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Racism and violence : The image of a colonised human in the eyes of Frantz Fanon and Enrique Dussel

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(Gniezno)

**RACISM AND VIOLENCE. THE IMAGE OF A COLONISED MAN
IN THE EYES OF FRANTZ FANON AND ENRIQUE DUSSEL¹**

Abstract

The aim of the article is to compare Spanish and French vision of colonisation. By drawing on the works of Frantz Fanon and Enrique Dussel, I intend to demonstrate what mechanisms were employed by the French and the Spaniards to create a colonial society. The article also sets out to find how the contemporary inhabitants of the Latin America and the Francophone Africa cope with the legacy of colonialism.

Keywords

colonialism, racism, violence, Frantz Fanon, Enrique Dussel, Spain, France

¹ Polskojęzyczna wersja artykułu pt. Rasizm i przemoc. Wizerunek człowieka skolonizowanego według Frantza Fanona i Enrique Dussela ukazała się [w:] H. Jakuszko i L. Kopciuch (red.), *Człowiek w kontekstach kulturowych i historycznych*, Lublin 2012, s. 219–232.

Colonialism left a particular mark on the fates of the world. The condition of the societies inhabiting the former European colonies is a direct aftermath of the contact between Europe and the rest of the world, although in its assumptions it was based on commendable premises and lofty ideals (civilising mission, Christianisation, bringing help), it also had its darker side, constituted by two phenomena of power: racism and violence. Our deliberations have the aim of demonstrating how the French and the Spanish, by drawing on these two categories, attempted to build their colonial societies. A research hypothesis thus formulated will be examined through (re)interpretation of the major works of Frantz Fanon² and Enrique Dussel³, in which they address the issue of colonialism and the resulting negative consequences for the colonized societies. We will be interested in the mechanisms by means of which the white European created the human of a different skin colour, causing the latter to desire to change into a 'new white' by renouncing their own race. The intention is to demonstrate how the French and the Spanish, in colonising 'through body', effected a singular intercultural suspension between a European and a native. In the conclusions, we are going to attempt a comparison of the two visions of colonisation, especially in the context of the struggle that the societies of Latin America and Francophone Africa wage on their post-coloniality.

THE FRENCH PLAY ON THE SKIN

Fanon, a Martinique-born researcher of colonialism frequently underlines that the black inhabitants had in fact one dream: a total emulation of the language and the accent of the coloniser, which at times turned simply into a linguistic obsession of speaking like a white man. The blacks strove to copy the gestures, actions and the language of the white people. At the same time, Fanon

² F. Fanon, *Wyklęty lud ziemi*, transl. by H. Tygielska, Warszawa 1985; idem, *Algieria zrzuca zasłonę*, transl. by Zygmunt Szymański, Warszawa 1962; idem, *Piel negra, máscaras blancas*, Editorial Abraxas, Buenos Aires 1973.

³ E. Dussel, 1492. *El encubrimiento del Otro. Hacia el origen del "mito de la Modernidad"*, Plural Editores, La Paz 1994; idem, *Europa, modernidad y eurocentrismo*, [in:] Edgardo Lander (ed.), *Colonialidad del saber, eurocentrismo y ciencias sociales. Perspectivas latinoamericanas*, Buenos Aires 2000, p. 41–53; E. Dussel, *Hacia una filosofía política crítica*, Bilbao 2001; idem, *Filosofía de la liberación*, México 1977.

observes that before the concept of *négritude*⁴ came into existence, no inhabitant of the Antilles was capable of seeing themselves as a black person, although they were actually black. As he expressed it in one of his most important books “in the Antilles, the vision of the world is white because no «black» version of it exists”⁵. It could not be any different since in the colonial schools black pupils were educated in a ‘whitened’ history of their land. As Fanon writes, “in the Antilles a young black man, ceaselessly repeating ‘our Gaul forefathers’ at school, identifies with the white explorer and civiliser; with the one, therefore, who brings the utterly white truth. There is genuine identification in it, as the young black man subjectively adopts the attitude of the white man”⁶. Fanon is not the only one to provide this kind of examples⁷.

