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The Colonization of the Future (Ateities kolonizavimas)

Santrauka. Pagrindinė šio straipsnio idėja yra ta, kad pasaulis, įskaitant ateities dimensiją, patiria kolonizaciją kaip tęstinį procesą. Kalbant apibendrintai, tai rodo, jog žmonės išleidžia iš rankų savo patyrimo kontrolę. Kalbant Marxo terminais, jie susvetimėja ir praranda pasitikėjimą savimi šiame grėsmingame pasaulyje.

Būti postkolonializmo būklėje – tolygu siekti, kad žmonės įgytų gebėjimus, kurie jiems padėtų susigrąžinti istoriją. Užtuot vergavę istorijai ir socialinėms sąlygoms jie turi išgalių kurti save ir savo pačių aplinką. Kad pasipriešinti kolonizacijai, reikia daugiau utopinių idėjų. Priešingai negu teigia daugelis kritikų, utopija nėra nei iracionali, nei žadinanti fantazijas. Utopinio mąstymo paskirtis – išvengti pavojaus, kurį kelia įprasti socialinės tikrovės vaizdiniai.

Keywords: *colonization, history, rationalization, utopianism.*

Pagrindiniai žodžiai: *kolonizacija, istorija, racionalizacija, utopizmas.*

1. Introduction

Central to this paper is the idea that the world, including the future, is in the process of being colonized. In general, what this means is that persons do not have control of their experiences. In terms supplied by Marx (1973), they are alienated and lost in a threatening world. For example, neither the economy nor culture seems to have any relationship to their desires. But different from Weber's notion of increasing rationalization, this problem is not related merely to the appearance of more rules and regulations.

Yet is there really anything new about a discussion of alienation? Some critics, although they are mostly Marxists, claim that

capitalism is the source of this ailment. In this case, workers are trapped in a cycle of production where they are treated as a resource—"labor power"—that is purchased at the lowest possible price. In this regard, these persons are transformed into commodities and lose their humanity.

Other writers argue that alienation is a product of modernity. As Weber described (1978), the increasing rationalization of the world leads to a situation where anything that cannot be readily quantified and objectified is diminished in importance. Within this context, personal creativity represents a style of uncertainty that must be constrained. And in

the end, the life is squeezed out of most activities.

According to several writers, located at El Departamento Ecuménico de Investigaciones (DEI) in Costa Rica, a confluence of these factors is operating nowadays to create alienation. Particularly important in their work is how the market is described. In typical Marxist fashion, rules and definitions are assumed to be imposed on the masses through the exercise of power by the privileged classes. Behind a façade of economic laws and rationality lurks the desire for social enslavement and economic advantage (Sung, 1989).

But others argue, such as Franz Hinkelammert (1991), that this matter is not so simple. Without a doubt the market fosters alienation. What is debatable, however, is how control and the accompanying dehumanization are exerted. Most of the writers associated with DEI contend that the market conceals the abuse of power through the creation of an elaborate ideology. Through a strange mixture of science, economics, and morality, for example, the market becomes a neutral device that is perceived to benefit all of humanity.

In some ways, Foucault's (1978) thesis on "micro-power" is operative in this description of social control. Through the use of symbols that are twisted to appear objective, and thus universal, control is imposed in an allegedly benign or apolitical manner. But this mode of control has been extended far beyond interpersonal discourse. In today's world, the influence of the market has infiltrated every relationship, even those at the institutional level.

In view of this turn of events, Hinkelammert (2002) and Serrano (1995) have referred to the contemporary world as a "Total Market." Their point is that the market, due to the alleged neutrality and universality of this device, has penetrated every aspect of social and cultural life. A culture of the market, in other words, has become prevalent and defines the value of most events and behavior. And as might be expected, anything that does not fit neatly into the algorithm of supply and demand is diminished in importance.

