



A decolonial dialogue with Marxism

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DECOLONIAL INTERNATIONAL NETWORK

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What is decolonial theory?

- ❑ Decolonial theory is a theoretical framework that analyzes the current world civilization that has developed since the foundation of European colonialism in 1492. A civilization is a collection of societies with a specific cultural base: knowledge, ethics and views on how to organize and structure a society.
- ❑ It argues that this current world civilization is based on the European Enlightenment. It has produce the dominant ideas and policies on how to organize a world society in its economic, social, cultural and political dimension.
- ❑ Decolonial theory is a fundamental critique of the European Enlightenment. It shows the Eurocentric bias in Western knowledge production.

The weaknesses of decolonial theory

- ❑ It is scattered (not comprehensive): contributions on a few disciplines (philosophy, sociology), but not on economic theory, political theory or world history.
- ❑ It is not coherent, because it is scattered. There is some Marxism in it, some Islamic philosophy, some indigenous cosmology etc.
- ❑ It is not integral: there is not a base from which a theoretical framework can be developed. The base of the theoretical framework of Liberalism is the individual, of Marxism is class analysis.

Where do we stand with decolonial theory

- ❑ It took Liberalism and Marxism 200-300 years to develop.
- ❑ Decolonial theory is very young, only a very decades. There is still a lot of work to de done.
- ❑ There is a world wide movement on decolonizing the world.
 - ❑ In the Global North the policy it is about diversity and inclusion, which is about representation of people of color in Western academia and activism, and the production of new knowledge.
 - ❑ In the Global South the focus it is about creating a new world civilization.
- ❑ Decolonizing The Mind (DTM) is a specific school in decolonial theory. It takes up the challenge to develop a comprehensive, coherent and integral framework for decolonial theory and practice. The basis is the concept of mental slavery and the need to decolonize the minds. It has a specific concept of epistemology (of how knowledge was colonized and how to decolonize knowledge). It has a theoretical view of world history, a theory of racism, an economic theory, social theory, political theory, cultural theory and mathematics and the hard sciences

The DTM framework in the book

- ❑ It takes up the challenge to develop a comprehensive, coherent and integral framework for decolonial theory and practice.
- ❑ The basis is the concept of mental slavery and the need to decolonize the minds.
- ❑ It has a specific concept of epistemology (of how knowledge was colonized and how to decolonize knowledge). It has a theoretical view of world history and a theory of how racism has been embedded in the colonial world civilization. It has an economic theory, a social theory, a political theory, a cultural theory and decolonial approach of mathematics and the hard sciences.
- ❑ It articulates an imagination of a new world civilization. We are now in the final stage of the decline of the West and the rise of the Rest. Basically we are witnessing and participating in the transition towards a new world civilization.

The DTM methodology

- ❑ A critique of the Western colonization of the mind and thus Eurocentric knowledge production. It is a critique of the European Enlightenment and its two major schools of thought: Liberalism and Marxism.
- ❑ The development of an alternative comprehensive, coherent and integral knowledge production using what is already in other civilizations and using creativity and imagination.
- ❑ The translation of this new knowledge into viable policies to build a new pluriversal world civilization. Any decolonial theory that is unable to tell you what its practical implications are, has hardly any value.

Decolonizing The Mind (DTM)

- ❑ It is founded on the concept of mental slavery which was there in the black liberation movement led by Marcus Garvey (1887-1940).
- ❑ It incorporates many contributions from different civilizations about how to build a just society that enables people to live in peace, welfare and freedom and combines it with imagination and creativity.

A DTM view of Liberalism and Marxism

- ❑ Both are rooted in the Eurocentric European Enlightenment.
- ❑ Liberalism the ruling ideology of imperialist powers.
- ❑ Marxism is an ideology of an important segment of anti-imperialist force in social movements.
- ❑ DTM strives for a new pluriversal world civilization that goes beyond the European Enlightenment.
- ❑ The need for anti-imperialist unity is the basis for the dialogue between Marxism and Decolonial Theory.