This ‘white education’ left its mark on the Antillean family, causing its mental devastation. In this context, Fanon juxtaposes the black man with a Jew, stating a certain irrational similarity in the stereotypical thinking about the Other. “Usually, when it comes to a Jew,” he writes, “we think about money and its derivatives, while in the case of a black man, one thinks about sex”⁸. Such juxtaposition serves to reveal the fact that black persons were a substitute of the Jew to the French. The difference was that whereas the Jew was an intellectual threat to Europe, a black person was a biological one. In Fanon’s opinion, “to have a phobia against a black man means to feel a fear of what is biological”⁹. Therefore black persons are by default described by means of such categories as sex, strength, virility, savagery, animal, devil, sin. In this context, Fanon quotes the example of French women who, motivated by fear, did not wish to be examined by a black gynaecologist, as well as the example of a white prostitute who experienced orgasm at the very thought of intercourse with a black man¹⁰. He

⁴ *Négritude* — a literary and political movement started in the 1930 by Aimé Césaire in the defence of “Negrohood”. It was a reaction to discrimination and cultural oppression of the French colonial system. It defied the cultural assimilation and social policy of France.

⁵ F. Fanon, *Piel negra*, p. 126.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 122.

⁷ Boubou Hama and André Clair, when describing the various paradoxes encountered by the African students attending French colonial schools write they had to repeat from memory the characteristic sentence: “Gauls, our ancestors, had blue eyes and fair hair”. See their: *Albarka znaczy szansa*, transl. by K. Witwicka, Warszawa 1977, p. 103.

⁸ F. Fanon, *Piel negra*, p. 136.

⁹ *Ibidem*.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 131–132.

also remembers his own traumatic experience he had one day in Paris, when a little white girl walking in the street with her mother cried: “Look, a black one, I’m scared”¹¹. That was when the stranger from Martinique personally experienced racism. In principle, he was a Frenchman from the colonies, but when he and many like him arrived from the French overseas dominions to the metropolis, it turned out that there was something that definitely distinguishes them from the local inhabitant, namely the colour of the skin. Fanon realised then that “the black man has no ontological representation in the white eyes” and that “in the white world, a coloured person finds it difficult to develop their corporeal formula”¹². According to Fanon, in the colonial world one finds two poles, one represented by the whites and the other by the blacks: “I am white, which means that mine are the beauty and bravery, which have never been black. I am the colour of the day [...] I am black, I bring about the total fusion of the world, a sympathetic understanding of the earth, a self-abandonment in the heart of cosmos”¹³.

Fanon rendered the cruelty of the colonial world even more explicitly in “The Wretched of the World”. “The colonial world,” he writes, “is a world divided, Manichean [...] The colonised live in the state of constant tension in the face of the colonial arrangement. The world of the coloniser is a hostile one, a world which repels and attracts at the same time [...] the colonised ceaselessly dream of being the coloniser, of taking their place. The world — hostile, overwhelming and aggressive, repelling the colonised mass with all means available — is not an image of hell, from which one would like to run as fast as possible, but a paradise existing within the reach of one’s hand, guarded by cerberi”¹⁴. In this Manichean reality, where “the divisions are demarcated by the barracks and police stations”¹⁵, one side can do everything, the other nothing.

All the dilemmas discussed so suggestively by Fanon are concisely summed up by H. Bhabha in his classic book: “The sight of the white man crushes the body of the black one, and in committing this act of epistemological violence, he violates his own frame of reference and disturbs his own field of vision”¹⁶.

¹¹ Ibidem, p. 90.

¹² Ibidem, p. 91.

¹³ Ibidem, p. 37.

¹⁴ F. Fanon, *Wyklęty lud*, p. 30–31.

¹⁵ Ibidem, p. 21

¹⁶ Homi Bhabha, *Miejsca kultury*, transl. by T. Dobrogoszcz, Cracow 2010, p. 30.

