***Pueblo and Exteriority***

The concept of subjectivity is itself problematic. For, the subject of modernity is centered on the individual and the singular. From Descartes to Kant and beyond, in Nietzsche and existentialism, the subjective side of human life conceives of its social side with negative connotations. Furthermore, it has difficulty thinking of margins except of itself—the subject—as marginal. Hence, its singularity thinks of the other as dangerous. José Ortega y Gasset summarizes neatly the hierarchy in the triad (*vida individual*, *vida interindividual*, *vida social*) when he claims for individual life the status of *root of all realities* and the locus of authenticity. Would a *revolutionary* subjectivity transform the concept of the subject in such a way that it becomes possible to move beyond what Robert Solomon called the “transcendental pretense” of the modern subject, namely, the pretension to be the universal and necessary condition for truth?

The individual subject as conceived by germinal figures in Western philosophy such as Descartes and Kant is fruitful for ideas and practices of social change because these authors legitimize dissent and conceive of freedom as the possibility of going beyond limits. However, neither is enough for social transformation. Collective agency is required. Traditional Marxism conceived of social class as akin to the individual subject. That approach is useful in many respects because it helps illuminate the *social* *conditions* of the individual both in terms of history and the importance of those conditions for personal transformation. Structuralist and Foucauldian conceptions of subjectivity undermine that tradition by finding fault with the implicit essentialism of a subjectivity that reproduces itself by producing the other; instead, relations of production produce subjectivity (Rancière, 2015, p. 108), discipline and surveillance constitute it as well as the social (Foucault, 1979, pp. 167-168), or performance gives rise to the actor (Butler, 2007, p. 34).

In this essay I examine whether the concept of *pueblo* elaborated by Dussel in his philosophy of liberation is capable of situating the interstitial space between a subjectivist agency and a posthuman process of production. I hope to show that the concept of *pueblo* helps us decolonize the concept of people. Nevertheless, it reproduces essentialism through an opaque concept of the Other; on the one hand, in its Levinasian reading, it reduces subjectivity, intersubjectivity, and social relations to the egotism of a closed off totality; on the other hand, the critique of the totality is done from outside the totality by an alterity immune to self-critique within the confines of intersubjectivity. It is not the alterity itself which is immune to self-criticism, of course, but rather the subjectivity that claims to speak for a *naturalized* other; that is ideology, for it conceals the intersubjective dimension of ways of being human (e.g., gender, pedagogical cultivation, and the social mediation of all material, including sexual reproduction). At the same time, an alternative dialectical approach has more often than not been reduced to a relation among equals that abstracts out uncritically the social conditions (local and global) that have produced material, if not formal, inequality.

**1. The Affirmation of Alterity**

In a fictionalization of the Guatemalan Civil War by K’anjobal Maya novelist Gaspar Pedro González, the narrator-protagonist remembers a political demonstration when he was a young child:

“So many people! Never had I seen so many people. Where were we going? I overheard that the people were marching to protest abuses against us peasants. The peasants were taking advantage of a right they believed was guaranteed by something called a law. We kept walking through the streets of the city, until we reached a great square surrounded by large buildings, one of which appeared to be the seat of government. The people wanted to express their dissatisfaction with the representatives of the people, whom the people themselves had put in power. But at that moment we saw a large number of men descending upon us. They wore uniforms and were armed with guns, night sticks and riot shields. Their faces manifested hate and fury. They were the forces of violence coming at us. They were the feet, the hands and the faces of that government turned against us, its own people. They immediately attacked the people, people with bare hands, simple hands like those of my mother, that knew only how to work and make tortillas so we could eat. All the people carried was their words and their voices to protest against those abuses” (González, 2000, p. 8).

This novel, *The Return of the Maya*, unfolds during the genocide perpetrated in Guatemala during the 1970s and 1980s. Many readers may not be familiar with this particular story. After all, this has been only a small fire put out in a small country, a moment in a long narrative of repression connected to other fires and other exterminations unleashed by conquest, colonialism, and capitalist globalization. However, each flare-up against the neo-colonial structure was the expression of a people without representation who expressed the desire to be represented not simply as individuals alienated from their oppressed communities but as a *people*.

