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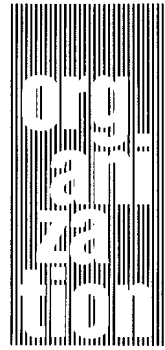
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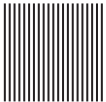
# Globalization, Organization and the Ethics of Liberation

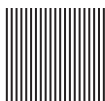
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**Abstract.** *The paper discusses three related issues that have a growing importance in the light of current developments in the contemporary debates around modernity and its future. These are globalization, organization and the ethics of liberation. The first section recognizes the specific meaning of globalization when it is confronted with the prevailing Eurocentrism. The result should be a critical posture that understands the world as a system that goes far beyond Europe. The second section discusses the nature of the problems of organization related to globalization. The organization of human activities related to production and commerce required a permanent process of 'simplification'. This was achieved by means of the 'rationalization' of the world of life in all its economic, political, cultural and religious subsystems. One of its undeniable consequences has been the production of victims and exclusion, proving the asymmetrical organization of 'modern' life. The final section, centred in the ethics of liberation, will allow us to clarify the elements and determinants for the transformation of this modern condition to guarantee the production, reproduction and development of life. A new type of theoretical possibility emerges to think of the world as a trans-modern organization of life characterized by its plurality, diversity and reasonability. **Key words.** alterity; colonization; ethics of liberation; eurocentrism; exclusion; globalization; symmetric participation; transformative praxis; victims*





## **Introduction: A Crucial Question**

I should begin by mentioning three factors which influence, to some degree, the event in which we are taking part. They are related to some of the ideas I wish to share with you. The first has to do with the place we are in, the State of Oaxaca, the birthplace of the Mixtec and Zapotec cultures and the home of the Dominican convent of Santo Domingo. The construction of the latter began in the 16th Century; exactly at the same moment, we will argue, as the beginning of Modernity.<sup>1</sup> I mean to say, of course, the invention of America and the subsequent colonial invasion.

The second aspect is related to the geographical area of the group that has called this meeting. It is a region that competes, day after day, against modern Western nations, directed nowadays from Washington.<sup>2</sup> We are of course referring to those of the Asian Pacific area. Here, we have a mixture of many diverse cultures which shaped the destiny of the first millennium through the achievements of a number of distinguished races and their cultural practices. Some of these were ignored or forgotten by the emerging modern Europe which had in mind only a supposed civilizing project.

When positioning them in prehistory, it was considered that the cultures and values represented by the Asian Pacific societies had not reached the state of 'civilization'. This was because the Europeans considered themselves the legitimate heirs of the age of 'Reason', and they reserved this idea for themselves during a substantial part of the second millennium. Nevertheless, the last decades of the 20th Century have revealed, and this is indisputable, the strategic role oriental nations are playing in redefining the historical tendency of the planet. Under the shadow of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, in the only way the Occidentals found to reassert their colonial vocation on the world, Japan rose again. From the lands of the rising sun, the Japanese, very promptly, showed their abilities to assimilate, appropriate and transform occidental technology. Moreover, they created their own and conquered enormous markets. However, this did not imply the renunciation of their own values, forms of organization, collaboration and life style.

After Japan, other countries such as Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia, South Korea, Thailand, the Philippines and Indonesia followed eagerly. Each of these had its own history and cultural peculiarities. Other countries in the region, such as India or Vietnam, have also demonstrated their tremendous potential. China is now writing the most recent chapter in this story of tigers and dragons, allowing us to see that the third millennium will create spaces in which different races and religions throughout the planet will unite to put limits on Modernity. Eurocentrism has refused to accept that its civilizing project is leading us to the destruction of the ecology of the planet along with the annihilation of humankind. Hence, the only way out is to seek, in the world's societies including Europe, a capacity to live with otherness or difference



(alterity). This impulse which is seen in the Asian Pacific is also providing the Arab world, Latin America and African Nations with the possibility of creating a multipolar or *transmodern* cultural world, which protects life and encourages humans to live together instead of simply facilitating profit, private appropriations and personal benefits.

The third factor that deserves to be mentioned is that this is an academic gathering which sets out to analyse the organization of modernity and yet incorporate certain *critical approaches* which question the received ideas in this area. It is interesting that some of the papers prepared for this encounter show the influence of philosophers such as Foucault, Derrida or Deleuze, thinkers that have pointed out the inconsistencies in the ideologies of the Modern. Moreover, we must underline the fact that they have done so from the inside, that is to say, from the fruitfulness of these ideas as well as from the limitations that such a line of thought supposes. This, without a doubt, is significant but, as will be explained later, limited in itself because it brings with it the disadvantages inherent to any point of view which remains enclosed within a particular paradigm.

To avoid any possible self satisfaction of those who consider themselves intellectual critics, I must add one last thing. These papers show clearly how Eurocentrism has not developed solely in the European Centre or the United States. It also includes nations of very similar imperial vocation such as Australia and New Zealand from the Asian Pacific area. This ideology has also been cultivated in other regions of the planet such as certain African, Asian and (Latin) American countries. Despite the fact that plenty of the researchers in the colonized countries consider themselves proud critical (or advanced) thinkers, vary rarely do they recognize the extent to which they are Eurocentric even though they are not European. This is a crucial question and avoiding it is unforgivable. This shows the limitations of the critical postures mentioned before. In other words, it shows the confusion of some of these researchers.