THE SPANISH FRAUD

Usually, the year 1492 brings to mind the ‘discovery’ of America, yet America was not ‘new’ for itself but for the Europeans. Dussel claims that at that time, America was ‘covered’¹⁷ by Europe personified by the Spaniards. In this context the Argentinean philosopher also rejects the notion of the ‘encounter’, which began to be used on the 500th anniversary of Columbus’ voyage. He justifies his objection thus: “The term «encounter» is a covering one since it constitutes itself by concealing the domination of the European «I» and its «world» over the «world of the Other», the native”¹⁸. Thus the entire project of colonising America was founded on the myth of modernity, which consisted in making the victims into the guilty ones. Dussel calls it a “gigantic reversal” (*una gigantesca inversión*)¹⁹. Thanks to such a device “the conquest is a practical affirmation «of the one who conquers» and «negation of the Other» as the other”²⁰. Violence played a fundamental role in the contact between the Spaniards and the native peoples of America. “The first relation,” writes Dussel, „was a relation of violence: a military relation between the conquering and the conquered [...] The first experience of modernity was an almost divine superiority of the European «I» over the primitive and uncouth «Other»”²¹. The relation was also characterised by erotic violence, what is more, the conquest was successful largely thanks to the Spanish conquest of the native women. In Dussel’s view the conquistador, “a violent and belligerent ego”, was also a “phallic ego”²², who “kills a Native Indian male or reduces him to a relation of submission, goes to bed with an Native Indian woman (in the presence of the Indian male at that) and cohabits with her, as they would put it in the 16th century”. Simultaneously it was a sadistic violence: “it was about fulfilling lecherous pleasure [...] where the erotic relation is synonymous with domination over the Other (Native Indian women)”. Consequently, there ensues a “colonisation of the Indian women, Spanish eroticism is established, the double morality of *machismo* introduced:

¹⁷E. Dussel, 1492. El encubrimiento del Otro, p. 35.

¹⁸Ibidem, p. 62

¹⁹Ibidem, p. 74.

²⁰Ibidem, p. 47

²¹Ibidem, p. 44

²²Ibidem, p. 50.

the sexual domination of the Indian female and visible respect for the European woman. This relationship will bring forth the illegitimate son (*el hijo bastardo*), the «Mestizo», a Latino, the fruit of conquistador and an Indian woman, and the «criollo», a white person born in the colonial world of the West Indies²³. The arrival of the European conquistadors and the African slaves in the New World caused a disruption of the ethnic and cultural unity which had existed on the continent. Since that moment, a “gigantic biological cross-breeding between the Indians, the whites and the blacks”²⁴ began. As a result, a new culture would come into being, a culture syncretic and hybrid, whose subject would be of mixed race, far from being an outcome of alliance or a process of cultural synthesis, but an effect of domination or trauma²⁵.

Let us draw attention to the fact that *ego conquiro* was not only expressed in the military and corporal violence, but also in the spiritual one. Seen from this perspective, the strategies of colonisation are not a project of destruction but production. This is not merely about the physical elimination of the colonised, but adjusting them to life, i.e. providing them with such forms of existence that would correspond with the modernisation project. In order to eliminate the native forms of consciousness: their system of notions, symbols and the ways of assigning meaning, which were considered useless, the colonisers resorted to what Gayatri Spivak called epistemological violence. In the assessment of the colonisers, these forms were merely myths, a pre-scholarly, magical consciousness etc. And if they could not be utterly eradicated, they were deprived of ideological foundations and subjugated. Already the evangelisation of the 15th and the 16th century made the Indians and the African learn to reject their own forms of shaping the consciousness so as to adopt those of the colonisers, which granted greater social prestige. The colonial imaginarium exercised a ceaseless influence on the desires, aspirations and the will of the subjects. “The European culture,” writes Quijano “turned into a temptress; it gave access to power. Ultimately, rather than repression, seduction is the chief instrument of power. The Europeanisation of culture transformed into an aspiration. It was a means of partaking in the colonial power”²⁶. A particular role belonged to the notion of

²³Ibidem, p. 51.

²⁴Amores Carredano (ed.), *Historia de América*, Barcelona 2006, p. 336.

²⁵E. Dussel, 1492. *El encubrimiento del Otro*, p. 62.

²⁶Aníbal Quijano, *Colonialidad y modernidad-racionalidad*, [in:] H. Bonilla (ed.), *Los conquistados. 1492 y la población indígena de las Américas*, Bogotá 1992, p. 439.

