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The Structure of Knowledge in Westernized Universities Epistemic Racism/Sexism and the Four Genocides/Epistemicides of the Long 16th Century

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Abstract: This article is inspired by Enrique Dussel's historical and philosophical work on Cartesian philosophy and the conquest of the Americas. It discusses the epistemic racism / sexism that is foundational to the knowledge structures of the Westernized University. The article proposes that the epistemic privilege of Western Man in Westernized Universities' structures of knowledge, is the result of four genocides / epistemicides in the long 16th century (against Jewish and Muslim origin population in the conquest of Al-Andalus, against indigenous people in the conquest of the Americas, against Africans kidnapped and enslaved in the Americas and against women burned alive, accused of being witches in Europe). The article proposes that Dussel's argument in the sense that the condition of possibility for the mid-17th century Cartesian "I think, therefore I am" (ego cogito) is the 150 years of "I conquer, therefore I am" (ego conquiro) is historically mediated by the genocide / epistemicide of the "I exterminate, therefore I am" (ego extermino). The 'I exterminate' is the socio-historical structural mediation between the idolatric 'I think' and the 'I conquer.'

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(...)

II. CARTESIAN PHILOSOPHY

We need to begin any discussion of the structures of knowledge in Westernized universities with Cartesian philosophy. Modern philosophy is supposed to have been founded by Rene Descartes (2013).³ Descartes' most famous phrase "I think, therefore I am" constitutes a new foundation of knowledge that challenged Christendom's⁴ authority of knowledge since the Roman Empire. The new foundation of knowledge produced by Cartesianism is not anymore the Christian God but this new "I." Although Descartes never defines who this "I" is, it is clear that in his philosophy this "I" replaces God as the new foundation of knowledge and its attributes constitute a secularization of the attributes of the Christian God. For Descartes, the "I" can produce a knowledge that is truth beyond time and space, universal in the sense that it is unconditioned by any particularity—"objective" being understood as equal to "neutrality" and equivalent to a God-Eye view.

To make the claim of an "I" that produces knowledge equivalent to a God-Eye view, Descartes makes two main arguments: one is ontological and the other epistemological. Both arguments constitute the condition of possibility for the claim that this "I" can produce a knowledge that is equivalent to a God-Eye view. The first argument is ontological dualism. Descartes claims that the mind is of a different substance from the body. This allows for the mind to be undetermined, unconditioned by the body. This way Descartes can claim that the mind is

3. I said "supposed" because as Enrique Dussel (2008a) has demonstrated in his essay *Anti-Cartesian Meditations*, Descartes was highly influenced by the Christian philosophers of the Spanish conquest of the Americas.

4. Notice that I make a distinction between Christianity and Christendom. Christianity is a spiritual/religious tradition, Christendom is when Christianity becomes a dominant ideology used by the state. Christendom emerged in the 4th century after Christ when Constantine appropriated Christianity and turn it into the official ideology of the Roman Empire.

similar to the Christian God, floating in heaven, undetermined by anything terrestrial and that it can produce a knowledge equivalent to a God-Eye view. The *universality* here is equal to Christian God's universality in the sense that it is not determined by any particularity, it is beyond any particular condition or existence. The image of God in Christendom is that of a White, old, bearded man with a cane sitting in a cloud, watching everybody and punishing anybody who misbehaves.

What would happen to the "God-Eye view" argument if the mind is of a similar substance to the body? The main implication would be that the claim that a human "I" can produce a God-Eye view falls apart. Without ontological dualism, the mind would be located in a body, would be similar in substance to the body and, thus, conditioned by the body. The latter would mean that knowledge is produced from a particular space in the world and, thus, there is no unsituated knowledge production. If this is the case, then it cannot be argued anymore that a human "I" can produce a knowledge equivalent to a God-Eye view.⁵

The second argument of Descartes is epistemological. He claims that the only way the "I" can achieve certitude in knowledge production is through the method of solipsism. How can the "I" fight skepticism and be able to achieve certitude in knowledge production? The answer given by Descartes is that this could be achieved through an internal monologue of the subject with himself (the gender here is not accidental for reasons that will be explained later). With the method of solipsism, the subject asks and answers questions in an internal monologue until it reaches certitude in knowledge. What would happen if human subjects produce knowledge dialogically, that is, in social relations with other human beings? The main implication would be that the claim about an "I" that can produce cer-

5. For a very interesting discussion on this question see Enrique Dussel (1995) and Donna Haraway (1988).

titude in knowledge isolated from social relations with other human beings falls apart. Without epistemic solipsism, the "I" would be located in particular social relations, in particular social/historical contexts and, thus, there is no *monological, unsituated* and *asocial* knowledge production. If knowledge is produced in particular social relations, that is, inside a particular society, then it cannot be argued that the human "I" can produce a knowledge equivalent to a God Eye view.

Cartesian philosophy have been highly influential in Westernized projects of knowledge production. The unsituatedness of Descartes' philosophy inaugurated the ego-politics of knowledge: an "I" that assumes itself to be producing a knowledge from no-where. As Colombian philosopher, Santiago Castro-Gomez (2003) argues, Cartesian philosophy assumes a point zero epistemology, that is, a point of view that do not assumes itself as a point of view. The importance of Rene Descartes for Westernized epistemology can be seen in that after 370 years, Westernized universities still carry the Cartesian legacy as a criteria of validity for science and knowledge production. Even those who are critical of Cartesian philosophy, still use it as criteria for what differentiates science from non-science. The "subject-object" split, "objectivity" understood as "neutrality," the myth of an EGO that produces "unbiased" knowledge unconditioned by its body or space location, the idea of knowledge as produced through an internal monologue without links with other human beings and universality understood as beyond any particularity are still the criteria for valid knowledge and science used in the disciplines of the Westernized university. Any knowledge that claims to be situated in body-politics of knowledge (Anzaldúa 1987; Frantz Fanon 2010) or geo-politics of knowledge (Dussel 1977) as opposed to the myth of the unsituated knowledge of the Cartesian ego-politics of knowledge is discarded as biased, invalid, irrelevant, unseries-

ous, that is, inferior knowledge.

