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## Race and ethnicity or racialized ethnicities?

### *Identities within global coloniality*

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**ABSTRACT** The traditional distinction between race and ethnicity is considered highly problematic. In the literature, ethnicity is frequently assumed to be the cultural identity of a group within a nation state while race is assumed to be the biological and/or cultural essentialization/naturalization of a group based on a hierarchy of superiority and inferiority related to the biological constitution of their bodies. It is posited that, depending on the context of power relations involved, there are 'racialized ethnicities' and/or 'ethnicized races.' The racialization of Puerto Rican identity in New York City is an example of the former and the use of racial categories such as 'black' as an ethnic identity is an example of the latter. By using the notion of coloniality of power, this article attempts to justify the use of the notion 'racial/ethnic identity' rather than using these concepts as separate or autonomous categories.

**KEYWORDS** cities ● Latinos ● post-colonial ● racialization ● racism

## INTRODUCTION

The traditional sociological paradigms on ethnicity in the United States are based on the experience of immigrants' incorporation to the host society: the assimilation school (Park, 1950; Gordon, 1964) and the cultural pluralist school (Glazer and Moynihan, 1963). Both schools used the turn of the century European migrations as a model for their theoretical framework. According to the assimilation school, all groups pass through several stages in the process of assimilation to the host society. First, they become acculturated to the values, norms and culture of the host society. Usually it takes two or three generations to lose their native language, values and

culture of origin. Second, once assimilated to 'Anglo-American' culture, the residuals of the 'country of origin' identity are eradicated as well as any discriminatory obstacles that could affect their successful incorporation to the labor market. Once they are structurally assimilated to the mainstream American economy, this reinforces the melting of their identities into a single Anglo-American national identity. The first generation normally makes the big economic sacrifices to uplift the next generations.

The cultural pluralist school assumes a similar teleological stagism, but with one main difference. Even though ethnic groups eventually assimilate, this does not mean that the new identity is a 'melting pot' that belongs to a homogenous 'American' cultural identity. Groups lose their language and customs but ethnicity continues to be recreated in a new form of identity that is neither a 'melting pot' nor a simple repetition of their communities of origin's ethnicity. It is a new hyphenated identity (i.e. Irish-American, Italian-American, Polish-American) that emerges out of common political interests. They become interest groups that deliver political power which eventually translates into economic gains, leading to 'upward mobility' for the whole community.

The more sophisticated versions of both schools recognize that their models need to take into account processes of discrimination through extra-economic means such as the black experience in the United States (Glazer and Moynihan, 1963; Gordon, 1964). These versions recognize that despite the cultural 'assimilation' of blacks, they experienced discriminatory obstacles that affected their integration into the mainstream of the American economy, unlike European ethnic groups. However, the 'cultural pluralist' and the 'assimilation' schools shared two basic assumptions. First, the longer an ethnic group is in the United States, the more structurally assimilated or culturally integrated they become to the mainstream American economy. Second, once equal opportunity legislation was enforced, blacks, Hispanics or Asians experienced the same processes of integration as any other European ethnic group in the United States. The timing of the migration as well as the racial discrimination suffered by immigrants of color are erased from the analysis. The assumption is one of a unilinear process of integration into the host society. Moreover, the cultural pluralist school recognizes the ethnicity of all the 'white' groups, but subsumes 'blacks', 'Hispanics' and 'Asians' under the 'they all look alike' racial reductionism (Omi and Winant, 1986). The diverse ethnic groups among the black, Latino and Asian populations are not recognized within this paradigm. They keep using racialized categories to lump together a diversity of ethnic groups. This conceals important analytical distinctions among different ethnic groups depending on class origin, educational backgrounds, the political economy of the city in which they live, and the broad context of incorporation to the new society.

Recent approaches to migration emphasized the context of reception to the host society and the modes of incorporation to the labor market (Portes

and Böröcz, 1989; Portes and Rumbaut, 1990). The context of reception refers to state policies toward a specific migrant group, the reaction/perceptions of public opinion, and the presence or absence of an ethnic community. This context provides the sociological framework that determines the diverse labor market incorporation. The identity of a group becomes racialized in positive or negative ways depending on this context. This approach represents an improvement over the timeless and unilinear deterministic conceptualizations of the old paradigms. However, three points need to be emphasized.

First, the context of reception approach remains state-centric. This approach conceptualizes the context of reception and the modes of incorporation in terms of the 'national' setting of the United States, overlooking the global historical-structural processes that condition both (Petras, 1981). Whether the state policies toward a migrant group are positive, negative or neutral is something that is frequently related to foreign policy, global geopolitical strategies and capital accumulation processes on a world-scale (Grosfoguel, 1997a, 1997b). It is crucial to locate each racial/ethnic group within the broader context of the core-periphery relationships between their state of origin and the United States. For instance, whether the core-periphery relationship is colonial, neocolonial with an active military intervention by the United States, or peripheral without geopolitical importance for the core state, makes an important difference in terms of the migrants' class origin/educational backgrounds, the United States' policies regarding their reception, and the public perception of the migrants' ethnic/racial identities. These, in turn, affect their modes of incorporation to the labor market (Grosfoguel, 1997b). Another consideration is the geographical proximity of a peripheral state to the core state which allows lower class migrants to bypass the institutional barriers to migration by crossing the borders illegally (e.g. Mexico). A somewhat different case is presented by countries that have 'broken' the neocolonial linkages with the United States and are treated by American foreign policy as enemies (e.g. Cuba, Nicaragua during the Sandinista regime, Vietnam). In these cases the migrants are usually treated as refugees with a more positive context of reception than many other immigrants.