In Latin America, the term *people* has occupied a special place in critical theories in social theory and philosophy, from post-bourgeois dependency theory to the Levinasian Marxist account by Enrique Dussel, which incorporates its own version of dependency theory through the theory of transfer of value from one national capital to another as the Marxist foundation of dependency theory.[[1]](#endnote-1) I will focus below on Dussel’s analysis of the concept*.*

Dussel’s political works ground the legitimacy of government, not on a people conceived only as individuals coming together to ensure bourgeois right, nor on a class that as such shows the truth of bourgeois civil society but also undermines the possibility of legitimate government, but on a people marked by the distinctiveness of its constituents independently from the government that apparently unites them from above. Four salient points can be gathered if we use Dussel’s theory on the brief citation of the suppressed demonstration by indigenous Guatemalans.

1-The people must be represented by the government. The former is, in Dussel’s terminology, the *potentia* from which the *potestas* of the latter emanates ethically and politically:

“I will therefore use the term *potentia to refer to* the power that is a faculty or capacity inherent in the *people* as the final instance of sovereignty, authority, governability, and the political. This power as *potentia*--which spreads like a network over the entire political field, and within which every political actor is a node (to use a category proposed by Castells)—develops on various levels and in various spheres, thereby constituting the foundation and essence of *all that is political*” (Dussel, 2008, II, 2.3.5).

In González’s story above, the power of the government has become fetishized, a product of a living will *appears* as the source of life of the people: Rather than being recognized as emanating from the political community, the exercise of delegated power is absolutized and corrupted as it *appears to flow* from *potestas*. This is the fetishism of power, where the product of the political community comes alive as a power existing over and above the community (Dussel, 2008, I, 1.13).

“The fetishization of power... consists of a “Will-to-Power” as domination of the *people*, of the majority, of the weakest, of the poor.... In order to be able to exercise self-referential power--the fetishization of *potestas--*it is necessary to have previously, and to continue to weaken, the originary political power of the community(*potentia*)” (Dussel, 2008, V, 5.31-5.32).

2-The people are naked before the usurper of their power; they are nothing to the usurper: Bare hands and voices, and a protest that falls on deaf ears. They are naked in that they are excluded, nonentities to the law. *Bare* *life* has come to express the modern loss of distinction between mere biological, pre-political human life (*zoe*) and human life as lived in social relations (*bios*); furthermore, modern sovereignty reduces the latter to the former; thus, bare life is constituted as such through the originary activity of modern *national* sovereignty that exercises power over qualified life (*bios*) and its management as a presumably apolitical wild thing (fetishized *zoe*). Such is the marrow of biopower’s spine (Agamben, 1998, pp. 6-7). Similarly, the oppressed is reconstituted locally and globally as bare life by *imperial* sovereignty and the system of dependent capital. Guatemalans like many other Latin Americans have lived imperialist-sponsored permanent states of exception. Agamben sees the permanent suspension of the law to uphold the law as a tendency characteristic of the last century of the political West although its *naming* *as* *such* has been replaced by the normalization of “the paradigm of security” (Agamben, 2005, p. 14) as the technology of governance; it is a condition that “is neither external nor internal to the juridical order… a zone of indifference , where inside and outside do not exclude each other but rather blur with each other” (Agamben, 2005, 23).

3-Their hands produce but only for satisfying the community, not the system; what the community produces is independent from the system that oppresses them.

4-They are not recognized as producers of their own sustenance or as having the rights that others, namely, the not-indigenous have. For Dussel, this is the originary moment of existential negation of the oppressed:

“All oppression has an ideological aspect that is fundamental to it. However, everything begins when the Other is situated as not-being; and, while reducing him or her to servitude, the oppressor still pretends to give him or her the ‘gift’ of civilization--being” (Dussel, 2007, p. 391).

Neoliberalism unambiguously denies the humanity of the oppressed as Other, what Francis Fukuyama has called the other’s “strange thoughts” (Fukuyama, 1989, p. 7). It does so today in the name of (capitalist) democracy and rights. Imperialism’s postmodern version is so-called “humanitarian imperialism” (Johnson, 2004, p. 71), or simply empire; “the right of humanitarian intervention” is integral to the matrix laid down by imperial biopower in the age of globalization (Hardt and Negri, 2000, pp. 15 and 237). Whenever the empire’s fetishized power is threatened, it denies a *particular* people’s right to life, that is, a culturally specific, socially conditioned, historically conquered life, on the one hand, while on the other, it affirms human life in its *abstract political generality*, as *bios* only, not a *zoe* which transcends biopolitical management. Foucault has shown that natural life (*zoe*) is absorbed by disciplinary society and the society of control, by capitalism; I would add that the ability to control populations (the *pueblos* *indios* of the Spaniards, the Vietnamese strategic hamlets of U.S. imperialism, for example) and/to destroy them is a mark of the imperialist and colonialist features of capitalism and modernity.[[2]](#endnote-2)

Thus, when it descends from the abstract to the concrete, imperialism contradicts itself performatively. It has to kill *and* manage the life of the Other as part of its logic. Communities are destroyed and/or constituted as strategic hamlets, *pueblos indios*, *villas modelo*. The sovereign thus has power over life and death, but also over the type of life the subjected community *as Other* is to live. Thus, when it comes to the relationship between sovereignty and the other as Other, the latter has no dignity and is hence not worthy of respect.

