

Césaire and the formation of de-colonialist thoughts

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The publication of the translated version of the *Discourse of the Colonialism* by Aimé Césaire is important not only for the announcing public of the de-colonization and the de-colonial movement, but also for those who register apertures in the social sciences spheres facing the necessary inter-multicultural dialogue and the positioning of knowledge and practices which surpass the euro-U.S.-centric canon.

The book was conceived from four works by the Caribbean thinker Aimé Césaire, they are: *Discourse on colonialism (Discurso sobre el colonialismo)* (1950), *Culture and colonization (Cultura y colonialización)* (1956), *Letter to Maurice Thorez (Carta a Maurice Trorez)* (1956) and *Discourse on Négritude. Négritude and Afro-American cultures (Discurso sobre la negritud. Negritud y culturas afroamericanas)* (1987), texts which make the central preoccupations of this antiracist critical poet and his legacy to the national liberation and de-colonization evident, as well as his incidence in the construction of the de-colonial sciences, hence the enrichment of the judgment to the sciences with Eurocentric substrate. The rest of the book is formed by an introduction by Immanuel Wallerstein and an appendix by Samir Amin, Ramón Grosfogel, Nelson Maldonado-Torres and Walter Mignolo, who approach Césaire's statements, exalting the novelty and contributions of his thought to the redefinition of the system-world, the Eurocentrism crisis and the geo/corporate-policy of knowledge.

The *Colonialism Discourse* reflects the reconfiguration of the world after WWII, when there were suggesting dynamics in favor of the liberation (the African and Asian cases) and the de-colonization of the non-Occidental world, excluded, subsumed and ontologized by the principles, assumptions and practices of the modernity/colonialism. In such a way, Césaire's work offers an interpretative route of colonialism, communism and négritude, central topics in his political and intellectual agenda, and in the assertion of the intellectuality of the non-European world, especially of the African diaspora.

This book's reading goes against those which still insist on showing exclusively the colonization effects on the colonies, since besides making the exacerbation of such practices and the cultural emptying explicit, Césaire insists on showing how the colonization incises on the de-civilization of

the colonizer, it is, on his brutalization; for he works in order to

Awoken his primal instincts toward greed, violence, racial hatred, moral relativism; and there would be the need to show that every time a head is severed and an eye punctured in Vietnam, and that in France is accepted, that every time a girl is raped, and in France is accepted, every time a Madagascan is tortured, and in France is accepted, there would be the need to show [...] that every time this happens an experience of the civilization is being verified [...] a universal regression is produced, a gangrene is settling [...] what we find is the venom instilled in the veins of the Europe and the gradual but certain savaging transformation process of the continent (p. 15).

In these terms, for instance, Nazism represents a continuation of the European modern/colonial expansion and not an Occidental historical deformation; for as it is shown by Grosfoguel “there is nothing original in Nazism which had not been implemented before by the colonialism against non-European countries” (p. 148). Thus, the set of European racist and genocide practices against the “uncivilized”, “barbarian”, “inferior” and colonized world ends up affecting the spirit and the mentality of the colonizer, which abets the application of these into Europe, which shows how the Nazism is nothing but domestic colonialism.

These appreciations point out the effects of the modern/colonial project for Europe, as well as the limits of the so-called humanism or in a more precise way of the European racist pseudo-humanism, the very same where the promises of “equality, fraternity and liberty” come from, and the profuse right declarations, having always as referent the European man, white and heterosexual, in a clear manifestation of imperialistic and global racism. Next to these unthinkable considerations for most of the intellectual sphere in the years following to WWII, Césaire unveils the crisis of Europe as for civilization as well as civilizing project, which for him is “morally and spiritually indefensible”; for “a civilization unable to solve the problems that arise from its functioning is a decaying civilization.

A civilization which chooses not to see the most crucial problems is a wounded civilization. A civilization which cheats on its own principles is a dying civilization” (p. 13). These affirmations allude the proletariat and the

colonial problems, the hypocrisy, the lying, the Christian pedantry, the Nazism, the racist-converting processes, the abstract universalism of the occidental thought, the European-transformation processes of the developing world, the Euro-centralism of the communism, the racist and colonialist pseudo-humanism and, in general, the difficulty from Europe and Occident to incarnate the respect for human dignity; what in Césaire's words makes it "responsible before the human community for the highest corpse rate in history" (p. 21).