As a result of this maneuver, social control is made to appear neutral, even rational. After all, most persons fail to see the exercise of power as influencing their choices of a career or education. For example, students select their courses in the hope of acquiring the "cultural capital" necessary for them to become marketable. Behaving in such a manner is simply rational and makes good economic sense. In a very appealing way, questions about the exploitative side of capitalism are concealed systematically behind claims about economic cycles and market discipline.

Part of this control, notes Hinkelammert and his colleagues, is the colonization of the future. What is noteworthy about this insight is that traditionally the future is linked to hope and renewal. But if the future cannot offer alternatives, and merely recapitulates the past, social change is unlikely and traditional institutional arrangements will go unchallenged. In effect, persons will continue to face a market that dictates current policies and practices, in addition to what is feasible in the future.

The problem is that Hinkelammert simply suggests that the influence of the market has been extended to infinity. The scholars as DEI have not discussed, in any appreciable detail, how the philosophical principles essential to substantiating the market have undermined the future. The goal of this discussion is to examine these ideas.

2. The Colonization Thesis

Colonization has a long history. And in some quarters a postcolonial phase of development is assumed to have been reached (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, 1999). At the heart of the colonial debate, however, are the issues of agency and social control. In fact, Mkandawire (2005) declares that basic to colonization is the elimination of any agency on the part of the colonized. Central to this history, in other words, has been the attempt made by various European societies to expropriate the riches of their colonies, which have been located often in Africa, Asia, or Latin America. And as might be expected, this colonial history has been quite violent.

A vital part of the colonization process is the gradual inferiorization of the colonial society (Fanon, 1963; Memmi, 1991). According to the standard scenario, the colonizer is portrayed as bringing civilization to foreign lands. These places, accordingly, are presumed to be backward and incapable of advancing through their own efforts. Science and religion, for example, have been invoked regularly to rationalize this inferiority. But as a reward for their diligence and benevolence, the colonizers are permitted to transfer syste-

matically the wealth of these colonies to the so-called home countries.

As is clear from history, this inferiorization process is quite brutal. Theories are proposed that undermine the populations and cultures of colonial societies. These persons are described to reside, for example, at the lower levels of the evolutionary scale, and thus lack intelligence, morality, and other important traits. Additionally, this inferiorization is reinforced through practices that are often cruel and degrading. Simply stated, the inhabitants of colonies are identified as sub-human and are treated accordingly.

So, when Habermas (1975) began his discussion of colonization, the use of this term conveyed a very negative image. As a result of the asymmetrical link that exists between the system and the life-world, particularly in modern societies, Habermas maintains that persons are estranged from their experiences and conceptions of reality. In other words, how they define themselves and their social relationships is criticized and rendered insignificant. Accordingly, to use Habermas' language, the "life-world" of persons is colonized.

Clearly Habermas is describing alienation, although with new terminology. The term life-world, or *Lebenswelt*, is not a traditional part of the Marxist lexicon, but was popularized by Edmund Husserl (1970) and his followers. Habermas is borrowing from phenomenology, and by doing so is illustrating the political side of a school of thought that is treated typically as devoid of politics.

What is Habermas saying when he declares that the life-world is on the verge of co-

lonization? In the work of Husserl and other phenomenologists, the life-world refers to the realm inhabited by persons that is constituted by their values, beliefs, and experiences. Because consciousness is always conscious of something, writes Husserl (1964), knowledge and order are not autonomous; indeed, conscious is active and penetrates everything that is known. Social reality, therefore, should not be confronted as an objective force, because everyday existence is constituted through individual and collective action. The life-world, in short, embodies the decisions made by persons that differentiate reality from illusion.

Clearly when Habermas says that the world is being colonized he is acknowledging a violent process. Without a doubt, the world is being intentionally cleansed of the existential texture that persons have invented. But he is also suggesting, contrary to the standard rendition of colonialism, that this process does not necessarily take the form of overt attacks. As is illustrated by history, the life-world can be appropriated through a violent means, such as when the cultural heritage of a society is confiscated and destroyed. Nonetheless, the colonization that Habermas has in mind is equally damaging, but is much more subtle. How citizens constitute the social world is being overshadowed by structures and systems—so-called external forces—that redefine persons and their relationships.