Dignity received one of its most influential formulations in the work of Kant. Dignity is a quality that attaches necessarily to the universality of the rational will. Kant stresses the fundamental place that the good will has in morality. It is good without qualification as it seeks with all the strength that reason and circumstance provide it with to act for the sake of duty to the moral law. Practical reason intends its subjective principle to become universal law and, as such, maker of universal law. Because it is decoupled from the particular, the contingent, the concrete, and the sensuous, it is bound only to that which has universal necessity, namely, the Idea of Reason. Good in itself, and ideally an autonomous praxis that constitutes the universality to which it is bound, the will ought never to be merely the instrument of another; for, it has “intrinsic value—that is, *dignity*” (Kant, 1964, p. 102).

A decolonized Kantian thought would have to address why this universality of reason is denied to most humanity by Kant himself. The belief that the concrete European male has dignity because the ideality of his culture expresses the universal is not regarded as problematic. Other cultures and “the fair sex” do not possess it because they are rather lazy. From a Dusselian perspective, Kant’s ethnocentrism is intimately connected to a totality closed to the Other, that is, a particularity that universalizes itself but is egocentrically oblivious to Otherness (Dussel, 1995, pp. 19-20).

For Dussel, Otherness is the source of value. It is morally coterminous with dignity:

“Dignity is neither valuable nor value; it is the foundation of all value. Dignity is not necessary to affirm when it is not denied; only when it is denied, it is necessary to defend and proclaim it. In the recognition of the Other, the first thing that must be affirmed is the sacredness of her or his distinct subjectivity” (Dussel, 2007, p. 502).

*El* p*ueblo* has dignity, then, but it is also productive. *Pueblo* is productive in several senses: productive of the economic conditions of life but also constitutive of the political life of the community. The latter is the normative material principle of politics. “The production, reproduction, and development of the life of the political community (of pueblo in the critical instance, the *plebs*) is the normative material principle of all politics” (Dussel, 2007, p. 491). From this principle, one must then contextualize the diverse meanings of *pueblo*: “The nation confronting the aggressive foreign power; ... the oppressed classes against the dominant classes in the nation; ... youth against the bureaucracies” (Dussel, 2007, p. 460). The affirmation of human life in community is similar to Agamben’s recovery of the concept of *zoe* as something more than bare life under the control of the political qualification of life as *bios*.

Dussel must here navigate a narrow strait between the ideology of *pueblo* found in populist constructions and the concept of *pueblo* as a critical tool for an understanding of the situation of domination of “el pueblo de los pobres” (“the poor as a people”) and for revolutionary practice. “*El* *pueblo* *de* *los* *pobres*” is, says Dussel, the “indigenous masses, former [*antiguos*] African slaves, mulattoes, zambos, mestizos and impoverished immigrants” (Dussel, 2007, p. 422).

The possibility of rhetorical populism is always present, Dussel recognizes, and he refers indeed to how not only the category of pueblo but also that of totality share an ambiguity that may lead to the obliteration of distinction between oppressed and oppressor, victim and victimizer, and class, race, and sex hierarchical distinctions.

Dussel’s approach to “pueblo” is grounded on his analectical method, the critical *exterior* positioning beyond and outside the logic of the system, namely, the moment of exteriority which transcends the system while at the same time being interior to the system as its negation. While the dialectic is, according to Dussel, *comprehending* of a totality but also *unable* *to* *move* *beyond* the totality, the analectic relativizes the totality by showing that what is negated by the system cannot be comprehended by the system; hence, the exteriority of that which is negated. Epistemologically, it can only be understood by an analectical approach; ethically, it can only be affirmed by the same analectical approach. Dussel’s version of pueblo is such an analectical concept to be distinguished from populist versions (Dussel, 2007, p. 416). In fact, Dussel has used the revolutionary credentials of Fidel Castro to counter Marxist structuralist critiques of his version of the philosophy of liberation (see Cerutti, 1992, p. 203).[[3]](#endnote-3)

Thus, he says that revolutionaries such as Fidel Castro have provided us with a critical formulation of the concept of *pueblo* that resonates with the politics of liberation, which “... places sovereignty on the political community, on the people, and not on the State” (Dussel, 2007, p. 491).