This is, in fact, another angle of the 'conquest'. Their minds have been colonized to such an extent that their idea of the 'other' is the mirror image of the European or American identity. This problem shows the need to work on a second order criticism. This should not be satisfied with showing the fallacies of Eurocentrism when writing the 'history' of humanity. It must seek the limitations that accompany all critical thought which does not question the validity of the 'universal history' written from the point of view of the Centre.

For this, it is necessary to acknowledge that the planetary dimension is far larger than the European and American concept of 'world'. Furthermore, when we locate ourselves somewhere else, it should be possible to understand the history of the world from a different perspective. This means that there is the need for an alternative history that emerges from the experience of the victims: the ideas of those who have been invaded and dominated and who have not had the chance to express



themselves. Gradually, they are starting to raise their voices because they want to make their presence felt and have their own ideas. Here in Mexico, a clear example would be the Mayan rebellion in the state of Chiapas. There, indigenous communities that had been practically forgotten and existed basically only in [official] history text books and museums, regained visibility by raising their voices after years of living in silence.<sup>3</sup>

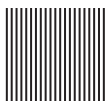
In this order of ideas, what should be emphasized, because it is impossible to set out every detail in such a brief space, are the arguments and questions concerning three related issues that have a growing importance in the light of current developments in the contemporary debates on the modern world. These are: *globalization*, *organization*<sup>4</sup> and the *ethics of liberation*, which comprise three fundamental aspects necessary for understanding modernity and its future.

First, what will be discussed is the specific meaning that globalization acquires when it is confronted with the prevailing Eurocentrism. The result should be a critical posture which understands the world as a system that goes far beyond Europe. This will enable us to discuss the second point, which is the nature of the problems of organization related to globalization. Finally, the ethics of liberation will allow us to bring both factors together and discuss the elements and determinations that permit their transformation.<sup>5</sup> It may be that these ideas will serve as a useful tool to help stimulate debate about some of the issues of organization of the Modern world, its evolution and its future.

## **Globalization Seen in the Context of the Last 500 Years**

To understand the meaning of globalization, it may be useful to examine one of the issues mentioned earlier. To what extent are we Eurocentric even if we are not European? If we become conscious that our thought is trapped in this ideology, we enable ourselves to recognize the limitations of that which the 'centre' calls globalization. At the same time, we allow ourselves the possibility of understanding it from a different perspective, that is to say, acknowledging that globalization means something else when it is seen from different points of view, such as those of the invaded territories and the victims.

In order to understand globalization, it is indispensable to understand that we are dealing with a historical process of asymmetric exchanges inasmuch as they are economic, political and cultural interests that did not start recently. Globalization takes us back to the 16th Century. This was the starting point of so-called 'Western civilization'. It deals with the construction of what is usually called 'Modernity', a phenomenon that denotes the cultural centrality of Europe from the moment when America was discovered (1492). In other words, to speak plainly, since the European invasion of the Amerindian cultures; above all that of Mexico in 1519 and Peru in 1529.



In this sense, understanding globalization leads us inevitably back to the discussion of the origins and meaning of Modernity. What attracts our attention is that many academics are already talking of 'post-modernity' when we have not yet solved the matter of Modernity. It seems clear that, in order to understand the 'post-' of Modernity, we need to understand what it is and when it started.

Let us add that the construction of Modernity is not always identified clearly as the convergence of three related processes which form a unity. Firstly, we find the emergence of *capitalism* as an economic and civilizing system for which many people consider that there is no alternative. With the invasion of America, Europe accumulated an enormous amount of resources that gave it a 'relative advantage' against other civilizations with larger populations and, technically speaking, with more or less the same levels of progress that Europe had during the Renaissance. China is a good example. Eventually, this led to the formation of capitalism.

Secondly, the *colonization* that Latin America suffered for three centuries, and that Africa and some Asian countries suffered from the 19th Century, must be mentioned. Europe integrated a colonial world from which there has only been a partial emancipation through the political independence of these nations, that is, their legal foundations as independent States. Nevertheless, they are kept in subordination by means of economic, technological and military power.

Finally, not only do we have *Eurocentrism*, nowadays, but we also have *Americanocentrism* represented in an exemplary manner by Samuel Huntington, with an ideological fireworks display that aims to consolidate the predominance of the civilizing occidental project. What we mean by this is that, in order to understand Modernity, we need to discuss capitalism, colonization and Eurocentrism as processes that lend it their specific historical content (Dussel, 2001b). In all, understanding globalization demands a critical posture concerning the dominant explanations of Modernity and its associated processes. To appreciate this, there is no better example than that of G. W. F. Hegel (1770–1831).