In point of fact, Bourdieu (1992) refers to the colonization of the life-world as “symbolic violence.” The assumption is that this mode of domination is quite destructive, but is implemented through a sophisticated means that is not necessarily confrontational. Through the

juxtaposition of symbols, and the accompanying portrayal of reality, persons are led to believe that they do not have a significant role in the construction of individual and social meanings and their institutionalization. The life-world is thus reified and transformed into a realm comprised of autonomous objects and events. The experiences of persons, accordingly, become their adversary.

Bourdieu, additionally, calls this style of reification misperception. His point is that persons are alienated, but only in the last resort through the usual crude political confrontations and manipulation. Through symbolic violence, persons actually participate, and thus are complicit, in their alienation. In other words, they become convinced that their involvement in the construction of reality is unnecessary, ineffective, and, possibly, irrational. Therefore, they relinquish, often willingly, control of their life-worlds, and thus their existential projects.

3. Colonization and the Future

The market is sustained by a particular mode of legitimacy that supports colonization of all sorts, even of the future. Some proponents of the current phase of globalization, for example, claim that the market is a product of both long and short-term cycles of economic evolution. Others simply propose that markets reflect deep-seated human tendencies, or bring to fruition the rationality witnessed in natural and social laws. In any case, markets are the product of fundamental principles that pervade humanity and justify this mechanism of exchange.

Similar to other products of the “first philosophy” practiced in the West, the market has almost unquestioned legitimacy. In this regard, Harvey Cox (1999) writes that the market has been accorded, in some circles, the status usually accorded to a god. Whereas Plato introduced his Ideas to sustain knowledge and morality, the market is reinforced by a similar abstraction. That is, history or basic rationality is presumed to justify the operation of this device.

Nonetheless, how does this ontology affect the future? The essential message at this juncture is that the future is not within human control. In an almost deterministic manner, the future, similar to the market, is an outgrowth of primordial tendencies that are unaffected by volition. A functional economy without markets, for example, is announced to be impossible and utopian. Likewise, any talk about creating the future makes little sense and should not be pursued. Only those who are irresponsible or unruly would not heed this advice. That persons can invent the future is merely an illusion based on outmoded mythology.

Reasonable and productive persons, in the modern world, have abandoned these illusions. As a group, they are now much more rational. What this idea means in this context is that mature and intelligent persons adjust to historical demands. They do not attack windmills, so to speak, but learn how to adapt effectively to economic and other institutional imperatives. Whatever the future delivers will provide challenges that skilled and resourceful persons can overcome. But in the end, the ability to adapt is the

measure of a person or group’s intelligence or creativity.

In daily affairs, this assimilation is manifested in politics that becomes very pragmatic. In this sense, rapid changes are eschewed, while politicians or policy makers strive to tinker with the prevailing social system. Consequently, any proposals that envision an alternative economic or political system are labeled idealistic or futuristic and dismissed.

As a result of this confluence of ideas, the future is colonized. First, the future has a source that nobody can control. Specifically, history evolves and produces changes that persons must confront. Reminiscent of Hegel, history has a destiny that human action does not influence to any serious degree. The future, therefore, is best approached through hope or prayer. Any other type of intervention is futile and indicative of megalomania.

And second, given the intimate relationship between history and the future, persons are left with few options. Those who are rational or prudent do not challenge fate or destiny. The question that is often raised is: How can they possibly know what is best for humanity? This is Hayek’s response to social planners. Such a realization, additionally, may improve the overall mental health of a society. Specifically, persons will not be so foolish to believe that everyday or average persons can change the course of history. Only exceptional individuals or national heroes, for example, are capable of such feats. Hence the masses are excluded as a viable agent of history and pacified.

