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What is decolonial theory?

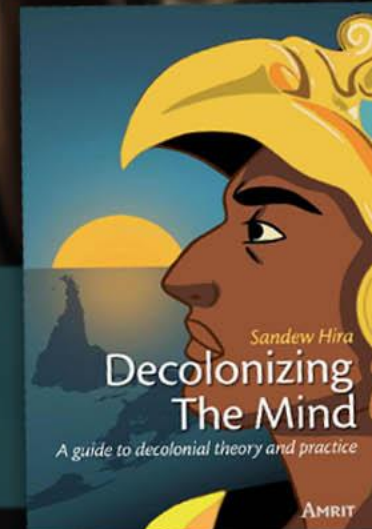
The background, nature, strength and weaknesses of decolonial theory and practice



The current narratives about civilization: Latin Abya Yala



Decolonizing The Mind,
the final frontier of colonialism
with Sandew Hira



#023

1-1-2024

2024: a decisive year in world history

- ❑ Ukraine war in end phase
- ❑ Palestine in decisive phase
- ❑ China, North Korea and USA possible military conflict

Palestine

- ❑ 22,000 Palestinian killed, 57.000 wounded.
- ❑ Houti naval blockade
- ❑ 230,000 Settlers Evacuated from Northern 'Israel' for First Time since 1948
- ❑ No cease fire agreement
- ❑ Netanyahu's conditions for peace – a matter of life or death:
 1. the complete destruction of Hamas
 2. the demilitarization of the Gaza Strip
 3. the deradicalization of the Palestinian population in Gaza

Niger: the fall of French colonialism in Africa

- ❑ July 26: coup d'état in Niger
- ❑ July 30: Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) issued an ultimatum on 30 July; threat of military invasion
- ❑ Dec. 5: Niger revokes key security agreements with EU and turns to Russia for defense partnership
- ❑ Dec. 22: France completely withdraws its military from Niger and formally closes its embassy.

Marxism in Latin Abya Yala

- ❑ Big influence of the Cuban Revolution on liberation movements
- ❑ Decolonial theory is strong in Latin Abya Yala
- ❑ Special series on Marxism

Three great civilizations in Abya Yala

- ❑ Aztec: Central Abya Yala (Mexico)
- ❑ Maya: Central Abya Yala (Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, Honduras and El Salvador)
- ❑ Inca: Peru, Ecuador, Bolivia

The brutal genocide by the Spaniards

- Estimate population 1492: 75-145 million
- D. Stannards describes the Abya Yala Holocaust: *“Within no more than a handful of generations following their first encounters with Europeans, the vast majority of the Western Hemisphere’s native peoples had been exterminated. The pace and magnitude of their obliteration varied from place to place and from time to time, but for years now historical demographers have been uncovering, in region upon region, post- Columbian depopulation rates of between 90 and 98 percent with such regularity that an overall decline of 95 percent has become a working rule of thumb. What this means is that, on average, for every twenty natives alive at the moment of European contact - when the lands of the Americas teemed with numerous tens of millions of people - only one stood in their place when the bloodbath was over.”*

The results

- ❑ The genocide literally eradicated the original population in many places.
- ❑ In a few countries the indigenous people are still a sizeable part of the population: Peru (45%), Bolivia (44%), Guatemala (41%), Mexico (28%) and to a lesser extent Belize (17%), Ecuador (14%) and Panama (12%).

The story of Cuauhtemoc “One who has descended like an eagle”

August 12th 1521 Aztec ruler of Tenochtitlan (Mexico City) gave a speech on the occasion of last battle in a struggle to prevent the establishment of European colonial rule in Mexico.

The day after his speech he was captured by Hernán Cortés, the Spanish barbarian who led the invasion of Aztec land. He was held captive for three and a half years before being executed upon the orders of Cortés. Cuauhtémoc was tortured by bathing his hands and feet in cooking oil. The next day he was hanged.

The speech - 1

Our Sun is now hidden from view. The face of our Sun has disappeared, and has left us in complete darkness. But we know it will return again, that it will rise again, and it will begin to illuminate us anew.

But while our Sun is away, and remains in the residence of silence, we must swiftly join together and embrace. And in the very centre of our being, we must hide all that our hearts love, and hide all we know is a great treasure.

The speech - 2

We will destroy our creative centres, our schools, our ball courts, our youth centers, our places of song and diversion. Let happen until only our desolate streets remain, and we will only find comfort within our homes.

This will be until that time when our new Sun rises.

Dearest fathers and mothers, you must never forget to show young people the way, to teach your children. Make your children understand that while they live it is evidence of how good to us our dearest mother earth Anahuac has been.