The nature of our conversation

- ❑ Based on African Ubuntu philosophy: in being honest, I show my respect for you.
- ❑ We explore our differences and disagreements in a cordial atmosphere. It is not a battle of ideas. It is a dialog between friends who want to build a new and just world.
- ❑ We acknowledge the common wish to engage in philosophies of liberation.

A decolonial view of Marxism

1. Philosophy
2. Social theory
3. Cultural theory
4. Economic theory
5. Political theory
6. World history

1. Philosophy: is Marxism science or ethics?

- ❑ Engels on scientific socialism: *These two great discoveries, the materialistic conception of history and the revelation of the secret of capitalistic production through surplus-value, we owe to Marx. With these discoveries, Socialism became a science.*
- ❑ In Eurocentrism ethics is formally removed from science (positivism); science is about true or false and ethics about right or wrong. Eurocentrism (including Marxism) has two sources of knowledge: observation and reasoning. But in reality ethics is shoved under the rug in the European Enlightenment. It is hidden. That is a key characteristics of Eurocentrism.
- ❑ DTM
 - ❑ Ethics are embedded in sciences. Humans produce knowledge. Their ethics influence the way they produce knowledge. Science and ethics are intertwined.
 - ❑ There are more than two sources of knowledge. Apart from observation and reasoning, there is common sense, innate knowledge, social interaction, creativity and imagination.

2. Social theory: the concept of class

- ❑ Class is the basis of society. Communist Manifesto: *“The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles.”*
- ❑ The Marxist definition of class is not determined by income or social status. A class is defined in terms of the relationship between people and the means of production. In capitalism the bourgeoisie is the class that owns the means of production and thus controls the labor power of the class of workers that have only their labor to sell in order to survive. Individuals are members of a class.
- ❑ Class is based on the labor theory of value and the concept of social justice that is the core of this theory (see later).
- ❑ Race and ethnicity are categorizes in the concept of a nation. Stalin’s definition: *“A historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture.”*

A DTM critique of Marxist social theory

- ❑ The definition of class based on the relationship of means of production gives us a limited understanding of social differentiation, that has more complex elements such as income or lifestyle.
- ❑ Caste and race has been crucial markers of organizing some societies, that Marxism can not understand.
- ❑ Marxism has no understanding of racism as a foundation of Western civilization: theological, biological and cultural racism.
- ❑ There are other concepts of social justice that are not based on the Marxist labor theory of value and accept social differentiation that is not contradictory to social justice. And thus a society can be based on the concept of harmony rather than class struggle: national liberation, concept of civilization)

3. Cultural theory: the European Enlightenment

- ❑ Marx: *“Having once got rid of the standing army and the police — the physical force elements of the old government — the Commune was anxious to break the spiritual force of repression, the ‘parson-power’, by the disestablishment and disendowment of all churches as proprietary bodies. The priests were sent back to the recesses of private life, there to feed upon the alms of the faithful in imitation of their predecessors, the apostles. The whole of the educational institutions were opened to the people gratuitously, and at the same time cleared of all interference of church and state. Thus, not only was education made accessible to all, but science itself freed from the fetters which class prejudice and governmental force had imposed upon it.”*
- ❑ The state is secular.
- ❑ The culture is based on science from the Enlightenment
- ❑ Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) on cultural hegemony: social institutions such as schools, churches, courts, and the media are instrumental in achieving cultural hegemony by the ruling class.

A DTM critique of Marxist cultural theory

- ❑ The class concept has no relationship with identity formation, because of its economic approach. Identity formation is about how individuals are related to communities and civilizations. Identity formation is a crucial aspect in understanding culture.
- ❑ A key aspect of identity formation is how ethics are a determining factor in the formation of identity: what makes who I am, what I am, what I found important to pursue and cherish, how do I relate to community, society, civilization and nature.
- ❑ The source of ethics is not science, but spirituality. Secularism is not a universal necessity.
- ❑ There are thinkers outside Marxism who have more elaborate and sophisticated understanding of cultural hegemony than Gramsci like Marcus Garvey with concepts of mental slavery and the colonization of the mind.