4. A World without Hope

When history is treated as autonomous, the future is destroyed in a manner reminiscent of early colonization. How persons might imagine the future, for example, is assumed to be nothing but a fantasy. This dream, moreover, can never be realized! And those who express these visions are likely labeled as unsound, wacky idealists and socially marginalized. At other times they may be considered dangerous revolutionaries. As a result, persons become dominated by the future; the future arrives and they have no alternative recourse.

In this way, persons are actually dominated by the future. As the future emerges, and is likely welcomed by the powerful social classes, any serious opposition is discouraged. Through the juxtaposition of history and the contingent masses, criticism is revealed to be uninformed and frivolous, but dangerous. The future thus appears unscathed and fully rationalized, and any critique is successfully sequestered. In the mid-1960s, Herbert Marcuse (1964) referred to the resulting condition as a “one-dimensional” world. How could a fully rationalized product of history be anything other than reasonable, to paraphrase Hegel?

All the time, however, this scenario is based on a faulty premise. Particularly noteworthy, and because of the general acceptance of dualism, history is treated as autonomous, and thus is capable of delivering a future that reflects the desires of humanity. In other words, there is nothing biased about history. The possibility that the will of a parti-

cular class of persons, for example, might be hiding behind claims about universality and necessity is not given any serious consideration. Because history is universal—the universal and the particular are part of a single, abstract historical movement—a perfectly legitimate future is presumed to be accessible to everyone.

In a way, this form of domination is similar to what Derrida (1978) has in mind with his notion of “archē-violence.” Such cruelty originates from a foundational principle and thus is profound. The key shortcoming of Derrida’s portrayal of this power is that he focuses primarily on interpersonal relationships. Hence any resulting domination is a personal issue, contingent, and available for critique.

The colonization of the future, however, originates from a thoroughly abstract principle, or history, and is not contingent. And anyone who applies the rules or classificatory schemes that originate from history is not exhibiting bias, but is simply following historical or institutional demands. Accordingly, those who justify their actions through recourse to these abstractions are often not held accountable for their actions, since they claim regularly they were merely adhering to the law or governmental decrees.

Eventually, however, persons may begin to recognize that they are facing an unrelenting march of history; history, in fact, is a juggernaut. And as a consequence of this realization, the future becomes devoid of hope. At this juncture, hope is understood in the manner intended by Ernst Bloch (1986). Most important about his description

is that persons feel enthusiastic about the future when they can witness directly how their dreams and ambitions might be fulfilled. This insight is possible, however, only when the future is imagined to be contingent, and a crack is recognized to exist in the facade of determinism.

True hope, according to Bloch, is not merely psychological but ontological. The inability to close history completely, in other words, is central to the preservation of hope. The success of colonization, on the other hand, depends on the inability of persons to view themselves and their prospects in a manner different from the past. In sum, colonization requires that the past, or history, continue uninterrupted.

5. An Open Future

Some critics contend that civilization has now entered the postcolonial period. What this designation means is that colonization has ended—although various writers dispute this claim—and former colonies are now free to define themselves and their history (Loomba, 2005). But certainly important is that post-coloniality is not simply another stage of history. The rationale for this conclusion is quite simple: that is, if this were the case, persons would merely be delivered to another development phase without any critical reflection.

Karl Marx faced a similar dilemma when he assessed the impact of Hegel's rendition of history on the prospects of a revolution originating from the proletariat. In this regard, Marx wanted the working class to become the

new agents of history, foment a revolution, and remake the world. What he believed, in short, is that these exploited persons should be able to redefine themselves in their own image. This outcome is only possible, according to Marx, through the critical reflection that Hegel's philosophy of history denies. Hegel, after all, understood events and identities to the outcome of an abstract, evolutionary process.

Persons can become revolutionary in the sense intended by Marx only when history is recognized to embody human *praxis*. In this sense, history does not produce events, but represents the struggle of persons to meet their needs and fulfill their desires. Stated differently, history does not guarantee or deliver anything; contrary to Hegel's thesis, history does not possess an ethereal *telos*.