Indeed, in his 1953 text, *History Will Absolve Me*, which Dussel cites in his *Twenty Theses on Politics* (Dussel, 2008, XI, 11.21).Castro defines *pueblo* in terms not dissimilar to Dussel’s *pueblo de los pobres* (i.e., the poor as a people) to the exclusion of the imperialist and dependent bourgeoisies:

“When we speak of the people we are not talking about those who live in comfort, the conservative elements of the nation, who welcome any repressive regime, any dictatorship, any despotism, prostrating themselves before the masters of the moment until they grind their foreheads into the ground” (Castro, 1987, p. 104).

Significantly, it is a practical definition. Castro’s definition of *the people*, he states, is defined “in terms of struggle”:

“To these people whose desperate roads through life have been paved with the bricks of betrayal and false promises, we were not going to say: 'We will give you ...' but rather: 'Here it is, now fight for it with everything you have, so that liberty and happiness may be yours!'” (Castro, 1987, pp. 105-106).

"People" is for Dussel “a strictly political category and it constitutes a collective identity, a political community or a social bloc that goes through moments of the economic field (for example, modes of production) or the political field in the history of a country, a homeland [*patria*], a State in its multiple stages” (Dussel, 2007, p. 491). In his *Twenty Theses on Politics*, Dussel reiterates the strict political character of the category *pueblo*, since it is “not properly speaking either sociological or economic [category].... [It is] absolutely essential despite its ambiguity (and indeed this ambiguity does not result from misunderstanding but rather from inevitable complexity)” (Dussel, 2008, XI, 11.2.1).

Martín Retamozo has argued that the concept of *pueblo* in Dussel is a new biopolitical concept and that politics ought to be understood, therefore, as an activity “tending towards the organization, production, and reproduction of the lives of the members of the community” (Retamozo, 2007, p. 110).

If Retamozo is correct, then the concept of pueblo is a political project, vital programs to be constituted in transformative practices. The concept of exteriority used to interpret those concepts is itself a political project. The “drive” towards alterity of Dussel’s early works returns transmuted as immanent to social life itself. Furthermore, the distinctness of the category is expressed also in the singular components of it at a given political juncture. The thirst for democracy, that is, for political participation and the constitution of the political field through that participation at the factory, the school, the block, and the neighborhood, can be satisfied only in network organizations and struggles.

These are necessary steps to take in the struggle against neoliberalism. However, those gains are often not possible without the state representing *el pueblo* as understood by Fidel Castro above and radicalized in the Venezuelan Revolution during the first years of Hugo Chávez’s government. The political entities that were constructed parallel to the state and its bureaucracy, the various missions in Venezuela or the demand for factory takeovers supported by the State but under worker’s control require of the State, not only to wrest power from entrenched bureaucracies but also to counter the attacks of imperialism.

These strategies were meant to counter capitalism and neocolonialist dependency. The dependency of the periphery had to do with the structured unfolding of its economy to satisfy the interests of the core. It was an imposed underdevelopment, for the core did not develop in isolation from its exploitation of its periphery. Dussel aptly called the core’ self-image of isolated development “the myth of modernity.”

“[T]he main contradiction is found to be between transnational capital (and its private bureaucracies) and the wage workers of the peripheral countries and, even more so, the excluded wretched unemployed masses (who are not even “class”), who begin to organize as *pueblo* and who will prove significant for those political parties that educate a new political bureaucracy in the postcolonial states” (Dussel, 2007, p. 400).

Such resistance requires a more global approach to Agamben’s state of exception mentioned above. For, the normalization of the security state has gone global and it affects not only the periphery and the global South with terror in the name of democracy but the imperial world as well. Achille Mbembe offers a pithy description and critique of what could be called the rhizomatic localization of a global security state of affairs*.*

“The majority of contemporary wars, not to mention the associated forms of terror, aim not only at recognition but at the constitution of a *world outside relation.* Whether or not given as provisional, the process of *exiting from democracy* and the movement of suspension of rights, constitutions, and freedoms are paradoxically justified by the necessity to protect these same laws, freedoms, and constitutions… Owing to [the] structural proximity [of living exposed to one another], there is no longer any ‘outside’ that might be opposed to an ‘inside’, no ‘elsewhere’ that might be opposed to a ‘here’, no ‘closeness’ that might be opposed to a ‘remoteness’. One cannot ‘sanctuarize’ *one’s own home* by fomenting chaos and death far away *in the homes of others.* Sooner or later, one will reap at home what one has sown abroad. Sanctuarization can only ever be mutual” (Mbembe, 2019, p. 40).