### ***Eurocentric Modernity***

Hegel taught in Berlin from 1818 until the time of his death. During those thirteen years, this Prussian city, which was nonetheless non-imperial and had no colonies, consolidated itself as the cultural centre of Europe. The University was renovated according to the Humboldt system (1809), in which the teacher also became a researcher. Eventually, other universities would imitate this system in Europe and the United States. Hegel represents a new kind of figure in the university who unites teaching and investigation. He shows himself to be a 'maker' of history and a legitimate interpreter of the future of the world.

To identify the process that takes Europe to the centre of 'universal history', surpassing the Ottoman–Muslim and Chinese world, as a result of the technological advances that were produced by the Industrial



revolution, is a task for philosophy. Hegel considered that history developed in consecutive stages. Hence, Antiquity is the background for the Middle Ages and these are considered the preparation for the Modern age. This modernity of Europe is frequently seen as the *only* modernity. The key historical events that would explain the European 'superiority' can be traced back to the Italian Renaissance, the protestant reformation and the German *Aufklärung*, and culminate with the French Revolution and, in the political sphere, the English Parliament.

As one can appreciate, the historical road climbs from the Mediterranean towards northern Europe, spreads out in the centre and then goes east. What should be pointed out is that, in this Eurocentric vision, the [only existing] Modernity excludes Spain and, evidently, Latin America which is no more than a colony of Spain and which, during the 17th Century, would be transformed into a semi-colonial zone of Europe. Hegel expresses this view point with absolute clarity when he affirms that Africa starts in the Pyrenees, thus leaving Spain out of Europe. This Eurocentric vision avoids taking into account that other Modernity which begins with the 'discovery' of America, an event that gave importance to Spain and Portugal in history for a brief moment.

It should be insisted that the Enlightenment, the ideology of the French Revolution and the Industrial Revolution are the origin and impulse of Modernity. Hence, this process which has taken place as a result of the activities of southern Europe, the invention and invasion of America, is nullified. In other words, the Eurocentric point of view 'forgets' very quickly that it was precisely the plundered resources of the colonies that have allowed the European splendour of the last 200 years.

In conclusion, Hegel took on the task of writing 'the' version of the history of Modernity, of organizing the deformed ideological history that we all studied at school. It is a Eurocentric point of view because it assumes Modernity is exclusively European. That is, that the starting point of the construction of Modernity is understood only as a result of intra-European phenomena and its later development only needs a European explanation. This uncouth and regional ideology is also found in Max Weber's analysis of 'rationality' and 'disenchantment', in Jürgen Habermas's theory of 'communicative action' and his 'discourse ethics' and thus consolidates the Eurocentrism which prevails today.

### ***Modernity Beyond Centre-Europe***

Against this Eurocentric history, which excludes Latin America and Spain, another point of view may be put forward. It is completely different and becomes even more significant when the city this conference is taking place in is taken into account. The city of Oaxaca keeps fresh the memory of the lands where the Zapotec culture established itself in the year 800 BC. Moreover, it was also the territory in which a magnificent colonial culture was developed from the 16th and 17th Centuries. This is marvellously represented by this Convent of Santo





Domingo which hosts us today. In this environment, it is inevitable to take into consideration the origins of this fantastic architecture and all that it evokes and represents in the history of the world. We are talking of a legacy of the 16th Century, long before the American pilgrims arrived (1620).

This other point of view concerning Modernity refuses to see Europe as all-inclusive, and is aimed at recovering a much wider vision by acknowledging Modernity as the culture of the European vision of the world, without granting it a superiority that it does not really have. Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, such superiority rested on the 'discovery' of *Amerindia* in 1492, which offered Europe a geopolitical, economical and cultural horizon from which it extracted enough potential to overcome, from the 18th Century onwards, the high Asian cultures. From this alternative vision of history, the real history of Oaxaca can be understood, and not the ideas of Hegel or his successors. Globalization began at least 500 years ago, when the system in which we live today began to be constructed.

What is most interesting is that there was no *World History* until Christopher Columbus landed on what he thought was Asia. Eventually, when the Europeans recognized their mistake, they started rewriting history with the *Invention of America*. Before this significant historical event, the empires or cultural systems coexisted, keeping a relatively local isolation. It was the Portuguese expansion in the 15th Century that allowed the planet to become 'the place' of the 'unique' 'World History'.

From this perspective, Spain is in reality the first modern nation. It is the State which unifies the peninsula. Through the Inquisition, a national consensus based on centralized and military power was created from above, which enabled it, among other things, to invade Granada. This was partly due to the *Gramática* of Antonio de Nebrija in 1492, and also to the Catholic Church which had already been brought under control by the State thanks to Cardinal Cisneros.<sup>6</sup> This inaugurates the first stage of Modernity. It matches the spread of mercantilism and goes on until the 18th Century. These three centuries are marked by the organization of modern life based on commerce. The silver mines of Potosí and Zacatecas, discovered between 1545 and 1546, allowed Spain to become the principal power in the Mediterranean by giving it enough wealth to defeat the Turkish at Lepanto, exactly 25 years after the discovery of the mines. From that moment on, the Atlantic surpasses in importance the Mediterranean and a wider world emerges.