Again to cite Marx, he wants persons to appreciate that they make history, although not always under conditions of their own choosing. Although events may appear to be predetermined, due to the effects of ideology or so-called structural imperatives, the working classes are the agents rather than the products of change. What Marx is saying in more contemporary parlance is that the dualism that has justified the autonomy of history, and the colonization of many societies, is sustained by an illusion that is now defunct. The source of history is not abstract ideas, in the Hegelian sense, but the everyday struggles and conflicts that are a part of persons trying to create an identity and a future for themselves. In this regard, Marx viewed himself to be a materialist.

To be post-colonial, accordingly, means that persons have gained the insight necessary to retrieve history. Rather than enslaved by history, and thus determined *a priori* by social conditions, they are able to create themselves and new institutional arrangements. They are not restricted by history, and thus unable to invent the future, but can begin to rethink radically about the nature of collective identity and social integration. Only in this manner can the remnants of colonization be abandoned.

6. Conclusion

In order to counteract colonization, what is needed is more utopian thought. Contrary to what many critics may believe, utopianism is neither irrational nor indicative of fantasy. Central to utopian thinking, instead, is a refusal to be entrapped in the traditional portrayal of social reality (Casaldàliga, 1987).

Rather than delivered by history, utopians argue that the past, and thus the future, represents merely a specific construction of reality. What is considered to be traditional, therefore, is simply one possibility among others. Nonetheless, through ideology and the exercise of power, and sometimes consensus, this version of reality has come to be accepted as natural and, possibly, rational.

Hence a break with a traditional perspective does not signal automatically the onset of disaster. All that is occurring, according to utopians, is a shift in orientation, with no broader implications. For this reason, utopians are not afraid to seize history and propose an alternative vision of the future. Although

a proposal may be completely different from the past, or never realized successfully before, utopians are not deterred. New perspectives have to be dealt with on their own merits, rather than in terms of criteria that were acceptable or normal in the past, but perhaps irrelevant to the future. Stated simply, the future is something new.

In this regard, utopians are not necessarily pragmatic and limited to proposing piecemeal changes. In many ways, because of their disregard for history, they are adventurous and scary. They want to make history, instead of adhering to the prevailing norms. Obviously such a radical stance is needed to end colonialism! History must be rethought, possibly in ways never before imagined, if more inclusive or fair institutions are going to be created.

Those who benefit from the prevailing institutional arrangements may complain that any deviation from tradition is going to destroy society. Such changes are simply irrational and irresponsible, they may declare. But utopians argue that there is no ontological basis for these claims. Their position is that the past represents certain interests, and thus the future can embody other, possibly different perspectives. So, if these novel changes are desired, by the masses, for example, these options are not automatically precluded from history.

In order to avoid the colonization of the future, this insight of the utopians is very important. Specifically, history is always the product of some interests, and therefore the appearance of new visions does not violate this principle. The utopians contend, accor-

dingly, that the future belongs to those who are daring enough to reinvent their destiny. In today's world where abstract imperatives—

mostly inspired by the economy—dominate the social and political scene, this advice might prove to be quite liberating.

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ABSTRACT

Central to this paper is the idea that the world, including the future, is in the process of being colonized. In general, what this means is that persons do not have control of their experiences. In terms supplied by Marx, they are alienated and lost in a threatening world.

To be post-colonial means that persons have gained the insight necessary to retrieve history. Rather than enslaved by history, and thus determined a priori by social conditions, they are able to create themselves and new institutional arrangements. They are not restricted by history, and thus unable to invent the future, but can begin to rethink radically about the nature of collective identity and social integration. Only in this manner can the remnants of colonization be abandoned.

In order to counteract colonization, what is needed is more utopian thought. Contrary to what many critics may believe, utopianism is neither irrational nor indicative of fantasy. Central to utopian thinking, instead, is a refusal to be entrapped in the traditional portrayal of social reality.

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