Second, the 'context of reception' approach shares with the other approaches a static and unilinear conception of immigrants. Immigrants are assumed to leave for good their country of origin and settle in a new country with no circulatory complex/dynamic relationships across borders. In this sense, while this approach focuses on the state, it overlooks the transnational dimension of international migration processes and their implication for ethnic/racial identity in the host society (Basch et al., 1993).

Third, an important overlooked aspect which is central to the context of reception approach is the racial/ethnic composition of the migrants. The difference between 'white' Europeans and non-white Others is a crucial

axis that articulates social relations in the United States. There are groups of migrants that are socially constructed as 'white' such as European migrants, others that are constructed as 'black' such as certain migrations from the English-speaking Caribbean; there are ethnic groups that, although they have a mixed racial composition, are nevertheless racialized as a group such as Puerto Ricans and Mexican Americans. All of these variations in racialization and colonial experiences are crucial to understanding the different reception of an immigrant group in a racialized society such as the United States.

Thus, it is important to look at the totality of the migration process of each migrant group in its historical-structural complexity, that is, to analyze the time and space dimensions as well as the racial and ethnic dynamics, in order to understand why some groups have a more positive racial/ethnic identity in the eyes of the host population and, thus, are more successfully incorporated into the labor market than others: Where are they coming from and why? When did they arrive? What is the dominant class origin of the migration flow? What is the racial/ethnic composition? Where did they settle? What are the geopolitical, economic and social dimensions of the migration processes for each immigrant group? What are the relations between the host society and the country of origin? What is the history and political economy of the region in which they settled at the time they migrated? What is the context of reception for each different migrant group in the city in which they settled? How do the narratives of the nation in the host society affect the migrants' identity and/or racialization processes? After accounting for all these factors, we can start making sense of the diverse labor market incorporations among different ethnic groups and the diverse social networks built by their communities. Not accounting for the broad historical-structural context experienced by each particular migrant group in the process of incorporation to the host society, opens the doors to stereotyping their culture and racial/ethnic identities. By erasing the broad historical and political-economic context that precedes the incorporation to the labor market, and placing the emphasis only on the latter or on the supposed cultural/biological inadequacies of a group, it is easy to simplistically conclude that the failure or success of an ethnic group depends on how hard they work, how disciplined and motivated they are or whether the community's social capital is positive or negative. This kind of reductionism leads to praising the privileged and blaming the victims.

In order to avoid an economic interpretation, the notion of mode of reductionist incorporation, which in the outlined literature refers mainly to the labor market, should be understood in a broader sense such as the global and national political, cultural and social dynamics of the processes of what I will call *sociopolitical modes of incorporation*. This concept situates what has been defined as context of reception within a broader global and historical framework.

## RACIAL/ETHNIC IDENTITY AND THE COLONIALITY OF POWER

The terms 'Hispanic,' 'Asian,' 'Latino,' and 'black' have been used in the United States as an alternative to ethnicity. These terms obscure the complex, heterogeneous, and contradictory relationships between and within such groupings. The 'Latino/Hispanic' category collapses the differences between and among populations who have diverse historical experiences of oppression. In order to avoid this conflation, I propose to distinguish among 'colonial/racial subjects,' 'colonial immigrants,' and 'immigrants.' These distinctions provide a starting point for a new theoretical framework that addresses the social positioning of racialized immigrant groups in the United States. Most often the social position of these immigrants has been addressed in terms of the question of assimilation, context of reception, or in terms of the relationship between nation building and whiteness. The racial categories as constructed in the Euro-American social imaginary, which are the dominant racial categories used in the United States, will be emphasized here. However, for reasons of space, I will not deal here with how racial categories are constructed within each racial/ethnic community. Racist perceptions of subordinated groups are not an exclusively 'white' phenomena, although it is important to acknowledge that Euro-American racist perceptions represent the society's dominant views.

This article offers a new approach to the questions: Why do some minorities in the United States succeed economically and others remain impoverished? How does the way identity is constructed by dominant power groups relate to the positive or negative social and economic performance of a racial/ethnic group? These questions have been raised by other scholars in the past (Glazer and Moynihan, 1963; Lieberman, 1980; Sowell, 1981; Steinberg, 1981). My purpose is to rethink old assumptions and open up a debate. I prefer to see this article as a provocative attempt to stimulate debate rather than as a definitive solution. To understand these dynamics I build on the notion of 'coloniality of power' developed by Peruvian Sociologist Aníbal Quijano (1991, 1993, 1998, 2000). Originally applied to this concept, the Latin American context can be very useful for understanding contemporary racialization of immigrants in the 'coloniality of power' of the United States. This concept addresses the way social power relations today continue to be organized, constituted, and conditioned by centuries of western colonial expansion.