This is why, from this point of view, the 'centrality' of Latin Europe in world history is also the *fundamental determiner of Modernity*. Other determiners are: the subjectivity of the constituents, private property, freedom of contract, and so on. The advances of the 17th Century can be attributed to the exemplary figures of Galileo (condemned in 1616), Bacon (who wrote his *Novum Organum* 1620) or Descartes (*Discourse on*





*Method* 1638) who are, in many ways, the fruit of a century and a half of Modernity. Such advances are effects and not, in the Eurocentric ideology, starting points. It is indeed another reason to explain why Holland (which emancipated itself from Spain in 1610), England and France continued the path that had been opened originally by Spain, Portugal and 'the Conquest'.

Thus starts the second stage of Modernity with the Industrial revolution and the Enlightenment in the 18th Century. This deepens and widens the achievements of this *other* Modernity, carried out in the 15th Century, which are not recognized by Eurocentrism. England takes the place of Spain as the dominant hegemonic power and assumes command of Modern Europe until the origins of Imperialism from 1879 to 1945. This *Modern Europe*, 'centre' of World History since 1492 makes, for the first time in history, all other cultures part of its 'periphery'.

### ***The Myth of Modernity***

It has already been pointed out that the Modernity of Western Europe, the one which originated with Amsterdam in Flanders, is always considered as the 'only existing' Modernity. It is sufficient to remember, as evidence for this, the interpretations of thinkers such as Sombart, Weber and, more recently, Habermas, not to mention a whole set of others that call themselves post-modern and are unable to recognize the real nature and origin of Modernity. It is easy to note here an oversimplification and a fallacy that hides the real meaning of modernity. Hence, the sense of crisis these thinkers have, translated into a conviction that Modernity has already finished, when in fact we are, of course, still living through it.

This is a narrative of Modernity which denies its real nature. Thus, Modernity can be understood and explained as the 'solution' to, or the overcoming of, the immaturity of humanity; fragmented and dispersed until then. That is to say, of a non-universal, non-global and non-planetary humanity that would find, in the superiority of European 'reason', the key to its development. This attitude supposes, nevertheless, the concealment and denial of the irrational and violent processes of the 'conquest'. It creates the figure of a 'just conquistador', who ensures the progress of his victims as the only way in which they can grow up into an adulthood different from the one they possess. That is to say, that the 'other', the conquered/dominated, finally turns into a copy of the 'modern' conquistador/dominator.

What is being discussed is the irrational use of violence that Eurocentric Modernity requires to enforce its domination. This process, which is described as 'development' and 'modernization', is justified in the following way. Modern civilization considers itself to be the most developed and therefore superior to all others, and this implies the universal but unconscious adoption of a Eurocentric ideology. Such an automatically assumed superiority can be translated into a moral requirement that implies the necessary development of primitive and barbaric



'others'. It is necessary to impose on them the form in which Europe has developed after its encounter with 'Reason'. However, when the barbarian opposes himself to the civilizing project, the moderns must exert violence on him to eliminate any obstacles, in other words: 'a justifiable colonial war'. This domination, which produces victims, is interpreted as an unavoidable affair that must be carried out as part of the cost that must be paid in order to achieve the progress associated with Modernity. Thus, to the modern, the barbarian is 'guilty' of opposing himself to the civilizing project, which allows Modernity to present itself not only as innocent, but also as freed from any guilt related to its victims.

If we want to unmask 'Modernity', it is necessary to reveal the fallacy of the myth of 'reason' by showing its other side. That is, violence always carried out and at the same time always denied. Moreover, it implies the recognition of the victims of this civilizing project as *innocent victims* capable of revealing the false innocence of 'Modernity' in its process of the conquest of the other. Revealing the obverse side of modernity is equivalent to showing 'difference' (alterity) as the free existence of the 'other'. Hence, the Modern world is a world of conquerors and conquered in which the innocence of the guilty was assumed and the guilt of the innocent (the conquered) was assured. With this, the injustice with which the civilizing project has been carried out for the past 500 years becomes obvious.

In summary, the arguments sketched out above allow us to restate our initial position: that globalization must be understood as a process in which world history has slowly been unified. Since the moment when the great American cultures were invaded, first the European Centre, and now North America as Centre, have constituted the world as their colony.

## **Organization, Two Centuries of 'Simplification'**

A different form of understanding globalization and the process of asymmetrical exchanges that has been going on for the past 500 years has been proposed here. This has now reached its third stage. The first, in which the Hispanic Modernity is not recognized, took us back to the invasion of Amerindia and halted its development. The second stage corresponds to the hegemonic Modernity, in which the European Centre confirmed itself as the axis of the world, and the existence of the 'other' is denied by imposing the 'European ego' as the only possible one. Finally, the third moment concerns a new cycle of globalization which has occurred since the collapse of the USSR in 1989. The United States has been trying to control the rest of the world by means of market and military forces as it reinvents everywhere else as its colony.