It seems to me that Dussel’s reconceptualization of *pueblo* proves to be an effective theoretical and practical tool to approach the problems posed by the global state of exception and the resistance that must confront it. Nevertheless, it is not necessarily a concept that affirms alterity as an exteriority. It may rather be a concept that becomes critical when it finds its supporting fulcrum in the “structural proximity” with which Mbembe approaches the relation between self and other. That structural proximity between subjectivities can be nothing other than patterns of intersubjectivity.

I leave the reader to mull these questions: Is the concept of *pueblo* a dialectical concept that brings together various intersectional subjectivities through social mediations of class, gender, race, and nation? Is it instead an analectical concept that comes to us from a thought that is capable of grasping an *exteriority* to the totality? In the following section I compare and contrast two approaches to decolonization in the world of contemporary philosophy: A decolonized ethics of exteriority that serves as the inspiration for Dussel’s philosophy of liberation or a decolonized Hegelian ethics of intersubjectivity that was implicit in contemporary Marxist practices to destroy and overcome imperialism and racism.

**II. A New Dialectic?**

The affirmation of the excluded Other is for Dussel an analectical or anadialectical step at the heart of a life-affirming dialectic. The Hegelian dialectic proceeds from negation through a negation of that negation on its pretended road to liberating subsumption. In an early 1974 text, Dussel states that the analectical method, by contrast, “starts from the other as free, as a beyond-to-the-system of the totality. It starts, therefore, from his or her [the Other’s—MS] word, and, trusting on that word, it acts, works, serves, creates.” While the dialectical method is “the dominating expansion of the totality from itself” and “the passage from potency to act by ‘the same’,” the analectical method is “the just growth of totality from the other, and in order to be of service to the other creatively” (Dussel, 1991, p. 186). The dialectical method, Dussel would say, “is the path that the totality realizes within itself: from beings to the foundation and from the foundation to beings” (Dussel, 1991, p. 186).

The influence of the philosophy of existence is unmistakable. Kierkegaard’s critique of the Hegelian system because the existing individual is merely an irrational remainder, a surd, for the dialectic is politicized *and collectivized* in Dussel’s analectical method. Kierkegaard’s existing individual becomes the Other analectically and *pueblo* politically. It is not a starting from a historical zero, but rather a recovery of that which is excluded in the essential features of the dominant system (Sáenz, 1994, pp. 115-134).

The sharp contrast between the two methods in this early stage of Dussel’s career is, however, blunted by references to Ludwig Feuerbach’s contrast between a “true” dialectics and a “false” dialectics, whereby the former has an analectical support (an “ana-dia-lectical movement”) because of its dialogical point of departure (Dussel, 1991, p. 186). This early text thus points to the redintegration of the two methods precisely in the space opened by a communication community which, Dussel would later state in his debate with Apel, has to include the Other in his or her exteriority and be grounded for its truth on the affirmation of human life in community (Dussel, 1994a, p. 83).

Dussel states that the process of subsumption, if it is to be truly liberating must be a subsumption from alterity (i.e., from the victimized Other).

“The philosophy of liberation gives particular importance to the “analectical” moment of the dialectical movement. In the final analysis, the dialectical quality of the dialectical method consists in the rational movement that goes from the “part” to the “whole” or from a whole to another concrete whole that comprehends it. However, the possibility of such passage … is available, not only because of the negation of the negated in the totality (the moment of negation), and not even because of the affirmation of the totality, which would not be a “surpassing” of it; it would not be a radical or metaphysical *Aufhebung*, but only an ontological one; rather, such possibility exists because of the affirmation (as origin and as subsequent liberating fulfillment) of exteriority, which would be more essential for a philosophy of the oppressed” (Dussel, 1994b, p. 35).

Thus, the process of liberation implies an affirmation of the Other on the road from negation (e.g. capital’s negation of the flesh and blood of living labor) and the negation of the negation (e.g., the negation of capital’s dehumanizing system of exploitation).