### FOUR POINTS OF CLARIFICATION

First, the use of the word 'colonial' does not refer only to 'classical colonialism' or 'internal colonialism,' nor is it reduced to the presence of a 'colonial

administration.' As I will argue below, a colonial situation of exploitation and domination, formed by centuries of European colonialism, can persist in the present without the existence of a 'colonial administration.' Instead, I use the word 'colonialism' to refer to 'colonial situations' enforced by the presence of a colonial administration such as the period of classical colonialism, and, following Quijano (1991, 1993, 1998), I use 'coloniality' to address 'colonial situations' in the present period in which colonial administrations have almost been eradicated from the capitalist world-system. By 'colonial situations' I mean the cultural, political, and economic oppression of subordinate racialized ethnic groups by dominant racial/ethnic groups, with or without the existence of colonial administrations. It is crucial to point out that 'coloniality' in the contemporary world-system stems from the long history of European colonialism that preceded it. Five hundred years of European colonial domination and expansion formed an international division of labor between Europeans and non-Europeans that is reproduced in the present 'post-colonial' phase of the capitalist world-system (Wallerstein, 1979, 1995).

Today the core zones of the capitalist world economy overlap with predominantly white/European/Euro-American societies such as Western Europe, Canada, and the United States, while peripheral zones overlap with previously colonized non-European people.<sup>1</sup> The global racial/ethnic hierarchy of Europeans and non-Europeans was an integral part of the development of the capitalist world system's international division of labor (Wallerstein, 1983; Quijano, 1993; Mignolo, 1995). The international division of labor produced by European colonialism has also created a global racial/ethnic hierarchy since the 1500s (Quijano and Wallerstein, 1992; Mignolo, 1995). In the current 'post-independence' times, this hierarchy continues to be an integral part of the contemporary global division of labor.

I use a conceptualization that goes against the grain of commonly held assumptions. The social sciences and the humanities produce knowledge that is predominantly focused and oriented towards the nation state as the unit of analysis (Wallerstein, 1991a). The dominant assumption is that nation states are independent units and the main explanation for global inequalities is accounted for by the internal dynamics of each nation state. While in the past decade, ongoing scholarship on globalization has challenged this assumption, none of this literature has adequately addressed the continued coloniality of formally independent states (Robertson, 1992; Mittleman, 1997; Sassen, 1998). The dominant representations of the world today assume that 'colonial situations' ceased to exist after the demise of 'colonial administrations' 50 years ago. This mythology about the so-called 'decolonization of the world' obscures the continuities between the colonial past and current global colonial/racial hierarchies and contributes to the invisibility of 'coloniality' today. For the last 50 years, states that had been

colonies, following the dominant Eurocentric liberal discourses (Wallerstein, 1991a, 1995), constructed ideologies of 'national identity,' 'national development,' and 'national sovereignty' that produced an illusion of 'independence,' 'development,' and 'progress.' Yet their economic and political systems were shaped by their subordinate position in a capitalist world system organized around a hierarchical international division of labor<sup>2</sup> (Wallerstein, 1979, 1984, 1995). These multiple hierarchies (including the racial/ethnic hierarchy), together with the predominance of Eurocentric cultures (Said, 1979; Wallerstein, 1991b, 1995; Lander, 1998; Quijano, 1998; Mignolo, 2000), constitute a 'global coloniality' between Europeans/Euro-Americans and non-Europeans. Thus, 'coloniality' is entangled with, but is not reducible to, the international division of labor. The 'colonial' axis between Europeans/Euro-Americans and non-Europeans is inscribed not only in relations of exploitation (between capital and labor) and domination (between Europeans and non-Europeans), but also in the production of subjectivities.

Second, although the literature on whiteness and nation building (Omi and Winant, 1986; Gilroy, 1987; Roediger, 1991; Almaguer, 1994; Basch et al., 1993) has influenced my work, I want to take this analysis a step further by putting whiteness studies in a more global framework. Scholars in this field have addressed the shifting meanings and discontinuous processes of racist discourses and their relations to nationalism, national identity, and nation building. However, they have underestimated the continuities between the colonial past and the present racial/ethnic hierarchies. Oppressed groups that have been incorporated into the US empire, including those within the nation's borders throughout a long history of colonialism, are best understood as 'colonial/racialized subjects.' Although this concept is explained in more detail below, let us say for now that power relations at the level of the nation state in the United States are still organized and constructed through structures, institutions, and cultural criteria that privilege white Europeans over non-European populations. This racial/ethnic hierarchy, constitutive of power relations in the United States, has shifted meanings and strategies over time, but has existed since the beginning of European colonization of the Americas (Quijano and Wallerstein, 1992; Mignolo, 1995). The diverse racial/ethnic hierarchies of different regions in the United States constitute and inform the experience of subjects of empire such as African Americans, Chicanos, Puerto Ricans, and Native Americans. Today, they live the pernicious persistence of what Quijano (1991, 1993, 1998) calls the 'coloniality of power.'

Third, I use the term 'colonial immigrants' to refer to those groups that, even though they come from countries that were never colonized directly by the United States, still suffer at the time of arrival from forms of racial discrimination and stereotypes that are similar to those experienced by the 'colonial/racial subjects' of the empire. These migrants frequently come



from regions dominated by the United States (neocolonies), and their status in the host society is in many instances associated with the low standing of their country of origin in the international division of labor (Grosfoguel, 1997b; Grasmuck and Grosfoguel, 1997). The stereotypes frequently used towards the 'colonial/racial subjects' of the US empire, who happen to be within the centers of empire for a longer time, are extended to the 'colonial immigrants' at the time of arrival. An example of this is the 'Puertoricanization' of Dominicans in New York City, the 'Chicanization' of Salvadoreans in Los Angeles or the 'Africanamericanization' of Haitians in Miami. These are all characterized here as 'colonial immigrants' as opposed to the 'colonial/racial subjects' of the empire.