“whiteness” shaped by the discourse of the “purity of blood”, a notion associated not so much with the colour of the skin, but with a personal transposition into the cultural imaginarium woven from religious beliefs, the type of attire, manner in which one behaved and, most importantly, by the forms of developing and transferring consciousness. Westernisation of the Other’s imaginarium was manifested in the efforts to emulate the European models in all domains of existence, at the level of institution, customs, thinking, education, art etc. Hence, the myth of modernity itself “defines its own culture as a better, more developed one, while on the other determining any other culture as inferior, simple, barbaric, an object of culpable immaturity”²⁷. Thus domination, war and violence employed on the others are presented as emancipation, usefulness and good for the barbarian who is being civilised, who develops or modernizes themselves. Dussel aptly emphasizes that thanks to America, its first periphery, Europe became not world capital of economic, scientific and technological advancement, but also the first universal value system²⁸.

LEAVING THE COLOUR CAGE

The problems addressed by Fanon in his works still hold relevant for France, which apparently fails to cope with the burden of its colonial past. It would be sufficient to quote the French bill of February 23rd, 2005 (ultimately did not come into force), which attempted to impose the obligation on teachers to teach only about the positive role of French colonisation, or the reaction of the authorities to the autumn riots of 2005, when the then minister of the interior, Nicolas Sarkozy, blamed the riots on the immigrants, calling them “rabble” and “gangrene”²⁹. Minister Sarkozy’s aversion to immigrants was anything but a one-off incident, if, already a president of France he demonstrated similar arrogance in July 2007, during the meeting with students of the Cheikha-Anta-Diopa university in Dakar. That was when he spoke the significant words, which even today are commented upon: “Young Africans, I have not come here to apologize [...] The sufferings of the black people, black women and black men are the sufferings of all humanity

²⁷E. Dussel, 1492. El encubrimiento del Otro, s. 70.

²⁸E. Dussel, Europa, modernidad, s. 46.

²⁹After: Rasizm à la française. Wywiad z Liliamem Thuramem, Forum 7, 15–21.02. 2010, p. 26.

[...] . The real tragedy of this continent is that the African has never made history for good [...]”³⁰. Sarkozy’s stance proves that in the country on the Seine, the nationalist, racist and xenophobic tendencies are still alive, tendencies which betoken dislike of immigrants who after all had been supposed to be French³¹. The phenomenon may be accounted for by the transcultural concept of a “scapegoat”³² that René Girard writes about. In his opinion, the mechanisms of looking for scapegoats “multiply wherever human groups attempt to shut themselves out in the identity of their community, place, nation, ideology, race, religion etc.”³³. This is why Liliam Thuram³⁴ objects to “Sarkoization of thinking”, as he puts it: “As long as we remain prisoners of the 19th-century ideology, which classified people into alleged «lower and higher races» in order to justify the existence of colonies, we will not be capable of comprehending that being black or white is the consequence of appropriate circumstances. No child is born black or white. Possibly, it may be born pink, beige and brown. «We only become black or white». One should break out of this cage of colour, decolonise our minds. We shall accomplish it by transforming our world of notions”³⁵.

GIVE VOICE TO THE MARGINALISED

The symbolic and cultural colonisation of Latin America as the first periphery played a key role in consolidating the hegemonic power of Europe and

³⁰ After: J. Ziegler, *Nienawiść do Zachodu*, transl. by E. Cylwik, Warszawa 2010, p. 87–89.

³¹ At this point, it would be worthwhile to quote the term *évolué* (lit. “evolved”), which was used in the colonial times to describe the indigenous inhabitants of the colonies who spoke French, obtained European education and live according to European standards, achieving a certain “civilisational stage of development”. In this context, one could ironically ask who should ‘evolve’ more today: the immigrants of the former colonies or those who rule the former metropolis?

³² R. Girard, *Kozioł ofiarny*, transl. by M. Goszczyńska, Łódź 1986.

³³ Idem, *Widziałem szatana spadającego z nieba jak błyskawica*, transl. by E. Burska, Warszawa 2002, p. 173.

³⁴ Liliam Thuram was born in 1972 in Guadeloupe, moving to France at the age of 9. He was a leading footballer in football clubs and multiple French representative. Having finished footballing career in 2008, he became involved in the fight against racism and social injustice. For this end, he established the “Education contre le Racisme” Foundation (Education Against Racism).

