within the very structures on which they depend. For instance, most political leadership is assumed through the deployment of some form of hegemonics: an attitude, a knowledge, a skill that is given value or valorized in the political culture. In deploying these hegemonically, political leadership reproduces the eurocentric nature of representation.

An alternate political culture is not simply something outside the system; it is first and foremost a domain from which a language and a dialogic can reveal eurocentrism in all its modes of thought control; yet not as polemic, which presumes a eurocentric subject-object relation to those it polemicizes. As a network, an alternate political culture would be a framework for political autonomy that speaks in terms that the eurocentric subject-object paradigm cannot hear. It needs to be a cultural framework in order to resist all efforts to reduce it to a subject-object paradigm again, and to commodify it. It has to be political in order to critically address the structures and ideological frameworks of the coloniality of power in opposition. And it has to be alternate to contest eurocentrism as the enemy without falling into the language of eurocentrism in doing so.