The speech - 3

We have the shelter and protection of our destiny, expressed through great respect and positive behavior, and confirmed by those that have come before us. We keep them in mind because our parents enthusiastically cultivated this within our spirit. Then it will be the time for our children to assume their responsibilities.

Do not forget to keep your children informed, remind them of how wonderful it will be, how we will rise again, and understand the reach of our power.

And at that time we our mother earth Anahuac will realize her great destiny.

Analysis of the speech – historical accuracy

The historical origin of the speech is disputed. The speech is said to be created by a group called Movimiento de la Mexicanidad in the 20th century. It took Cuauhtémoc as the icon to create awareness of colonization in Mexico. It brought together the elements of indigenous knowledge that contain the essential concepts in the speech. That matters.

Darkness versus Enlightenment

Cuauhtémoc talks about an era of darkness that the barbaric invasion had brought for his people: “The face of our Sun has disappeared, and has left us in complete darkness.” This is in sharp contrast to the view of the colonizer who would present the era of colonialism as the era of progress that was codified in the 17th century in terms like Enlightenment and modernity. What the colonizer regarded as Enlightenment was in the experience of the colonized an era of darkness filled with genocide, theft, murder, rape, oppression and exploitation. What in academic decolonial theory became known as the other side of modernity was already articulated in this speech five hundred years ago.

Culture and knowledge should thrive outside the world of the colonizer

He calls upon his people to “hide all that our hearts love, and hide all we know is a great treasure”. He continues: “We will destroy our creative centres, our schools, our ball courts, our youth centres, our places of song and diversion. Let happen until only our desolate streets remain, and we will only find comfort within our homes.” The occupier is denied the opportunity of taking over their centres of knowledge. But the culture and knowledge should thrive outside the world of the colonizer: “Dearest fathers and mothers, you must never forget to show young people the way, to teach your children.” In decolonial theory we revisit the knowledge of non-Western civilizations. Colonialism has tried to erase that knowledge, but they never fully succeeded in doing so.

The sun will rise again

Cuauhtémoc had a vision of the resurgence of a new world when he talks about the rise of “our new Sun”. The concept of a new world civilization – our new Sun - lies at the core of my interpretation of decolonial theory. In this book we argue with facts, theory and analysis that colonialism was not the zenith but the nadir of human civilization. In order to rise again from the bottom mankind needs to take a critical look on how knowledge production (seeking the ‘truth’) was transformed in ideology (producing ‘lies’) and has the daunting task of creating new foundations of scientific knowledge. That is the challenge for decolonial theory for the coming centuries.

The Maya narrative - 1

In Mexico the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional, EZLN) made the link between socialism and Abya Yala civilization. Its spokesman, subcomandante Marcos, explains the confrontation between Marxism- Leninism and the ancient Maya philosophy in the community of the southern state of Chiapas in Mexico: *“In this exchange between two different forms of decision making, the most orthodox proposals of Marxism or Leninism, theoretical concepts or historical references - for example, that the vanguard of the revolution is the proletariat, that the taking of state power and the installation of the dictatorship of the proletariat is the aim of the revolution - were confronted by an ideological tradition that is, how can I say this, somewhat magical.”*

The Maya narrative - 2

“It is magical in one sense, but very real in another. What I mean by this is that it is an ideological tradition born of war - in this case, the war of the Conquest that began, well, not exactly five hundred years ago, and that continues through different historical periods. It continues ... it continues, and it grows. If we had been orthodox leftists, we would never have worked with native peoples. Now, today, I believe there are many theories in crisis. Who would have thought that it would be the native peoples who would provoke all of this? Not even in the Leninist conception of the weakest link was it thought that it might be the native people, right?”

The Maya narrative - 3

“I told you that there was a learning process at the beginning of our work here, albeit a forced one. It’s not like we said, Well, we are going to learn and see what happens. No! We were close-minded, like any other orthodox leftist, like any other theoretician who believes that he knows the truth.. Ultimately the theoretical confronted the practical, and something happened - the result was the EZLN. Therefore, our combatants are right when they say, We are not Marxist- Leninists, we are Zapatistas. They are referring to this synthesis, this coming together, this compatibility that incorporates - I’m going to be very schematic - the historical traditions of struggle and resistance of native people and the necessity of a national revolution.”

The Inca legacy - 1

In Bolivia in 2005 Evo Morales was chosen in a general election as the first native president. His party Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS – Movement for Socialism) was massively supported by the native communities of Bolivia.

