



Colonization, Decolonization and Neocolonialism from the Perspective of Justice and the Common Good

African and American Intercontinental Meeting of Judges for Social Rights and the Franciscan Doctrine



The colonization of territories ignited the first wave of globalization. European sea captains began regular transoceanic travel in the 15th and 16th Centuries for the first time systematically connecting lands and peoples that had been unconnected.[1] The European powers advanced on new lands, subdued them – militarily and politically but also culturally – and began a progressive and uninterrupted process of spoliation. Then, in the 19th and 20th centuries, colonization reached new heights with different characteristics and new protagonists, but with the constant objective of extracting wealth from lands and peoples. The nexus of colonial domination and extraction linked, in powerful and enduring ways, European powers to native lands in the Americas, Africa and Asia. The echoes of colonialism live in many of the defining features of economy and society in the former colonized lands.

The peoples subjected in the processes of colonial domination endured cultural, social, political and economic mutations, mostly as a consequence of acts of domination, violence, genocide, and demographic collapse.[2] Forced labor, slavery, territorial displacement and the appropriation of natural resources were commonplace. The commodification of land and labor gave birth to new forms of capitalism based on the violent extraction of profit from humankind and nature.

Colonization also meant the replacement of the original social models by exogenous ones, which legitimized domination under various guises and created new axiological paradigms in accordance

with their own needs. Supposed racial superiority, civilization and religion were some of the arguments used to consolidate the advance of colonial practices. Psycho-social violence and pseudo-scientific models of anthropological evolution racialized entire human populations as inferior and in need of paternalistic guidance.[3]

Native institutions were annihilated and along with them all those ancestral ways of thinking and traditions that preserved a particular balance between human settlements and their natural surroundings. Psychological denigration and debasement of native *mentalités* became integral tools of domination.

The ideas of justice and the common good that existed in those territories prior to the conquest were suppressed and replaced by the “enlightened” ideas of the central powers. To this end, each and every one of the socialization channels was co-opted. Establishment culture and education disparaged pre-existing forms of thought and, under the guise of their barbarism, banished them from the new prevailing thought.

The decolonization processes that began with the independence movements of the 19th century and culminated with the last emancipatory events of the mid-20th century, did not lead to a reversal of domination. Although the format changed and the former colonies acquired a new nominal status, in reality spoliation, political subjugation and cultural colonization are still very much alive today.

Neocolonialism, which is now twinned with neoliberalism, is thorough and implacable when it comes to consolidating results for global centrality. Today, formerly colonized peripheral countries have the international political status of free regions, but, in most cases, they are subjected to new economic and cultural paradigms of domination. The wealth of the colonizers is a necessary cause and consequence of the poverty of the colonized.

In the 21st Century, the human face of neocolonialism are massive inequalities, war and terror and the mass catastrophic migrations from the formerly colonialized territories into the wealthier regions in Europe and North America. As an immigrant from the former colonies in the United Kingdom put it, “we are here, because you were there.”[4]

Justice and the common good were and are traversed by these processes of colonization, decolonization and neocolonialism. Viewing the institutions of Africa and America through that historical prism and understanding the current dynamics of domination and subjugation, allows us to shed some light on the contemporary tragedies of hunger, war, catastrophic migrations, displacement and marginalization referenced by Pope Francis in his famous encyclical *Laudato Si'*.

Recently, the Holy Father confirmed his specific concern on the subject, stating that “Many

countries of the American continent and an important group of countries of the African continent share a common historical past of spoliation, domination, and control and they have also been brutally subjected to the dictates of the global economy. Both continents have high rates of poverty and unemployment: access to land, shelter and work are pending issues for most of the populations of those nations. It is very important that these hardships find you united in the need for a shared characterization of the current state and judicial role, and in the analysis of external influences in the – not always correct – choice of political and social models”.*

This Workshop will examine the neocolonial *problématique* from a Social Rights and Franciscan Doctrine. Our work shall focus on the neocolonial sequelae on current manifestations of global inequality, unchecked climate change and unsustainable development, mass migrations, and, above all the role, of the institutions of society and the justice system in addressing and reversing said developments. The focus of this workshop be on the African and American contexts.

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*Words of the Holy Father Francis on the occasion of the Summit of African Judges in the Vatican (13 December 2019)

[1] Marcelo M. Suárez-Orozco and Desirée Qin. *Globalization: Culture and education in the new millennium*. Univ of California Press, 2004.

[2] Bacci, Massimo Livi. *Conquest: The destruction of the American Indios*. Polity, 2008.

[3] Suárez-Orozco, Marcelo M., George Spindler, and Louise S. Spindler, eds. *The making of psychological anthropology II*. Harcourt College Pub, 1994.

[4] Patel, Ian. *We're Here Because You Were There: Immigration and the End of Empire*. Verso Books, 2021.