It is precisely during the second stage of Modernity, with the Industrial Revolution, when the *forms of organization* as we know them today were born. These permitted the development of civil services and management



systems allowing the simplification of the world and the *de facto* subordination of labour. Organization is associated with the new scientific paradigm represented by the Discourse on Method. This facilitated *efficiency*, the technological *feasibility* associated with economic utility and the *management* of an enormous world system in continuous expansion. We are talking about the past two centuries. The organization of human activities related to production and commerce required a process of *simplification*. This was achieved by means of the 'rationalization' of the world of life, that is, all its economic, political, cultural and religious subsystems.

Modern subjectivity is hence based on the Cartesian separation between the soul and the body. This implies that the body becomes only a machine that can be submitted to the horizon of accumulation. This Cartesian reality can rapidly be translated into the separation between the idea of work and its practice, between the design and the execution, on which the factory system is based. Thus, the conditions for the management of the material subordination of labour, when enclosed in instrumental reason—engineering, management and technical skills—guaranteed its disciplined management and control. In other words, it is also the organization of industrial production which Adam Smith pointed out in 1776. He acknowledged that the division of labour and technological development were the key to economic supremacy and political practicality. This was the beginning of the process of rationalization of organization during Modernity. It was later on perfected by the scientific administration of Frederick Taylor and the conveyor belt production lines of Henry Ford. Later still, it was extended to all society, reaching out from the factories to every aspect of human activity.

Ergo, the organization of Modernity implied the 'rationalization' of political life by means of civil services, of the capitalist company by means of scientific management and of daily affairs by Calvinist asceticism. Nevertheless, it also implied the disembodiment of subjectivity with its alienating effects on living labour—criticized by Marx—on human desires—analysed by Freud—and on the lack of ethics in all economic and political management. This latter area came to be understood solely as a combination of engineering techniques, the suppression of practical—communicative reason by instrumental reason, the imposition of prison discipline—analysed by Foucault—and the solipsistic individualism that denies community, among other things. These are only a few examples of aspects of life which became victims of the formal *simplification* of systems. This presents itself as apparently inevitable for the 'management' of the 'centrality' of the world which Europe found necessary to enforce.

To sum up, capitalism, liberalism, dualism (disembodied), instrumentalism (the technologies of instrumental reason), are the *effects* of the idea which assumed Europe to be the 'Centre' of the world. Such effects slowly constitute themselves as systems which end by becoming total.



Nothing escapes them because everything is organized. The instrumental rationality replaces the figure of the 'fair conquistador' in order to carry out the unrecognized violence of control by means of numbers. The quality of human life has been sacrificed to quantity, a proof of the irrationality of instrumental reason.

By means of this, capitalism, the mediator between exploitation and accumulation, transforms itself into a *formal and independent system* which, by the logic of its own existence, can destroy all human life on the planet. This is what Weber suspected, but in a limited way because he only recognized a part of the problem. He pointed out that rationalization is the apparently necessary mediation of a distorted and simplified (by means of instrumental reason) practical reality. The aim was to create something 'manageable' given the complexity of the enormous world system. This deals not only with the internal 'management' of Europe, but also, and above all, with the 'management' of the entire planet (from the centre to the periphery).

Thus, for Weber, the ends to be achieved are inevitably those of a given culture or an existing tradition, in this case, the European Centre. And, as such, these ends must be accepted. This is, hence, an irrational position inasmuch as it cannot give reasons based on ethical principles for or against the values or aims that have been 'given'. Thus, when deciding on ends which are alien to human decisions, the formal procedure of simplification to make the world more 'manageable' produces other formal and rationalized subsystems which are 'unaware' of their own limits in Modernity. These are systems that functionalism only recognized as deviations or pathological bureaucracies, but which in fact go further than the disturbance that their immediate effects cause on the production, reproduction and growth of human life.

This is the key point in the criticism of the kind of organization which goes beyond formal reason in its adaptation of means and ends. Understanding this is to comprehend, first of all, that the human cannot exist without community (thus showing the substantive irrationality found in the extreme division of labour by individualism). Secondly, that organization moulds human life in its material form. To be absolutely clear, every organization that menaces human life will eventually show, in its instrumental rationality, the irrationality of its ends and, in consequence, its ethical vacuum.

### The Ethics Of Liberation . . . The Future of Humanity

Until now, what has been proposed is a different way of understanding modernity. It is seen here as a process of globalization that started over 500 years ago, and has different forms of organization such as the processes of simplification that require the 'managing' of the entire planet and the non-recognition of the 'other'. We have yet to consider the ethical principles that might guide its transformation into a different and better world by confronting Eurocentrism. This means the recognition of



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the 'otherness' of our nations which have been integrated into the 'World' only in their postcolonial, peripheral and underdeveloped condition. The intention is to reflect on the ways in which globalization and its forms of organization can be transformed. To do this, some of the central ideas of my ethics of liberation will be considered (Dussel 1998, 2003b, 2003c).

This implies acknowledging that so-called global integration is in fact violent and exclusive. There is no place in it for millions of human beings who live unemployed, in poverty, in ignorance and excluded. These enormous contingents of human beings, which can already be found in the main geographical areas of Western Europe and the United States, do not take part in or benefit from any of the promises of globalization.