4. Economic theory: the labor theory of value

- ❑ The value of a commodity is measured by the average number of labor hours required to produce that commodity.
- ❑ Surplus value is the value that has been created in the production of a commodity minus the value that the workers get to reproduce or sustain herself.
- ❑ In class societies the ruling class appropriates the surplus value depending on the mode of production. Classes are based on the specific method of appropriation
- ❑ In the capitalist mode of production the capitalist own the commodities produced by the worker and sells them through the market. He pays the worker a wage, and appropriates the surplus value in the form of profit. That is the essence of the exploitation of the working class and the basis for the concept of social justice.

The economic implication of the labor theory of value: central planning

- ❑ All means of production are in the hands of the state. There is no appropriation of surplus value anymore. Social justice is achieved.
- ❑ The production, distribution and finances of goods and services are organized by the state on the basis of a central plan, not by markets.
- ❑ Prices and wages are set by the state.
- ❑ Innovation is organized by the state

Marx on a socialist economy: *“united co-operative societies ... to regulate national production upon common plan, thus taking it under their own control, and putting an end to the constant anarchy and periodical convulsions which are the fatality of capitalist production.”*

A DTM critique of Marxist economic theory

- ❑ The labor theory of value is not a scientific theory. It is an axiom: a proposition that must be accepted without empirical proof. It is a declaration of ethics, not a scientific discovery.
- ❑ The failure of the socialist planned economy and the introduction of market socialism in China testify to the limits of a planned economy.
- ❑ There are other concepts of social justice that are not based on the Marxist labor theory of value (Islamic economic theory , Buddhist economic theory). Why should we turn the Marxist concept of social justice into a universal concept of social justice.

Muhammad Baqir as-Sadr (1935-1980)

The general edifice of Islamic economy comprises of three main elements according to which its doctrinal content is defined and whereby it is distinguished from all other economic doctrines in their broad lines. These elements are as follows:

- 1. The principle of double ownership.*
- 2. The principle of economic freedom in a limited sphere.*
- 3. The principle of social justice.*

Double ownership

As for the Islamic Society, the basic attribute of each of these two societies [SH: capitalism and socialism] is inapplicable thereto. Because the religion of Islam does not agree with Capitalism in the belief that private ownership is the fundamental principle nor does it see eye to eye with Socialism in regarding the common (public) ownership as the general principle but it establishes different forms of ownership at one time, thereby laying down the principle of double ownership (of different forms) instead of only one form... it believes in private ownership, general (public) ownership and 'State ownership' and provides for each of these forms of ownership a particular field to work in. It does not regard anything thereof as an exception or a temporary treatment necessitated by circumstances.

Economic freedom in a limited sphere

Limited freedom is allowed to the individuals in the economic field, which is restricted by moral and spiritual values in which Islam believes. Thus it allows the individuals to enjoy their freedoms remaining within the sphere of the values and ideals which refine and allow freedom and thereby make it a means of welfare and good for the entire humanity.

Social justice

The Islamic form of social justice comprise two general principles, each having its own lines and details. The first one is that of general reciprocal responsibility and the other one is that of social balance. It is through reciprocal responsibility and the balance, with their Islamic sense, that just social values are materialised and it is therewith that Islamic ideals of social justice come into existence.

- ❑ Reciprocal responsibility: help each other.
- ❑ Social balance: avoid doing too much or too little of something

The experience of China

The reform of Deng Xiaoping was a major reform in Marxism. The principles:

- ❑ *"Socialism provides more favourable conditions for expanding the productive forces than capitalism does."*
- ❑ *"Only if we emancipate our minds, seek truth from facts, proceed from reality in everything and integrate theory with practice, can we carry out our socialist modernization programme smoothly, and only then can our Party further develop Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought. In this sense, the debate about the criterion for testing truth is really a debate about ideological line, about politics, about the future and the destiny of our Party and nation."*

Deng Xiaoping

Why do some people always insist that the market is capitalist and only planning is socialist? Actually they are both means of developing the productive forces. So long as they serve that purpose, we should make use of them. If they serve socialism they are socialist; if they serve capitalism they are capitalist. It is not correct to say that planning is only socialist, because there is a planning department in Japan and there is also planning in the United States. At one time we copied the Soviet model of economic development and had a planned economy. Later we said that in a socialist economy planning was primary. We should not say that any longer.