A counterdiscourse to Eurocentric modernity must distinguish itself also, says Dussel, from a pretended counterdiscourse that must westernize itself to be accepted; that would be in accordance with an eurocentric paradigm of modernity. Instead, a counterdiscourse from and by the Other is necessary for the anadialectical moment to be part of the dialectic, and also so that the dialectic is a living method of liberation. According to Dussel, an affirmation of alterity is the positive moment in the dialectic; it is the affirmative “principle [that grounds] the negation of the negation” (Dussel, 2013, p. 46). Furthermore, this counterdiscourse is a philosophy of liberation that takes the standpoint of the *victim*, the term that now replaces the category *pueblo* because the scope of the standpoint of the philosophy of liberation is now global. “The *Philosophy of Liberation* is a counterdiscourse, a critical philosophy born in the periphery (from the perspective of the victims, the excluded), which has the intention of being relevant on a global scale. It has an *explicit* consciousness of its peripheral and excluded character, but at the same time it has the intention and commitment of embracing and engaging the complexity of the world as a whole” (Dussel, 2013, 47).

(a) Given the profound influence of Emmanuel Levinas[[4]](#endnote-4) on Dussel, we should examine the sharp contrast that Levinas makes with Hegel. Levinas supposes an ethical moment in which the Other is insurmountable ethical resistance to intersubjectivity within Being or a totality. Indeed, Levinas dismisses all negativity as a function of the Same.

“This reversion of the alterity of the world to self-identification must be taken seriously; the ‘moments’ of this identification—the body, the home, labor, possession, economy—are not to figure as empirical and contingent data, laid over the formal skeleton of the same; they are the articulations of this structure. The identification of the same is not the void of a tautology nor a dialectical opposition to the other, but the concreteness of egoism. This is important for the possibility of metaphysics. If the same would establish its identity by simple *opposition to the other,* it would already be part of a totality encompassing the same and the other” (Levinas, 1979, p. 38).

Hegelian dialectics would then not be anything other than a rationalist effort to affirm Being. It is History and therefore immanence. The Other resists History because it is anterior to History, resists Totality because it is beyond and irreducible to the Totality.

“But to say that the other can remain absolutely other, that he enters only into the relationship of conversation, is to say that history itself, an identification of the same, cannot claim to totalize the same and the other. The absolutely other, whose alterity is overcome in the philosophy of immanence on the allegedly common plane of history, maintains his transcendence in the midst of history. The same is essentially identification with the diverse, or history, or system. It is not I who resist the system, as Kierkegaard thought; it is the other” (Levinas, 1979, p. 40).

Ultimately, infinity is for Levinas the revelation that the finite self is *in* the truth only in relation to an Other that “always” overflows the Same in an infinite “gap” because the bond between subjectivity and other (*autrui*) never constitutes itself as a totality.

“False” infinity is, by contrast, the philosophical tradition that is “incapable of overflowing the Same” (Derrida, 1978, p. 312, n. 12). Hegel’s thought would presumably belong to such a philosophical tradition. In principle, of course, Hegel quite explicitly defines true infinity as the ideal unity of finite and infinite within a totality. Furthermore, Hegel’s racism and eurocentrism lead him to formulate in many of his texts a conception of *universality* (understood as Absolute Substance *and* Subject) that disguises only for the least aware white supremacist the *particularity* of Europe (Dussel, 1995, pp. 20-25). Imperialism contradicts the unity-in-difference of finitude and infinity and the task of decolonization requires the unmasking of ideological false unities but also the affirmation of the ideality of unity-in-difference.

Decolonization requires therefore besides a struggle for recognition against the colonizing other, a struggle for recognition against the colonized self. The revolutionary transformation through asymmetrical means of relationships of domination is the push from below towards “the I that is We and the We that is I.”

(b) Social structures influence the form of intersubjectivity (for example, is it exploitative and oppressive, or is there the unity of a mutual recognition of differences?), as well as the rise of new totalities: “Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past” (Marx, 1979, XI, pp. 103-104). Thus, the affirmation of the Other carries with it the negation of the circumstances that produce and reproduce the suffering of the Other.

For Hegel, *Life* is both motion and disquiet: The latter is the sensuous conditioned that was esteemed by Marx, the former is the unconditioned supersensible criticized as a hypostasized abstraction by the philosophies of existence. What is the common feature of both motion and the disquiet? The simple essence that produces itself through self-negation. But this essence is intersubjectivity, and intersubjectivity cannot exist without self and other, a challenge to any attempt to make the other into a mirror of the self.