³⁵ *Rasizm à la française*, p. 28.

creating Eurocentric modernity. As Dussel demonstrates, as of the 15th century, the modern system-world propagated itself always by means of violence, both military and cultural one, which constituted the relations with other systems, cultures, nations and individuals. Since 1492 the modern Europe, or later the United States, never initiated the process of ‘including’ other peripheral cultures through peaceful and rational argumentation³⁶. The colonial logic was a logic of exclusion. In the colonial order there is no place for the narration of the Other. The first figure to be negated by the modernity was the American native. The example of the Latin America corroborates the structural dependence of the periphery on the logic of colonial paradigms. In order to leave that cultural-symbolic dependence Dussel contrasted Eurocentric modernity which excludes the inhabitants of the periphery with the modernity existing from the world horizon, where the other is included³⁷. He formulates the project of trans-modernity (*transmodernidad*) construed as “affirmation of multiculturalism excluded by the European modernity”³⁸. Unlike the project of Habermas³⁹, who propounded achievement of unfinished and incomplete modernity, Dussel’s project is oriented towards achievement (in the long run) of an unfinished and incomplete project of decolonisation. Dussel borrows Levinas’ notion of exteriority⁴⁰, which does not imply the ontological outside, but refers to the exterior which comes into existence as a difference produced by hegemonic discourse. As a system, European philosophy claims the right to eliminate otherness, a difference which Levinas denotes as *Autrui*. In this context, the other is what is external with respect to the system. For Dussel, the notion of “exteriority” essentially emerges from thinking about the Other from the viewpoint of ethical philosophy of liberation: the Other as the oppressed, the excluded, the poor etc. It is from the exterior where he dwells, the Other stands in the

³⁶E. Dussel, *Hacia una filosofía*, p. 370.

³⁷*Ibidem*, p. 357.

³⁸Enrique Dussel, *Sistema-Mundo y „Transmodernidad”*, [in:] S. Dube, I. Banerjee, W. Mignolo (ed.), *Modernidades coloniales*, México 2004, p. 218. The article originally in English: *World-System and Transmodernity*, [in:] *Nepantla. Views from South* (Duke, Durham), 3, 2, 2002, p. 211–244.

³⁹J. Habermas, *Filozoficzny dyskurs nowoczesności*, transl. by M. Łukaszewicz, Kraków 2005.

⁴⁰For the French philosopher, the relation with the Other occurs as separation and closely associated desire of the other, and through the other, infinity. See: E. Lévinas, *Całość i nieskończoność. Esej o zewnętrzności*, transl. by M. Kowalska, Warszawa 1998.

light of discourse *vis à vis* the hegemonic entirety. The category of exteriority, which permits to initiate discourse from the periphery is a domain from which the Other reveals themselves. Exteriority becomes a practical reality when the Other presents themselves as the negativity of the system, when they 'explode' and show their face and their rights. Dussel says that the face of the Other (the *mestizo*, the African slave etc.), which is personified by the people, it is an 'explosion' of a different history, "it is a face of the gender, generation, social class, nation, cultural group, period in history"⁴¹. A good example is provided by the autobiographical work of Rigoberta Menchú⁴², Guatemalan Maya Indian, where Western modernity is acutely criticised. The 1992 Nobel Peace Prize winner begins her book thus: "My name is Rigoberta Menchú. I am twenty three years old. This is my testimony. I have not learned it from a book nor did I found out myself [...] My story is the story of all poor Guatemalans. My personal experience is the reality of all people"⁴³.

CONCLUSIONS

J. Kieniewicz defines colonialism as a "complex of factors which cause the subordinated society to lose the capacity of autonomous development and also to adopt the vision of the world created by an alien dominant system"⁴⁴. However, one should ask whether in the context of relations between Latin American and African societies and their former metropolises one may speak about a shared experience of colonialism? It seems that the differences are evident. The French approach to the heritage of colonialism displays a visible primacy of politics over culture. This is borne out for instance by the aforementioned project of a bill obligating teachers to pass on knowledge about the positive role of colonialism exclusively, or by Nicolas Sarkozy's attitude. The final example is offered by the designs of the French Football Federation to limit the recruitment of descendants of people from former colonies to football schools and the French national team. As may be seen, despite the 50 years that have elapsed since Fanon, racism is still alive in the country on the Seine. Meanwhile,

⁴¹ E. Dussel, *Filosofía de la liberación*, p. 59.

⁴² R. Menchú, *Mi nombre es Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia*, México 1984.

⁴³ *Ibidem*, p. 1.