The preamble of the constitution of 2009 opens with a statement of acknowledgement of the ancient civilization of its people: *"In ancient times mountains arose, rivers moved, and lakes were formed. Our Amazonia, our swamps, our highlands, and our plains and valleys were covered with greenery and flowers. We populated this sacred Mother Earth with different faces, and since that time we have understood the plurality that exists in all things and in our diversity as human beings and cultures. Thus, our peoples were formed, and we never knew racism until we were subjected to it during the terrible times of colonialism... We have left the colonial, republican and neo-liberal State in the past."*

The Inca legacy - 2

Article 9 defines the functions of the state and one of the functions is: *“To construct a just and harmonious society, built on decolonization, without discrimination or exploitation, with full social justice, in order to strengthen the Pluri-National identities.”* In the section on education article 78 outlines the purpose of higher education: *“Education is unitary, public, universal, democratic, participatory, communitarian, decolonizing and of quality.”*

Pachakuti: the sun will rise again - 1

On December 21, 2012, the government of Bolivia organized an event to commemorate the beginning of the Pachakuti. According to old Mayan legends a dark period known as the Macha or “No Time,” began when Columbus set foot on their land. Now the time has arrived for a new era, the Pachakuti, which will slowly eliminate hunger, disease and wars, and bring about harmony between humankind and nature. Bolivian president Evo Morales explained the significance of Pachakuti: *“This 21st of December is the day of the initiation of the Pachakuti, which translates into the awakening of the world to the culture of life.”*

Pachakuti: the sun will rise again - 2

"It is the beginning of the end of unfettered capitalism as well as the transition from the time of violence between human beings and violence to nature to a new time in which human beings will constitute a unity with Mother Earth and all will live in harmony and equilibrium with the cosmos as a whole. This day is for the age-old societies the moment when major telluric-cosmic changes will occur in the planet and it is the omen that the culture of death, hunger and injustice will have reached its end. It means the end of a state of things and the beginning of profound changes in the world."

The concept of Buen Vivir - 1

Morales on the current civilization: *“Capitalism has created a civilization that is wasteful, consumerist, exclusive, clienteles, a generator of opulence and misery. That is the pattern of life, production and consumption that we urgently need to transform.”* The main task ahead is *“to destroy imperialism and build the civilizing horizon of Living Well in harmony and equilibrium with Mother Earth.”*

The concept of living well (Spanish: Buen Vivir or Vivir Bien, Quechua: Sumak Kawsay) is a crucial concept in indigenous cosmology and is included in the constitution of Bolivia (Article 8).

The concept of Buen Vivir - 2

David Choquehuanca, the vice-president of Bolivia in 2021, defines this concept as follows: *“Vivir bien is to recover the experience of our people, restore the Culture of Life and reclaim our lives in complete harmony and mutual respect with mother nature, with the Pacha Mama, where everything is life, where we are all uywas, the children of nature and the cosmos. We are all part of nature and there is nothing that is separate, and we are brothers with everything, from the plants to the mountains.”*

Conclusion

The ancient civilizations in Abya Yala were destroyed to a large extent, but not completely.

They are still there in concepts that the indigenous movements use. These are relevant concepts in constructing a new world civilization.

Next episode: African narratives

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- USA
- Caribbean
- Brazil

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The background, nature, strength and weaknesses of decolonial theory and practice

**The current narratives about civilization:
African narratives**

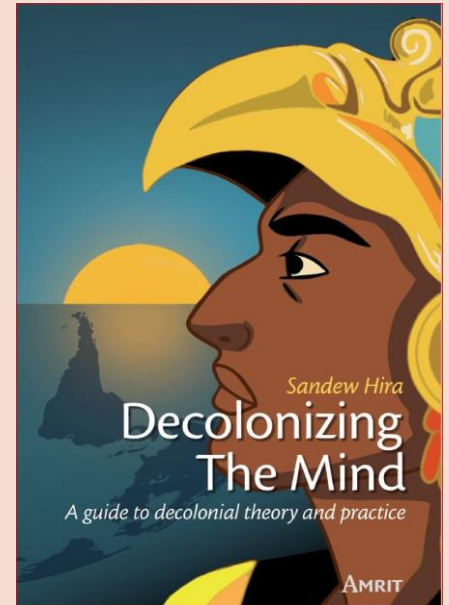
Decolonizing The Mind,
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Sandew Hira
Decolonizing
The Mind
A guide to decolonial theory and practice

#024
8-1-2024

Source in the DTM book

- Index: Bolivia, Mexico
- Download the PDF of the PowerPoint on www.sandewhira.com



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