If there is any doubt about this, it must be remembered that, after 500 years of modern Europe, the *Human Development Report* of the United Nations (1992) indicated that the richest 20% of mankind (basically located in Western Europe, the United States and Japan) consume over 82% of the goods found on earth. On the other hand, the poorest 60% (found mostly in the 'periphery' from where the riches that permit this 'Modernity' were plundered) consumes only 5.8% of these goods. This concentration is unheard of in human history and it represents a structural unfairness on a world scale. Is this not the result of the Modernity Western Europe began and a consequence of its forms of organization based on instrumental reason?

In the end, we are dealing with an ethical problem related to the way we think of the world. This implies, of course, its forms of organization and the way it operates its systems of production, consumption and social life. That is, with the different ways in which society has been organized, supposedly with the aim of living better. Thinking of a different world, under different forms of organization implies thinking about aspects of the ethics of human action. On such a basis, we should be able to elaborate critical principles from which we can transform reality.

### ***The Aspects of Ethical Action***

Ethics can be considered under three headings. In the first place, ethics must adopt as a principle the life–death criterion. It must assume that ethical action ought to act normative on *the production, reproduction and development of the life of the community, of humans being*. This is related to the obvious and irrefutable fact that we are living beings. Human beings are material which has organized itself in order to guarantee its own life's reproduction and development. This is done by satisfying the basic material needs—economic, cultural, political, religious, aesthetic—of every individual.

Ergo, every human action and the forms of organization that depend on it should orient this universal material principle that assumes the



inescapable existence of human life. The reason seems to be clear: there is nothing that humans can do that can escape the universal and material horizon of preserving and developing life. Given this position, every form of organization should be built with the object of developing some dimension of human life, whatever form it may take.

If, instead of defending human life, the forms of organization give priority to the increase and appropriation of profit, then they will not pay attention to the material needs of human beings. The result will be exclusion, economic deprivation and political, cultural and libidinal deficiencies. They will also put the sustainability of the planet at risk. In this case, the very materiality of human life will be called into question. All this implies an ethical problem that it is impossible to ignore.

Profit is an over-riding priority that is justified by relating ends and means to the concept of 'efficiency'. This has been done for the past two centuries by means of abstract indicators, despite enormous costs and failures. When considering the problems of organization from the point of view of this abstraction based on rules and numbers, the effects on human life are ignored. Moreover, people act as if the point at issue was not really human life.

The figures in the report of the United Nations mentioned earlier lead us to recognize that the victims are to be found everywhere and that there can be no glimpse of a solution unless the dominant forms of human organization are modified. This would imply, necessarily, the modification of human relationships through work, social institutions and morality. Hence, instead of profit and personal benefit, the basic material imperative that should guide every organized human action would be the *defence of the life of the human individual*.

This leads us to a second aspect of organized human action: who decides on how we should develop life? This question takes us to a well-known discussion about the formal principles that allow decisions and cooperation among individuals. Should only a few take decisions, those who control the organization? Or should those who collectively produce and reproduce the organization with their work have a say? Further still, should individuals that are not directly involved but who are affected by the decisions of the organization be allowed to participate? In the end, is there a formal procedure from which the organization can be built as a collective effort as part of a moral consensus?

The object is to arrive at an intersubjective agreement whose validity rests on consensus, autonomy and legitimacy. It should also facilitate the application of means and actions that protect and develop life. Such an agreement, in consequence can only be founded on practical-communicative reason and not, as until now, on the violence and exclusion exercised by instrumental reason. There must be a transition; from the imposition of the dominating ego on the 'Other' to the intersubjective construction of the reasons of *everyone*.



This second ethical aspect implies not only the construction of a consensus between those who run, control and conduct the actual organization and those who work. Above all, it also should include those who are affected on the outside, what economists cynically call 'externalities'. These individuals must be allowed to participate with symmetry in the decision-making of the organization because it affects the development of their lives. All ethical actions thus imply the reciprocal acknowledgment of all the members of a communicative group. They should hence promote the conditions that enable the *symmetric participation* of the affected members in the rational decision-making of such a community.

The third aspect of human ethical action has to do with the fulfilment of both of the prior aspects, that is to say, the *feasibility* of the protection of life and the promotion of symmetric participation in the building of a collective and rational form of organization. Feasibility implies determining in a material fashion what is economically, politically, technically and psychologically possible. We know that there are aims that are logically but not materially possible. Other aims are possible in certain societies, due on some occasions to their levels of prosperity, but impossible in others that have limited growth.

It is *de rigueur* to understand that every solution is not always possible even if it seems logically valid or reasonable. This is so even if it obeys the universal ethical value of the defence of human life that we have already mentioned. It is useless to suggest something that we know in advance will not work. That is, if it lacks the conditions that would allow its concrete and material implementation. Thus, feasibility determines the *management* of the social actions that allow life and participation. In other words, the forms of organization that let actions be carried out. Hence, ethical or moral action means to act according to what is possible under real conditions.