A third aspect in the debate that Césaire states in his texts alludes to a communism criticism, in concrete to the Euro-centrism of the communist movement, the partisan issue (PCF) and the perspective of the internationalism heralded by the Soviet Union. In his letter to Maurice Thorez (Secretary General of the French Communist Party) [PCF] where he denounces the PCF, Césaire relates the motives for his distancing with the communism from considerations proper to diverse national liberation movements, whose force is centered in a criticism to the class reductionism and their consequent blindness to racist-converting processes and to the rest of the socio-cultural hierarchies. The confirmations which make the PCF are extended to the gross of the international communism, aspects which can be summarized as

their inveterate absorptionism; their unconscious chauvinism; their conviction, barely primary — which they share with the European bourgeois— of the Occidental omni-lateral superiority; their belief in the evolution as it has developed in Europe is the only possible; the only desirable, that necessary for the world to undergo; to say it all, their belief, seldom confessed but real, in the Civilization written in capital c, in the Progress, written in capital p (p. 81).

For Césaire, there is a communist's blindness before the complexity and singularity of colonized and racist-ranked human groups, which in the case of colored people, for instance, can de-characterize and wither in organizations that are not suitable for them and generate another type of homogenization, assimilation and integration. This situation, in words of the Caribbean thinker who we are interested in, is referred to "[...] the struggle of the colored peoples against racism, is much more complex, is,

in my opinion, of a very different nature than that of the French worker against the French capitalism and in no way can it be considered as a part or fragment of this last struggle” (p. 79). This warning, frequently disregarded in the international communism dynamics, represents a great contribution from Césaire to the understanding of the nature and spirit of the communism as child of an authoritarian and excluding Euro-centralism, which this far disclaims the historical-structural character of the world, the presence of an articulation of multiple hierarchies and the emergence of the difference, and even of the difference in the difference.

At this level and asserting the *négritude* as a “way to live the the history inside the history” and as a “revolt against the European reductionism” (p. 86-87), Césaire gives way to de-colonizing exhortations appealing to the reconstruction of the values, the deepening of the past and the re-rooting in a history, a geography and a culture; of course, not falling into either narrow simplicity nor imperial universalism, in such a way that his proposal settles where Grosfoguel calls a “universal radical de-colonizer anti-capitalist diversal as a liberation project” (p. 169). In Césaire words’, his conception of the universal “is that of a universal depositary of all that is particular, depositary of all of the particulars, deepening and coexistence of all of the particulars” (p. 84); in contraposition to the racist and euro-u.s.-centered excluding imperial global designs.

Undoubtedly, Césaire’s stances in favor of the de-colonization are extended to the scientific and epistemological structures which have accompanied the expansionism processes, promoters of the alleged Occidental cognitive and scientific superiority. Then, science turns out to be monothematic and monological, at the time that it has a color proper to racism and of the determinism which helps it. On this particular, when Césaire wonders to himself about the role of the thinkers and intellectuals, for both colonizers and domestic or allied of the colonization, whom he calls “guardian dogs of the colonialism”, he expresses:

They will be your enemies —with height, lucidity and consequent manner— flagellators and greedy bankers, not only handyman politicians and sold-out magistrates, but all the same, and because of this same reason, bitter journalists; goitrous academicals wealthy with stupidities; metaphysical ethnographers,

expert in stoves; Belgian extravagant theologians, prating and malodorous intellectuals who believe they descent from Nietzsche [...] and, in a general way, all those who developing a role in the sordid division of work for the defense of the Occidental and bourgeois society, try in different ways, and for vile fun, to disarrange the forces of progress [...] all of them allied to the capitalism, all of them declared or ignominious representatives of the plundering colonialism, responsible all, loathsome all, slavers all, guilty all from now on of the revolutionary aggressiveness (26-27).

These perceptions are fed by numerous premises from several disciplines, which do not only postulate the Eurocentric character of the knowledge and the sciences, but all the same its false universality pretension and the confirmation of its parishionerness, its racism and its epistemic authoritarianism.