Fourth, I reserve the term 'immigrants' for only those incoming populations who, although they may face some initial discrimination, are allowed access within a few generations to the mainstream of US society. In centers of power, such as the United States, only upwardly mobile newcomers are able to obtain treatment as 'immigrants.' Despite their difficulties, 'immigrants' have a higher status than colonial subjects who continue to experience a negative racialization. In some cases, like the pre-1980 Cuban refugees, these groups have experienced economic success in the first generation due to positive US state policies at the time of arrival.

The outlined distinctions between 'racial/colonial subjects' of the US empire, 'colonial immigrants,' and 'immigrants' have important implications for understanding the positive or negative reactions of dominant 'Euro-American' groups toward a particular 'Latino', 'Asian' or 'black' ethnicity. 'Colonial/racial subjects' have historically been the targets of racist representations in the Euro-American imaginary as a particular expression of the worldwide history of colonialism. For instance, Puerto Ricans and African Americans are colonial/racial subjects of the US empire who have been the target of many racist stereotypes. As the longest standing black group and Latino group in global cities of the north-east region of the United States, the racial stereotypes of African Americans and Puerto Ricans established a precedent that new 'black' and 'Latino' immigrants must encounter to the extent that they are frequently confused with African Americans or Puerto Ricans in the hegemonic imaginary. This produces contradictory relationships among different Latino groups. Many Colombians, Mexicans, Dominicans, Cubans, or Ecuadorians in New York City make an effort to avoid being placed under the rubric of 'Puerto Ricans' or 'African Americans' for multiple and complex reasons. It is not merely a romantic attempt to mark out a distinct cultural identity. After all, to be confused with Puerto Ricans or African Americans could be useful for illegal immigrants who want to take provisional cover under the US citizenship guaranteed to Puerto Ricans and African Americans. This ethnic strategy of disentanglement has more to do with an effort to avoid the racialized and stereotypical construction of the 'colonial/racial subjects'

of the US empire whose ethnic identities have been racialized. To be identified as 'Puerto Rican' in the ethnic/racial hierarchy of New York City is not just an ethnic marker but mainly a racist marker for new Latino immigrants. Similarly, to be associated with 'African Americans' is also a racist marker for many immigrants of African descent. The association of 'Puerto Rican' and 'African American' identity in the Euro-American imaginary with racist stereotypes such as laziness, criminality, stupidity, and uncivilized behavior has important implications in the labor market, seriously affecting the new immigrants' opportunities.<sup>3</sup> They constitute what I called 'racialized ethnicities.'

### **SYMBOLIC CAPITAL, INTERNAL COLONIALISM AND COLONIALITY**

The identities of different populations within the United States are embedded in multiple structural levels (global, nation state, and local). Identities are constructed within social relations. They are constituted in relation to other groups' identification strategies in an unequal field of power relations within symbolic, economic, and political structures (Bourdieu, 1977, 1994; Said, 1979; Hall, 1990, 1996). The dominant groups of the symbolic, economic, and political fields are the ones with the power to make their social classifications of a society hegemonic. In the United States, this power of classification is in turn related to the history of the racial/ethnic construction of groups within a white supremacist/colonial system of domination of internally differentiated populations linked to the growth of a colonial power.

As is the case elsewhere, in global cities different ethnicities are invested with different social value. The symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1977, 1994) – that is, the capital of prestige and honor – of each group varies. Groups at the top of the racial/ethnic hierarchy enjoy a high or positive social prestige. Prestige is frequently translated into greater economic opportunities and access to economic capital. On the contrary, groups at the bottom of the racial/ethnic hierarchy have a low or negative symbolic capital, that is, no prestige, and their identities are usually tied to a negative/bad public image. These groups suffer discrimination in the labor market, finding barriers for economic opportunities.

In the late 1960s, Robert Blauner (1972) developed an 'internal colonial' approach to refer to the colonial status that minorities occupy in the centers of empire as 'internal colonialism.' Blauner provided a framework for understanding the different forms of incorporation of diverse ethnic/racial groups within the United States and the hegemonic construction of their identities. In this framework, Blauner distinguished between 'immigrants'

and 'internal colonial' groups. Those groups that were incorporated into the United States as part of an experience of immigration had a more privileged form of incorporation than those that were incorporated through violence as part of an imperial/colonial expansion (Blauner, 1972; Lieberman, 1980). European groups of different ethnicities formed part of the immigrant experience, while people of color experienced colonization.

Blauner used this analytical distinction in order to deconstruct the 'immigrant analogy.' The foundational myth of the nation, the 'American Dream,' portrayed America as the land of opportunities where immigrant groups of all social and racial origins had equal opportunities. In this myth all immigrant groups experienced difficulties in the first generation, but after a few generations were able to become socially mobile. According to Blauner, this myth could not explain the colonial experience of racialized groups in the United States. An important distinction had to be made between 'immigrants' and those who originated in internally colonized populations. Immigrant labor was incorporated as wage labor, while colonized groups suffered coerced forms of labor.

Although this conceptualization is historically accurate, it is not useful to an understanding of the post-1965 period. Once the old colonial forms of coerced labor disappeared and the 1964 Civil Rights Amendment was passed, it was conceptually difficult to sustain an 'internal colonialism' approach to understanding the experience of the post-1965 new immigrants and domestic minorities. One of the limitations of the concept of 'internal colonialism' lies herein. Colonialism is understood as consisting of extra-economic mechanisms or institutions such as a colonial administration or colonial methods of labor coercion. Therefore, many scholars (including Blauner himself) abandoned the 'internal colonial' approach altogether for the so-called 'post-colonial' period.