There is no fundamental contradiction between socialism and a market economy. The problem is how to develop the productive forces more effectively. We used to have a planned economy, but our experience over the years has proved that having a totally planned economy hampers the development of the productive forces to a certain extent. If we combine a planned economy with a market economy, we shall be in a better position to liberate the productive forces and speed up economic growth.

5. Political theory: the state

- ❑ Communist Manifesto: *“The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles.”*
- ❑ The state (government, political parties, parliament, judiciary, police, intelligence services, army) serves the interest of the bourgeoisie. The judiciary and parliament are controlled by the capitalist class. There is no independent judiciary in a class society. There is class justice.

Political theory: reform or revolution

- ❑ Lenin: *“Reformism is bourgeois deception of the workers, who, despite individual improvements, will always remain wage-slaves, as long as there is the domination of capital.”*
- ❑ Political strategy:
 - ❑ Organize in a vanguard party of dedicated revolutionaries.
 - ❑ Prepare for a revolutionary situation that always will occur due to periodic capitalist economic crises.
 - ❑ Take the lead in overthrowing the old state apparatus by military means and install an revolutionary government that starts building a socialist society.

A DTM critique of Marxist political theory

- ❑ Reform and revolution are not necessarily mutually exclusive and contradictory trajectories. Revolutionary reforms are possible: Venezuela, Bolivia. They based on other concepts of social justice even if the use “socialism” as a vision for the future.
- ❑ Reform or revolution is based on class analysis. If you don't act from class analysis, then there other legitimate goals for struggle: a new world civilization.
- ❑ The means are not limited to one particular strategy: vanguard party that organizes a revolution. The goals of social justice can be reached with many means depending on the specific conditions of a country: history, political experience, culture etc. There is no general rule. What works for China does not have to work for Britain.

6. World history: the Eurocentric notion of the end of history

- ❑ Liberalism: capitalism is the end of history
 - ❑ George Hegel (1770-1831) Europe is the pinnacle of human history, the end of history in 1837: *"the last stage in History, our world, our own time."*
 - ❑ Fukuyama, 152 years later, on the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989: *"What we may be witnessing is not just the end of the Cold War, or the passing of a particular period of post-war history, but the end of history as such."*
- ❑ Marxism: Communism is the end of history. Marx: *"In a higher phase of communist society [the rule holds] from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs!"*

A DTM critique of Marxist theory of world history

- ❑ World history is not a unilinear development from simple to complex, from barbarism to civilization, from communal societies to technologically advanced capitalist or communist societies.
- ❑ A technologically advances society can be barbaric (Nazism, colonialism) and a communal society can be civilized in terms of ethics.
- ❑ The idea that we can know how the world would look link in 10.000 years is absurd. The notion of the end of history (be it liberalism or communism) is not science. It is wishful thinking and a lack of imagination.
- ❑ We don't strive for on uniform world community. We strive to build a pluriversal world civilization, where people with different ethics and world views can live together and dialog, not war, is the means to converse

The test of Marxist theory: the significance of the NATO war in Ukraine

- ❑ Is this war a war between imperialist powers?
- ❑ How does class analysis apply to this war?
- ❑ What lies ahead?

A DTM view of the war

- ❑ This is a war of a dying world civilization (colonialism) against a rising new pluriversal world civilization.
- ❑ It is not only about a multipolar world (about international political power), but also about an new pluriversal world civilization based a a new pluriversal knowledge production.
- ❑ Marxism and DTM are united in the struggle against Western imperialism.

How to move forward with Marxism and DTM?

- ❑ This the start of a dialog, not the end.
- ❑ We should extend the dialog to other theoretical frameworks: Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Chinese philosophy, Eurasianism, Indigenous philosophies.
- ❑ It is not only about the exchange of ideas, but also about practical politics.