Intersubjectivity, whether as dialogue, resistance, or revolution is always present in the social relationship that the young Marx had called the true common life. There is no will prior to the intersubjective relationship.

Hegel’s conception of Life *is* the *relationship, not a proto-conscious abstract will outside life itself*. Thus, the negation of Infinite life by the finite in the *Phenomenology* is a conceptualization of the negation in practice of mutual recognition in the struggle for recognition and the dialectics of domination. It is, to be clear, the negation of the other subjectivity through the negation of the Infinite. (Parenthetically, we find the same conceptual approximation in the young Marx's statement that the true common life goes through egotism.) Nevertheless, ideality asserts itself by *overcoming* the negation of the Infinite through the preservation of the difference amongst the finite subjectivities (Hegel, 1977, p. 108). Hegelian idealism is built upon the notion of contradiction at the heart of Being.

Hegel’s conception of the totality (which he calls also the Infinite) is a dynamic unity of opposites that are sublated, or brought to a higher level, through difference. Opposition as such is never overcome; what is negated is also preserved. The particular is not thrown off in favor of the universal, but rather brought to the status of universality which preserves itself in the multitude of particulars that compose it.

In the struggle for recognition and the movement towards its negation and ideality, namely, "*the I that is We and the We that is I*," one can observe both the motion and the disquiet of life.

The benefit of a theory of intersubjectivity grounded on dialectics is that it denaturalizes in principle all social relations of existence, subjects all of them to the dynamics of change for the sake of the affirmation of *mutual recognition.* The ethics of mutuality has its own logic; its fulcrum is the totality understood as intersubjectivity. It does not understand the Other as a transcendence, but rather as immanent to social relations, exploitative and oppressive, or egalitarian and liberatory. The logic of mutuality can be found in feminist theory as well as in radical ecology; it is necessary in the struggle against imperialism and the tendency towards the commodification of the whole of life.

We thus arrive to one of the distinguishing features of Dussel’s thought in contrast to a decolonized theory of intersubjectivity. It can be stated in the form of a question: Is Dussel’s critique of exteriority the critique of totality or the affirmation of a naturalized exteriority?

If the latter, then Dussel may be positing a metaphysical category that has no contradiction within itself. If so, it would end up naturalizing existing contradictions. For Dussel, contradiction comes to exteriority from the totality that seeks to encompass it, e.g., the peasant kidnapped by the slave-hunter; or, alternatively, it produces the totality, e.g., the living labor that is the source of all value, but also *the heterosexual erotic relationship of his first ethics and of his very recent text on political economy.*

*“*The relation of the subject before another subject (S1-S2) can be at a minimum of three types: The first relation is that of gender: woman-male, that is, the erotic, sexual couple (*de pareja*) relationship. It is the origin of all other relations and it constitutes the first type of community…. The second practical possible relation is that of the couple to their children. It is the practical-pedagogical relation… The third relation is the one that is established in a community of equals, in the metaphorical expression of brother-sister…” (Dussel, 2013, p. 32).

Dussel’s thought, from the early contrast between “Semitic” and “Hellenic” humanism to his latest politics through his two ethics and his reconstruction of Marx’s critique of political economy, is based on a will to life prior to all intersubjective relationships. That is the bone marrow of his materialist ethics: The affirmation of human life. The addition “in community” comes only after criticisms of homophobia, sexism, and patriarchalism in his earlier works. Unfortunately, those prejudgments arise again in a “neo-Aristotelian” conception of human *physis* (by contrast to *nomos*) in his latest politics, as we see in the citation above.

Thus, the dialectics of intersubjectivity is useful for the decolonization of Levinasian and Dusselian thought. A decolonized Levinas does not simply encounter the Other as transcendent to the totality, for there is nothing outside the totality. In fact, we run the risk of naturalizing forms of oppression (i.e., the normalization of heterosexuality as the paradigm of erotic love, the mythology that the right to abortion is an attack on human life … in community, and the privileging of theology through the sacralization of the Other.

By contrast a decolonized conception of the Hegelian totality opens us to the social situation of the struggle for recognition: no longer as a struggle *inter* *pares* of the bourgeois ideal, but rather the asymmetrical struggle against capital. We can glimpse the colonized conception of labor under capital in the fact that the modern slave was in fact regarded as legally culpable for struggling for freedom and thus the foundation of responsibility under law.