The only exception within the 'internal colonial' literature to the outlined criticism is the work of Mario Barrera (1979) who comes very close to the 'coloniality of power' approach developed here. Contrary to Blauner, Barrera does not make extra-economic coerced forms of colonial labor control a central feature to his definition of 'internal colonial' relations. On the contrary, Barrera puts the racial classification of peoples and its articulation or entanglement with the class structure as central to his definition. Using an original and sophisticated combination of class and racial analysis, Barrera escapes the pitfalls of the 'internal colonial' approach.

But for most 'internal colonial' theorists this is not the case. This leads scholars to think of a sharp break in the post-1965 period, making the use of the concept 'colonial' obsolete once civil rights were formally achieved in the United States. However, to think of the post-1965 period as a complete, discontinuous break with the past is inaccurate. Although the racial/ethnic hierarchy has changed with the ascension of some groups, previously classified at the bottom, to intermediary positions (Koreans,

Jamaicans, or Cubans), there are still important continuities with the colonial past, given that Euro-Americans remain at the top of the hierarchy and people of color at the bottom. How can we think about the continuities of the colonial past while acknowledging the discontinuities? How can we reconceptualize the notion of 'internal colonialism' in a way that accounts for the post-1965 transformations and complexities of the race/ethnic hierarchy of the United States?

While we can learn much from more recent approaches to racial dynamics, they do not adequately formulate the continuing structures of power that emerged from US colonial history. As a consequence, racial categories are dehistoricized. For example, the 'racial formation' approach developed by Omi and Winant (1986), although important to understanding the shifting meanings of race across time, and crucial for a non-reductionist approach to race, still underestimates the historical continuities between colonial and the so-called 'post-colonial' times. Their conceptualization is useful for understanding the ways in which the current relationships of power differ from the past but is unable to adequately address historical continuities.

We can conceptualize colonial continuities in the present by rethinking the 'internal colonial' approach in terms of non-economistic and non-coerced forms of reproduction of a disenfranchised 'colonial' labor force. The recent 'post-colonial' literature has tried to address this issue in the field of literary criticism and cultural studies. However, the 'post' in the term 'post-colonial' itself implies a temporality that undermines the initial intention of conceptualizing colonial continuities in the present (McClintock, 1992; Shohat, 1992). There is no 'post' in colonial/racial hierarchies in the world today. Instead, there are cultural and political processes that reproduce a 'colonial situation' without the presence of a 'colonial administration' or 'colonial laws' to visibly enforce a colonial subordination. While racist culture is not instrumental to capitalist accumulation, it was and continues to be an integral and inherent feature of *historical capitalism* (Wallerstein, 1983).

## THE COLONIALITY OF POWER PERSPECTIVE

Quijano's (1991, 1993, 1998) concept of 'coloniality of power' is crucial to overcome the limits of the outlined approaches. 'Coloniality of power' names the continuities in the so-called 'post-colonial era'. It highlights the social hierarchical relationships of exploitation and domination between Westerners and non-Westerners that have been built during centuries of European colonial expansion, emphasizing cultural and social power relations. As Quijano states:

Racism and ethnicization were initially produced in the Americas and then expanded to the rest of the colonial world as the foundation of the specific power relations between Europe and the populations of the rest of the world. After five hundred years, they still are the basic components of power relations across the world. Once colonialism became extinct as a formal political system, social power is still constituted on criteria originated in colonial relations. In other words, coloniality has not ceased to be the central character of today's social power . . . With the formation of the Americas a new social category was established. This is the idea of 'race' . . . Since then, in the intersubjective relations and in the social practices of power, there emerged, on the one hand, the idea that non-Europeans have a biological structure not only different from Europeans; but, above all, belonging to an 'inferior' level or type. On the other hand, the idea that cultural differences are associated to such biological inequalities . . . These ideas have configured a deep and persistent cultural formation, a matrix of ideas, images, values, attitudes, and social practices, that do not cease to be implicated in relationships among people, even when colonial political relations have been eradicated. (1993: 167–9; my own translation)

The concept of 'coloniality of power' for the study of race/ethnic identities and relations is important because it enables us to understand why the present racial/ethnic hierarchy of the capitalist world system is still 'constituted on [cultural] criteria originated in colonial relations.' 'Coloniality of power' historicizes and explains why certain groups are at the bottom of the ethnic/racial hierarchy while others remain at the top. It moves beyond the tendency in racial/ethnic studies to focus only on the persistence of a color hierarchy. Such a focus can lead to the reification of color categories obscuring other forms of racialization in the capitalist world system.