Before this panorama, Césaire becomes one of the thinkers who from the colonized world gives elements to “the shaping of genealogies of de-colonial thoughts”, genealogies that, according to Mignolo, “respond to emptied or repressed memories by the hegemony of the Euro-centered thinking since the Renaissance” (p 197).

In other words, Césaire early takes part in the so-called de-colonial epistemic role, from where readings against the abstract universals are promoted, and against the colonialness of the being and knowledge, in order to register the evident changes in the geography of reason, in the epistemic subjects and in the perspectives of the contemporary critical thoughts, phenomena which move against the global/imperial designs and how correction and overcoming of the Euro-centric look and practice.

These topics developed in Césaire texts which integrate the book *Discourse of the Colonialism*, constitute important contributions in the efforts of many thinkers to assert at the political-cultural, epistemic and existential levels, not only to non-European intellectuals, but also diverse ways to be in the world, logically breaking up with the modernity and as an answer to the disenchantment with the Euro-centralism. All of these estimations are accompanied by the comments of Immanuel Wallerstein, Samir Amin, Ramón Grosfoguel, Nelson Maldonado-Torres and Walter Mignolo, who distinguish the contributions of Aimé Césaire to the political,

epistemic, ontological and cultural de-colonizing processes of peoples and individuals of all the non-European world; a topic which settles “the door to the wretched of earth” as a third force or historical way (p. 176), in order to confront and interpret expansive, hegemonic, universal, totalizing projects and their “dishonest practices”.

It is from these practices of located readings in the postcolonial critic where, undoubtedly, according to Mignolo (p. 212), “the future history will have to be written from the historical-structural and heterogeneous knots which mark the history of the modernity/colonialness”, as a contribution to the existential, cognitive and mentality de-colonizing under “the access to a universe —pluriverse— conceptual post-Eurocentric and post-continental” (Maldonado, p. 192).

Hence, Césaire’s exhortations after the overcoming and the no re-duplication of the colonial world (p. 25) or the construction of a new society, are consistent with the Fanon proposal of “changing skin, developing a new thinking and trying to create a new man”; statements which feed the processes and perspectives not only against all shapes of racist-converting processes, colonialism and global anti-Semitism, but they also favor the multiple ways of being in the world and give it a meaning as well as for the new surfaces and spaces of struggle and existence. It is in this perception where we find the invocation and consideration of “our epoch as that of the re-found identity, the one of the recognized difference” (p. 9), hence the one of the no assimilation under a supposed model —white or European—, which incites the emergence of the diversity, postulated according to Ramón Grosfoguel (p. 169) by Edward Glissant as “a universal radical de-colonizer anti-capitalist diversal” or a concrete universal that constructs a de-colonizer universal by means of the respect and the integration without the disappearance of the particular ethical-epistemological struggles against the patriarchy, capitalism, imperialism and Euro-centered modernity from a diversity of ethical – epistemological projects. A serious calling to construct a universal which will be pluriversal, an including universal that advances in aspects as the redistribution, recognition —even without knowledge— and the decolonization.

In the middle of these considerations, it is necessary to acknowledge the plus which for the book generates the comments by Ramón Grosfoguel, Nelson Maldonado-Torres and Walter D. Mignolo, whose analysis recognize the value of Césaire's thinking in the current conditions of global coloniality, global oppression and/or social Fascism, a factor nourished with appreciations softened to the dynamics on colonial difference, the decline of the Occident and the gnosologic and epistemic turn which help us, in moment when it is verified how "beyond the occidental reason, there is a world of colors", as it is recently affirmed by the Colombian painter Adolfo Albán. The contrary happens in the text by Amin, whose presence in such volume turns out to be forced, since this author's analyses with the exception of the appreciations on Euro-Occidentalism and the anti-imperialist after the WWII are centered in topic without discreet and close relations to the energetic Césaire's declarations on colonialism, *négritude* and communism.

Finally let us say that the *Colonialism Discourse* represents a suggestive manifesto for the whole of the Global South and the world still colonized by political, economical, epistemological and symbolical stances and practices. However, it is surprising not only Césaire's clarity, but also the influence that somehow the Euro-centralism exerts upon him; since some statements do not escape certain canons and premises, specially the ones referring to certain dichotomies by opposition and the invocation to a universalism, the one that, even if it integrates the multiple particularities, could turn out to be counterproductive for a world that does not seem to resist an absolute "another".

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