In this essay I have moved back and forth between the analectical affirmation of the oppressed and a liberatory dialectics of intersubjectivity as the fulcrum on which practices of liberation ought to balance themselves. They both appear and disappear to the interpretive understanding as if the struggles out of which we are born were pragmatic gestalt figures. In both there is *conatus*, a striving towards the other filled with desire. Is it a desire for the Other on the basis of a drive towards exteriority? A desire for the Other on the basis of a true common life?

Desire of the same in the Other and of the Other in the Same is the essence of the intersubjective relationship—a restless process, a disquiet in life that cannot be stilled, not even in ideality; for ideality is the realization through reason that the Other is not in principle exterior to the Totality, but is rather the negative, and hence, the self-negation within the intersubjective relationship. It is therefore the infinite, from which we are alienated intellectually (in the understanding) and passionately because of the absence of *intersubjectivity*. Conditions of domination are the negation of the ideality of intersubjectivity. That negation shapes the reality of bondage for the struggle for recognition takes place precisely within that totality, and not before or outside. A brief concluding illustration may help us see what both a decolonized struggle for recognition and a decolonized affirmation of the subjectivity of the oppressed as incommensurable with the totalitarian ideal inherent to systems of domination.

*Ona Judge, a dower slave, belonging to Martha Washington, then First Lady in the first modern slave-democracy. Judge eludes her condition by escaping, when informed by Martha that she was to be a wedding gift for Martha’s granddaughter. Contradictorily a commodity and someone with duties to her Master, she “absconced” in the words of the advertisement in The Philadelphia Gazette of May 24, 1793. Judge finds relative safety in New Hampshire. Discovered, the white authorities (the official Collector of Customs) strategically refused to send her back to Virginia for fear of a revolt at the docks of Portsmouth. In an apparent gesture of compromise, Judge communicates through the Customs Officer that she would go back to her enslavers if and only if they promise her freedom upon their deaths. George responded: “… it would neither be politic or just to reward unfaithfulness with a premature preference [of freedom]; and thereby discontent before hand the minds of all her fellow-servants who by their steady attachments are far more deserving than herself of favor.” Thus, she’s responsible (fundamental concept in the idea of freedom) for choosing to be free. Neither that President nor the white supremacist followers of the US system of policing (from the policing practices during slavery to the policing practices of mass incarceration and white terrorism today) want to examine their own self-contradiction. The conditions of oppression allow them that privilege. In 1793, the US Congress passed the Fugitive Slave Act. George Washington signed into law. Ona Judge remained a fugitive until her death. Ona Judge was blamed by the first president of modern slave democracy of moral and legal guilt for asserting her freedom by leaving the confines of her slavery and assuming the status of internal refugee.* *The poor and the oppressed will remain fugitives of terror and violence until the system of domination is overwhelmed through asymmetrical struggle. The struggle for recognition is always asymmetrical.*

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1. “In general, dependency theory refers to the internal character of dependence of a socioeconomic system on another. It is important to stress the *internalized* character of the dependence. It is not an *external* domination of one country or system by another. Instead the domination and the exploitation of one country by another is intra-systemic—part of the system of dependence…. A well-known feature of dependency theory has been the generalized belief in the left that the ‘peripheral’ countries have exhausted the lines of development within the system of dependence to which they belong” (Sáenz, 1999, pp. 282-283). [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. The theory here is relatively simple. According to Giorgio Agamben and Michel Foucault, pre-modern political theory made a distinction between the natural life (*zoe*), including the natural human life from the political qualification of human life as *bios*. With modernity and capitalism, natural life becomes an object of total management and control, that is, its pre-ontological dimension is absorbed by the being of political management, administration, and exploitation: a political economy of control. The reader should keep in mind that *zoon politikon* refers to the *bios* of human life and not to the *zoe* of all life, which includes animals and gods (See Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Modern Life* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998). [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. For Cerutti the populism of the philosophy of liberation rests on a transcendent and ethical position. See one of Dussel’s first responses in Dussel, 1984, pp. 15 and 18. Dussel’s works of the 1980s, including of course, his turn to Marx, are characterized by a reply to Cerutti on the question of *pueblo.* [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Emmanuel Levinas (1905-1995) was a French philosopher whose critique of ontology in Western philosophy, significantly in Hegel and Heidegger, was deeply influential on Dussel’s own anadialectical or analectical method—A dialectic that negates the negation of the oppressed Other on the basis of an analectical affirmation of the transontological or exterior position of the Other. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)