Moreover, a focus on color alone does not address the fact that, although diverse colonized groups may be phenotypically indistinguishable from dominant colonizer groups, they can nevertheless be racialized as inferior others in a colonial situation. The racialization of the Irish in the British empire is a good example of how this process is not fundamentally about skin color but about a location within a colonial relationship. The same process of racialization occurs with 'white' Puerto Ricans, Cubans or Mexicans in the US. Given the US reduction of whiteness to Anglo-north-western European groups, they exclude and, even, racialize Euro-Latinos. This is why I would prefer to use the category 'colonial/racial' subjects of empire rather than simply 'racial subjects.' Racial categories are built in relation to colonial histories. They must be looked at together. Thus, the shifting meanings and structures that Omi and Winant (1986) conceptualized as a 'racial formation,' I prefer to characterize as a 'colonial/racial formation.' Shifting meanings about race have a historical continuity that can only be understood in relation to the colonial histories of empires. Racialization is the process through which groups (frequently the dominant ones) use cultural and/or biological features/criteria to

construct a hierarchy of superiority and inferiority among collective social actors. The modern/colonial world system was founded on these premises. The year 1492 is a foundational moment. It is the year when Spaniards expelled Arabs and Jews from the Iberian Peninsula and colonized indigenous peoples in the West Indies, later known as the Americas. The former created the internal racialized subjects within Europe, while the latter formed the external borders with 'non-European' peoples.

The categories of modernity such as citizenship, democracy, and national identity have been historically constructed through the 'coloniality of power' between Europeans and non-Europeans (Quijano, 1991, 1998). Coloniality is the darker side of modernity. They are two sides of a single coin. In the United States, this 'coloniality of power' is constitutive of the symbolic and structural racial/ethnic hierarchies. Euro-American elites have historically deployed their symbolic capital, that is, the power of social prestige, to classify, racialize, exclude, and subordinate colonial subjects.

If the concept of 'coloniality of power' is stretched beyond the nation state to a global scale, we can speak of a 'global coloniality' (Georas, 1997). Despite the eradication of the juridical-political institutions of colonialism, 'global coloniality' names the continuities of colonial practices and imaginations across time and space on a global scale. This can explain why an immigrant group from a sending society that was not a colonial territory of the metropole to which they migrated can still enter the labyrinth of colonial/racist constructions of identity. For example, Turkish immigrants in Germany today suffer the oppression of a German racist/colonial culture that originates in the European colonial expansion, without Turkey ever having been a German colony. Similarly, Turkish and Moroccan immigrants in the Netherlands (Verkuyten, 1997) suffer the effects of colonial/racist discourses, although Turkey and Morocco were never colonies of the Dutch empire. Thus, Turks in Germany, and Turks and Moroccans in the Netherlands are, according to the conceptualization developed here, 'colonial immigrants.'

The global coloniality of power from colonial to post-colonial times helps us understand the ongoing power of the white male elites to classify populations and exclude people of color from the categories of citizenship and from the 'imagined community' called the 'nation.' The civil, political, and social rights that citizenship provided to members of the 'nation' were selectively expanded over time to 'white' working classes, and 'white' middle-class women. However, 'internal' colonial groups remained 'second-class citizens,' never having full access to the rights of citizens and to the 'imagined community' called the nation (Gilroy, 1987, 1993). 'Coloniality of power' is constitutive of the metropolitan nation states' narratives of the nation. Who belongs and who does not belong to the 'nation' is informed by the historical power relations between Europeans

and non-Europeans. The persistence of a colonial culture in the present informs and constitutes social power today.

The central aspect of the concept of 'coloniality of power' is that it allows us to understand the interface between racist cultures and social power relations with a long colonial history in the capitalist world system. It shows how social power today is still informed by criteria built over a long colonial history. Yet it is important to highlight that coloniality is not a homogeneous, but rather a heterogeneous, process. There are multiple forms of colonialities according to the different colonial powers and the diverse histories of each empire. Although the colonial/racial subjects of an empire have a longer history of racialization than some recent immigrants, this does not mean that the latter are immune to similar racial categorization of older colonial subjects of empire. There are immigrant experiences that can only be understood in relation to the 'coloniality of power' of the host society ('colonial immigrants'), while other immigrants were able to escape certain forms of coloniality ('immigrants') due to their skin color, class origins, and/or the particular policies of the state.

## GLOBAL CITIES AS MICROCOSMS OF EMPIRE

In the United States, male elites of European descent ('whites') have dominated the social classification of peoples throughout a long historical process of colonial/racial domination over Native Americans, Africans, Latinos and other non-European subjects. Racialized representations of the 'colonial subjects' are not peculiar to the United States. Other colonial subjects in other parts of the world have also been subjected to the history of empire and its related 'global coloniality.' Groups with a long history of colonial relations with an imperial state are particularly vulnerable to negative representations of their identities. They are at the heart of the 'global coloniality' still present in an officially 'post-colonial' era. The targets of 'coloniality' vary according to the global city such as Paris, Amsterdam, London, and New York. These cities, centers of empire in the past, are today 'microcosms of empire' (Georas, 1997). They reproduce in their spatial boundaries the racial/ethnic hierarchies of the old colonial empires. Colonized populations who live in a former colonial power, but not the one that had colonized their country, often find they confront less stereotyping than at home. For example, African Americans and Puerto Ricans in Paris or Amsterdam often experience a 'neutral' and sometimes even a 'positive' reception among the Dutch and French people (Baldwin, 1972; Oppenheimer, 1995; Stovall, 1996). There is in general no negative preconceived notion attached to the 'Puerto Rican' and 'African American' identities in the Dutch and French hegemonic imaginary. However, the



moment someone identifies him/herself with racialized ethnicities such as Puerto Rican or African American in New York City or Chicanos and African Americans in Los Angeles, there is a list of preconceived negative ideological representations that are immediately mobilized against these racialized subjects. As Pedro, a Puerto Rican informant who has lived in Paris for the last 20 years, said:

I moved from a rural town in Puerto Rico to New York City in 1957. East Harlem was my residence for the next twenty years. I worked making shirts in a *fabrica*, I also worked in a supermarket carrying merchandise, and as a janitor cleaning offices. In New York, life was very difficult for a guy like me. Every place I went and said I was Puerto Rican, the only job I could aspire to was menial, cheap-wage jobs. Whites thought Puerto Ricans were lazy and criminals. They always treated us like shit . . . One day I realized that no matter how hard I worked, I was condemned to live in a ghetto and work as cheap labor all my life. That was when I decided to take an airplane and move to Paris even though I did not know anything about this country. That was when things changed for me. Here nobody discriminated against me for being Puerto Rican. I only suffered discrimination when they thought I was Algerian. But when I clarify that I am Puerto Rican, they politely excuse themselves . . . I learned the language and worked for several years as a janitor. At night I went to a university to study. You know here is not like in the United States where to get a university degree you need thousands of dollars . . . After I finished my degree, I started working in my first office job where I did not have to be a janitor.

Pedro's experience as a Puerto Rican is not unique. African Americans have a long history of moving to Paris to escape the racism of the United States (Stovall, 1996). However, the same can be said of Afro-Surinamese and Algerians in New York City. There is in general no negative preconceived notion about these groups' identities in the Euro-American imaginary. The absence of a colonial history within a particular empire makes an important difference in terms of how the identities of migrants are constructed and, thus, perceived. However, in Amsterdam and Paris it is a different story. Afro-Surinamese and Algerians are racialized colonial subjects with an old colonial history with their respective metropolises. They are subaltern subjects marked by the workings of 'coloniality,' that is, the reproduction of old racial/colonial hierarchies inside the metropolises. Afro-Surinamese in Amsterdam and Algerians in Paris are represented in the 'white social imaginary' with the same racial stereotypes as African Americans and Puerto Ricans are represented in New York City, namely, criminals, lazy, dirty, opportunists, stupid (Guillette and Sayad, 1976; Laval, 1984; Essed, 1990, 1991, 1996; Wieviorka, 1992; Van Dijk, 1993; Grosfoguel, 1999). The 'identities' of 'colonial/racial subjects' acquire a negative or pejorative meaning due to the articulation of the hegemonic 'colonial/racial formation.'



Something similar can be said of West Indians in New York and London. In the post-Civil Rights era, they are frequently portrayed in New York's 'Euro-American imaginary' as 'hard working, educated, and entrepreneurial people,' while in London they are represented with the same racist stereotypes as Puerto Ricans and African Americans in New York (Hartmann and Husband, 1973; Hall et al., 1978; Grosfoguel, 1997a, 1999). This is partly related to the fact that West Indians were historically colonial/racial subjects of the British empire but not of the American empire (Grosfoguel, 1999). However, the social conditions of possibility for the emergence of a positive image about West Indians in New York City are also related to important transformations in the racial discourses of the United States.

During the 1920s and 1930s, the strong biological racist discourses in the United States made it difficult for West Indians to distinguish themselves ethnically from African Americans in the 'white social imaginary' of New York City. Although West Indians did not have a long colonial history with the United States, they nevertheless experienced the effects of the 'coloniality of power' directed at African Americans. West Indians lived and were racialized together with African Americans (Watkins-Owens, 1996). During those years, they joined forces with African Americans against racial exclusion in New York City (James, 1998). Thus, their political strategy emphasized racial over ethnic identity (Kasinitz, 1992). However, the post-Civil Rights transformations of the American racial discourses from biological racism to cultural racism made possible ethnic strategies of distinction within the 'black' community. In order to distinguish themselves from the negative symbolic representations of African Americans, the post-1965 first generation West Indians fostered an ethnic identity that emphasized their nationality (Jamaican, Grenadean, etc.) over an ethnic identity that emphasized race (e.g. blacks) (see Kasinitz, 1992). The West Indian English 'accent' contributed to distinguishing them in the Euro-American imaginary from the negative symbolic capital associated with 'African American identity.' This is an important strategy of 'ethnic' distinction vis-à-vis the United States' colonial/racial subjects (e.g. African Americans and the Puerto Ricans).

The fact that first generation West Indians were no longer grouped with African Americans meant that their higher skilled backgrounds would not be offset. Thus, they were successfully incorporated into the host labor market in better-paid public and private service jobs. West Indians are currently portrayed by the 'white' establishment in New York as a 'hard working model minority' as opposed to the 'laziness' of African Americans. 'White' political elites have fostered the ethnic rather than racial identity of West Indians as a 'divide and rule' strategy to defeat African American candidates in the city's politics (Kasinitz, 1992). The symbolic capital of West Indian 'identity' in the racial/ethnic hierarchy of the city is higher than that of colonial/racial groups.

This is not to say that there is no process of racialization towards West Indians in New York City. As a group predominantly composed of Afro-Caribbeans, they also suffer from the hierarchies established by the coloniality of power, but in a different way. Rather than being marginalized from the labor market as are Puerto Ricans and African Americans, they face discrimination that limits income. It has been documented that West Indians receive lower salaries than 'whites' and even African Americans in professional and skilled occupations (Modell, 1991). As a result, they have an intermediary location in New York City's racial/ethnic hierarchy. In sum, first generation West Indians' English accents and their higher cultural capital (i.e. higher educational backgrounds) in the context of the post-Civil Rights era, led to their ethnic distinction from African Americans, and, thus, to their positive symbolic capital and more successful incorporation.