⁴⁴ J. Kieniewicz, *Ekspansja, cywilizacja, kolonializm*, Warszawa 2008, p. 120.

in Spain, one observes a primacy of culture over politics. From the very outset, Spain implanted its language, culture and tradition in the seized colonies. This forged a strong bond between the metropolis and the colonies, which has lasted until the present day. Almost two centuries from the decolonisation of America, Spain is still present in the life of its former colonies. It participates not only in the Iberian-American summits, but also acts in the interest of Latin American states on the international scene. It should be emphasized that when Spain decided to withdraw forces deployed to Iraq, Latin American countries immediately followed suit. It seems that of all countries that possessed colonial empires, Spain renders most assistance to its former colonies in overcoming the post-colonial burden.

Perhaps the differences should be accounted for by the diverse origins of Spanish and French colonialism. Colonisation of the Latin America was a direct aftermath of the voyages of discoverers. Church was a key institution in the colonisation process and today the region is considered a bastion of world Catholicism. French colonisation differs in the essentials. France, which already in the 16th century preferred to fraternise with Turkey against Christian states, contributed greatly to the downfall of Christian unity. Therefore, unlike the Spanish one, French colonial expansion was not motivated by the evangelisation mission. The incentive lay strictly in the political and economic expedient.

Filip Kubiacyk

**RASIZM I PRZEMOC. WIZERUNEK CZŁOWIEKA SKOLONIZOWANEGO
W OCZACH FRANTZA FANONA I ENRIQUE DUSSELA**

Streszczenie

Kolonializm w sposób szczególnie odcisnął swoje piętno na losach świata. Kondycja społeczeństw zamieszkujących dawne kolonie europejskie jest bezpośrednim owocem kontaktu Europa — reszta świata, który, choć w swoich założeniach opierał się na chlubnych przesłankach i szczytnych ideach (cywilizowanie „dzikich”, chrystianizacja, niesienie pomocy), miał także swoją ciemną stronę. Konstytuują ją przede wszystkim dwa fenomeny władzy: rasizm i przemoc. Autor artykułu, analizując prace Frantza Fanona i Enrique Dussela, pokazuje, w jaki sposób Francuzi i Hiszpanie odwołując się do tych dwu kategorii, próbowali zbudować swoje kolonialne społeczeństwa z wszystkimi tego konsekwencjami. Fanon, opisując kolonizację jako fenomen przemocy, jego jądro

upatrywał właśnie w rasizmie. Pochodzący z Martyniki pisarz pokazuje, jak kultura europejska rościła sobie prawo do reprezentowania kultur tubylczych w byłych koloniach francuskich, zwłaszcza na Antylach. W tym kontekście autor artykułu położył szczególny nacisk na zbadanie fenomenu dwóch światów — białego i czarnego — według określenia Fanona. Chodzi o mechanizmy, za pomocą których biały człowiek kreował człowieka o czarnym kolorze skóry, powodując, że ten wyrzekając się swojej rasy, chciał zmienić się w „nowego białego”. Autor dowodzi, że Francuzi, kolonizując niejako „poprzez ciało”, doprowadzali do swoistego zawieszenia międzykulturowego między Europejczykiem a tubylcem. Z kolei odwołanie się do prac Dussela pokazuje, że w roku 1492 Ameryka została „zakryta” przez Europę uosabianą wówczas przez Hiszpanów. W ten sposób cały projekt kolonizacji Ameryki został ufundowany na tzw. micie nowoczesności polegającym na uczynieniu z ofiar (ludów prekolumbijskich) winnych, a z oprawców stosujących przemoc (Hiszpanów) niewinnych. Autor analizuje argumenty, które w opinii argentyńskiego filozofa służyły Europejczykom do opisywania i kategoryzowania Nowego Świata (ewangelizacja, idea Ameryki jako utopii Europy, idea wojny sprawiedliwej etc.), a które w większości nie były niczym innym, jak usprawiedliwianiem fenomenu przemocy aplikowanej przez Europejczyków ludom i kulturom nieeuropejskim. W konkluzji autor pokusił się o porównanie hiszpańskiej i francuskiej wizji kolonizacji, zwłaszcza w kontekście zmagania się ze swoją postkolonialnością przez społeczeństwa Ameryki Łacińskiej i francuskojęzycznej części Afryki.