If organized human action took into consideration these three ethical factors, the defence of life, social consensus and feasibility would be guaranteed. The reproduction of such a social order would facilitate its diffusion. A permanent cycle of re-organization that acts in favour of life by means of feasible decisions that have been agreed by everyone through consensus and reason would have been established. On the contrary, the non-acceptance of these ideas (the attack on life in order to obtain profit, authority exercised to obtain control over the other, the imposition of methods of development that have been shown to be socially and ecologically harmful) leaves us with forms of organization that act against humans and life, producing through their irrationality the victims whose existence they refuse to acknowledge and silence.

### ***Critical Principles of Transformative Praxis***

The factors that guide ethical action, mentioned earlier, find their negative form in the critical principles that guide the *transformative praxis*





of reality and its forms of organization. To create different forms of organization requires us, firstly, to recognize the material limits of the modes of organization that are dominant today. It also requires us to show, from the victims' point of view, that their transformation is a matter of urgency.

Although it might seem obvious, it has not always been accepted that *every system is fallible and imperfect*. Thus, every system either produces or will produce consequences that affect someone. If we acknowledge that the system in which we live today is imperfect then we should also be able to understand that it is a product of human activity from which negative effects inevitably result. Hence, the system and its forms of organization produce, but at the same time ignore, the sufferings of the 'other'. These manifest themselves in poverty, unhappiness, pain, domination and/or exclusion.

The utopian aspect of the present system, expressed in its institutions and forms of organization, contains a contradiction. This is because most of those who participate in it are deprived of the possibility of making their rights valid. The right to life as a theoretical concept is in strong contrast with the materiality of many other factors: death, famine, misery, the oppression of corporeity as a result of labour, the repression of the libido and the unconscious, the lack of power of the individual in companies and institutions, curable or preventable diseases, illiteracy and many other factors. These show up the real situation of the victim even as it is being formally denied.

It is important to remember that there is no perfect society. Every system produces its own victims. That is why every society gives rise to demands, sooner or later, for a transformation that could open the way for more social justice. When a victim discovers his or her situation, that is, when one recognizes oneself as a victim because of material oppression or formal exclusion, then a critical attitude may emerge. This allows the victims to better their condition through development and participation. The existence of victims makes the need to transform society, its institutions and forms of organization, an ethical obligation.

Thus, the second critical principle of transformative praxis is based on the premise of the *impossibility of victims taking action until they recognize their own condition*. The consciousness of one's own condition is produced by one's empirical, day-to-day shared experience. This is how wider recognition is reached in one's own communicative group, starting to formalize a possible future that will facilitate liberation. In other words, those excluded can form a community that judges the system by producing a different and improved project. Facing the 'impossibility of choosing death' because choosing death is not a choice, the victims need to build new 'life options' from definite alternatives.

In spite of the fact that the criticism made by the victims is not taken seriously by the system and the dominant forms of organization, their criticism proves the system to be illegitimate. It reveals the way in which



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it makes the production, reproduction and development of human life impossible. The array of examples is vast and is expressed in the emergence of new social movements that fight for recognition and try to achieve different forms of existence: The *Zapatist National Liberation Army* in Mexico, the rural *Sin Tierra* movement in Brazil, the *cocaleros* (coca growers) in Bolivia or the *piqueteros* (unemployed) in Argentina are examples. Then again, on another level, there are the movements against exploitation in maquilas (tax free zone export industries), sweat factories and the pollution of the environment. Other organized protests include the defence of women, homosexuals, AIDS-infected people, non-Caucasians, illegal immigrants and old people.

All these examples question the system that produces and preserves but that does not accept these realities as problems. To become conscious of them would motivate the construction of new forms of organization as concrete alternatives for a better life. This is liberation in its most pragmatic form.

The third critical principle of transformative praxis is the *liberation principle*. This aims at the implementation of formally planned future alternatives. This means the material transformation of the system, its institutions and its forms of organization. This will make them function in the service of those who have been excluded. Any form of ethics must look, as a matter of urgency, at the *liberation* of the victims whose lives have been plundered and limited. Anyone who acts critically and ethically should transform the actions, institutions or systems which currently dominate the world. This implies that their activities should be orientated towards opening up new possibilities in which the life of every victim can be materially transformed, allowing the victim to abandon his state of perpetual anguish.

The criteria of liberation would be that the unfulfilled demands of the victims, reflected in the alternatives suggested by the critical discourse, should be met. From then on, all future ethical decisions will be taken from the perspective of the victims. This means that life—and the choices it implies—would not be the privilege of a few but something common to every human being. It should be noted that an alternative organization of the world does not imply the abandonment of the instrumental reason which has characterized Modernity. What happens is that the means—ends goal and its efficiency calculus have to become subordinate to ethics. That is to say, the development of life and the symmetrical participation of the human being must be put first. Instrumental reason must be articulated and its 'efficiency' judged while taking into account the reproduction and development of life. Means and ends are integrated into a vision in which finalities and values are judged according to their 'efficiency' in developing the lives of the individuals. This is why, we insist, instrumental reason is not to be abandoned but rather to be subordinated and put at the service of the dignity and freedom of all the members of the community.