However, it is important to clarify that second-generation West Indians in New York are a different story (Waters, 1994). They live, study, and share 'colonial' spaces together with African American youth. Their 'accent' is no longer as British as that of the first generation of West Indians. They became 'African Americanized' in the 'Euro-American' imaginary, suffering similar racial stereotypes and discrimination in public spaces and the labor market. As a result of their African Americanization, they have been resubsumed under the colonial subjects of the US empire.

James Baldwin, the African American writer who lived in Paris for many years, provides an excellent description of the paradoxical relationship experienced by colonial subjects of one empire in another empire. Respectful treatment by Parisians made him initially believe that the French were not racist until he discovered that:

. . . in Paris, *les misérables* are Algerians. They slept four or five or six to a room, and they slept in shifts, they were treated like dirt, and they scraped such sustenance as they could off the filthy, unyielding Paris stones. The French called them lazy because they appeared to spend most of their time sitting around, drinking tea, in their cafés. But they were not lazy. They were unable to find work, and their rooms were freezing . . . French students spent most of their time in cafés, too, for the same reason, but no one called them lazy . . . Every once in a while someone might be made uneasy by the color of my skin, or an expression on my face, or I might say something to make him uneasy, or I might, arbitrarily (there was no reason to suppose that they wanted me), claim kinship with the Arabs. Then, I was told, that I was different: *le noir Américain est très évolué, voyons!* But the Arabs were not like me, they were not 'civilized' like me. (Baldwin, 1972: 24–7)

The negative symbolic images of colonial racialized subjects in their respective metropolises are related to the colonial histories of each empire and the 'global coloniality' still present under a 'post-colonial,' 'post-imperial' capitalist world system. Global cities are today the new 'contact

zones' of 'colonial encounters' (Pratt, 1992). According to Mary Louise Pratt:

... 'contact zone' refers to the space of colonial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict. (1992: 6)

Although Pratt used the notion of 'contact zones' to talk about the space of colonial encounters during European expansion, that is, the classical colonial period, it can be a useful concept to use in contemporary global cities today. What is common to Puerto Ricans/African Americans in New York, Surinamese in Amsterdam, West Indians in London, and Algerians in Paris is their respective long historical relationships as colonial/racial subjects within each empire and their subordinated location in the reproduction of those hierarchies today. This is not to imply that African Americans or Puerto Ricans in Paris, West Indians, Surinamese, or Algerians in New York City, suffer no discrimination, but rather to point at how the degree to which they encounter racism is markedly lower, or is frequently related to being confused/associated with one of the local colonial subjects (i.e. a Puerto Rican confused for an Algerian in Paris, or a Surinamese confused for an African American in New York City) so that they become transformed into 'colonial immigrants.' The symbolic capital (negative or positive) attached to the 'identity' of different groups in the racial/ethnic hierarchy of a global city is related to the ongoing 'coloniality of power,' even though colonialism generally has been eliminated as a political system in the late twentieth century. In sum, racial and ethnic identities cannot be understood as two different forms of identity. In the global coloniality that exists today we need to understand that identities operate as both 'racialized ethnicities' and 'ethnicized races.' No identity in the modern world escapes the global racial/colonial formation form by coloniality on a world scale.

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### **Notes**

- 1 Japan is the exception that confirms the rule. It was never colonized nor dominated or peripheralized by Europeans and, similar to the West, played an active role in building its own colonial empire. China, although never fully colonized, was peripheralized through the use of colonial entrepôts such as Hong Kong and Macao, and through direct military interventions.

- 2 Recent critiques of the world-system approach have also focused on a 'state centric' approach (Evans et al., 1985). However, the 'state-centric' approach reproduced the developmentalist myth that a peripheral state can develop if it builds a developmentalist state that can foster the 'proper' strategies of development. Taiwanese and South Korean 'miracles' are the examples frequently used by this literature. What this approach conceals is the 'manufacturing of showcases' during the Cold War through billions of dollars of US foreign aid, a US-led radical agrarian reform, and US officials' direct intervention in these peripheral state reforms (Grosfoguel, 1996). Taiwan and South Korea's mobility in the world system from periphery to the semi-periphery was part of a US strategy to contain 'communism' in Southeast Asia (Grosfoguel, 1996.). The recent 'Asian' crisis contributed to the demise of these Cold War 'miracles' and to the deconstruction of the idea that developmentalist states could escape world-systemic processes. In sum, the state-centric critique perpetuates the developmentalist and decolonization myths and reinforces the 'nation state' as the unit of analysis.
- 3 Many new immigrants of African descent reject any association with colonial/racial subjects of the US empire, such as African Americans, as new Latino immigrants reject any relation to Puerto Ricans (Foner, 1998). Many immigrant groups of African descent whose identities are perceived as indistinct from African Americans in the Euro-American 'social imaginary' have been ascribed the same racist stereotypes as the latter. Some black groups, such as Caribbean immigrants, emphasize ethnic identity over racial identity in order to avoid the stereotypes targeted against African Americans in the United States (Kasinitz, 1992). Even so, there are groups of African descent whose identity is perceived as distinct, but who still suffer racist discrimination due to the pernicious prevalence of color discrimination in the Euro-American imaginary (Halter, 1993).

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