## Conclusion: A Different World is Possible

The ideas and questions put forward throughout this paper concern the challenges which globalization represents today. It is a time in which the irrationality of the system is reflected in the flesh of its victims. Everyone can recognize the tremendous problems of poverty, injustice and exclusion present on the entire planet. This is the other side of the coin from that in which huge profits and great power remain in few hands. We are living a time of confrontation between Eurocentric world, exclusive and violent, and the possibility of *a different modernity*. This will be transversal and will allow the planet's social shape to be reinvented.

This is a new type of theoretical possibility which I call *transmodern* (Dussel, 2002), a future utopia not dominated by modernity but in constant dialogue with it. The aim is to build a *pluriverse* (not a universe) in which every culture can conserve its own identity and, at the same time, assimilate the developments of this globalizing modernity. It will have its own criteria so that each person can decide what it is and what one wishes to adopt from this modernity.<sup>7</sup>

In conclusion, an attempt has been made here to outline a few ideas that show the feasibility of a different world project. In this, the modern individual who has been freed from his or her Eurocentrism will reen-counter the non-modern 'Other' emancipated from the colonizers. The aim is to build a transition into a different world. We need to be convinced that a different world is possible, *plural, diverse and symmetrical*. In this new space, all the different world views can be expressed, marking a new departure in the development of Humanity.

## Notes

This text came into being at different moments and was the result of three different drafts. It was written for the inaugural conference by Enrique Dussel at the Tenth International Colloquium of APROS that took place in the city of Oaxaca, Mexico, 7–10 December 2003. The second moment consisted of a transcription of the conference made by Eduardo Ibarra-Colado, who accepted the task of structuring and rewriting a new version, including the notes that accompany the text. For this, it was necessary to interpret the sense of the words of Dussel, deciphering the sounds and images on video and revising the published papers of the author. The final moment was again in the hands of Dussel, who revised and corrected the final version, giving it the distinctive form that it has now.

- 1 The construction of the Convent and College of Santo Domingo was started in 1527, scarcely 35 years after the so-called 'discovery' of America and six years from its 'conquest'. Challenging the predominant explanation that assumes the absolute truth of the discovery of the 'new world', Dussel has developed a contrasting interpretation. The 'discovery' of America should be understood as its invention. The so-called 'conquest', likewise, hides and legitimizes a violent *colonization*. For a discussion of this issue, see Dussel (1995).



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- 2 Dussel is addressing the gathering of the Asia Pacific Researchers in Organization Studies (APROS), a multidisciplinary research group working on themes of organization in the region. This research network was created in 1982 in Australia and gradually included the other countries of the Asian Pacific, and later the countries of the American Pacific. Until now, there have been eleven international colloquia in the following cities: Hong Kong (3), Canberra, Kobe, Hawaii, Cuernavaca, Shanghai, Sydney, Oaxaca and Melbourne. The next one will take place in New Delhi in 2007.
- 3 Dussel refers to the movement begun on 1 January 1994 by the *Zapatist National Liberation Army* (EZLN). This coincided with the coming into effect of the North American Free Trade Association (NAFTA). There is no doubt that history has taken a different turn as a result of this confrontation. On this issue, see Dussel (2003a).
- 4 The term 'organization', so popular in the Anglo-Saxon world, does not cease to be an abstraction whose existence allowed functionalism to 'dehumanize' the relationship between individuals. This fetishism must be recognized and overcome. If not, it would be impossible to understand that forms of organization—and their problems—are the consequences of power relations affecting humankind's levels of development and well-being. For a discussion, on the issue, see Dussel (1998: 496–500).
- 5 The reader may consider consulting some other papers by Dussel (1996, 1998, 2001a, 2003b, 2003c) for a better appreciation of the problems mentioned throughout his keynote address. A significant part of the philosophical work of Enrique Dussel is available at: <http://www.clacso.org> and, for a discussion of his work, we recommend Alcoff and Mendieta (2000).
- 6 Dussel refers to the Cardinal Gonzalo Jiménez de Cisneros (1436–1517), the Archbishop of Toledo and the Mayor of Castille who upheld the expansionist policies of King Fernando of Aragón in the north of Africa.
- 7 Thus, various ways of analysing the world system become possible. The 'otherness' of yesterday and today, incorporated in non-modern forms of organization whose existence has been systematically ignored, may be re-examined. For example, the different forms of production, consumption and other human activities, such as education and health, that the Amerindian communities had before their colonization find new meanings. The different types of knowledge, skills and practices of these cultures gave way to a form of social and ethical organization that emphasized efficiency and which must now be reconsidered. The same thing could be said about alternative forms of organization found in other cultures that, despite their undisputable richness and diversity, have been diminished by presumptuous and 'self-sufficient' Modernism. Might it not be possible to recreate modernity while conserving everything that it has contributed in favour of life and the planet? Might we not at the same time include in a new civilizing project what it is possible to learn from the Others by recovering from them the knowledge that they have cultivated for thousands of years?

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