What is relevant to the “Western men tradition of thought” inaugurated by Cartesian philosophy is that it constituted a world-historical event. Prior to Descartes, no tradition of thought claimed to produce an unsituated knowledge that is God-like or equivalent to God. This *idolatric universalism* of “Western men tradition of thought” inaugurated by Descartes (2013) in 1637, pretends to replace God and produce a knowledge that is God-like. The Dusselian questions are: What are the political, economic, historical, and cultural conditions of possibility for someone in the mid-seventeenth century to produce a philosophy that claims to be equivalent to God’s Eye and to replace God? Who is speaking and from which body-politics of knowledge or geo-politics of knowledge is he speaking from?

Enrique Dussel (2005) responds to these questions with the following argument: Descartes’ “I think, therefore I am” is preceded by 150 years of “I conquer, therefore I am.” The *ego conquiro* is the condition of possibility of Descartes’s *ego cogito*. According to Dussel, the arrogant and idolatric God-like pretention of Cartesian philosophy is coming from the perspective of someone who thinks of himself as the center of the world because he has already conquered the world. Who is this being? According to Dussel (2005), this is the *Imperial Being*. The “I conquer” that began with the European men colonial expansion in 1492, is the foundation and condition of possibility of the “I think” that secularizes all the attributes of the Christian God and replaces God as the new foundation of knowledge. Once European men conquered the world, God is disposable as a foundation of knowledge. After having conquered the world, European man achieve “God-like” qualities that gave them epistemic privilege.

However, there is a missing link between the “I conquer, therefore I am” and the “I think, therefore I am.” There is no in-

herent necessity to derive from the “I conquer, therefore I am” the “idolatric universalism” (the God-Eye view) nor the “epistemic racism/sexism” (the inferiority of all knowledges coming from human beings that are classified as non-Western). What links the “I conquer, therefore I am” (*ego conquiro*) with the idolatric, God-like “I think, therefore I am” (*ego cogito*) is the epistemic racism/sexism produced from the “I exterminate, therefore I am” (*ego extermino*). It is the logic of genocide/epistemicide together that mediates the “I conquer” with the epistemic racism/sexism of the “I think” as the new foundation of knowledge in the modern/colonial world. The *ego extermino* is the socio-historical structural condition that makes possible the link of the *ego conquiro* with the *ego cogito*. In what follows, it will be argued that the four genocides/epistemicides of the long 16th century are the socio-historical condition of possibility for the transformation of the “I conquer, therefore I am” into the epistemic racism/sexism of the “I think, therefore I am.” These four genocides/epistemicides in the long 16th century are: 1) against Muslims and Jews in the conquest of Al-Andalus in the name of “purity of blood”; 2) against indigenous peoples first in the Americas and then in Asia; 3) against African people with the captive trade and their enslavement in the Americas; 4) against women who practiced and transmitted Indo-European knowledge in Europe burned alive accused of being witches. These four genocides/epistemicides are frequently discussed as fragmented from each other. The attempt here is to see them as interlinked, inter-related to each other and as constitutive of the modern/colonial world’s epistemic structures. These four genocides were at the same time forms of epistemicide that are constitutive of Western men epistemic privilege. To sustain this argument we need to not only go over the history but also explain how and when racism emerged.

III. THE CONQUEST OF AL-ANDALUS: GENOCIDE/EPISTEMICIDE AGAINST MUSLIMS AND JEWS

The final conquest of Al-Andalus in the late 15th century was done under the slogan of “purity of blood.” This was a proto-racist discourse against Muslim and Jewish populations during the Catholic Monarchy colonial conquest of Andalusian territory to destroy the sultanate of Granada which was the last Muslim political authority in the Iberian Peninsula (Maldonado-Torres 2008a). The practice of ethnic cleansing of the Andalusian territory produced a physical genocide and cultural genocide against Muslims and Jews. Jews and Muslims who stayed in the territory were either killed (physical genocide) or forced to conversion (cultural genocide). This ethnic cleansing was achieved through the following genocide (physical) and epistemicide (cultural):

- 1- The forced expulsion of Muslims and Jews from their land (genocide) led to the repopulation of the territory with Christian populations from the North of the Iberian Peninsula (Caro Barojas 1991; Carrasco 2009). This is what in the literature is called today “settler colonialism.”
- 2- The massive destruction of Islamic and Judaic spirituality and knowledge through genocide, led to the forced conversion (cultural genocide) of those Jews and Muslims who decided to stay in the territory (Barrios Aguilera 2009, Kettami 2012). By turning Muslims into Moriscos (converted Muslims) and Jews into Marranos (converted Jews), their memory, knowledge and spirituality were destroyed (cultural genocide). The latter was a guarantee that future descendants of Marranos and Moros will be born fully Christians without any memory trace to their ancestors.

The Spanish state discourse of “purity of blood” was used to surveil the Muslim and Jewish populations who survived the massacres. In order to survive and stay in the territory, they were forced to convert to Christianity (Galán Sánchez 2010). Those populations that were forced to convert or that had Jewish or Muslim ancestry, were surveilled by the Christian monarchy in order to assure that they were not faking conversion. “Purity of blood” was a discourse used to surveil the converts or descendants of the converts. It referred to the “family tree” of the population. The “family tree” provided to state authorities the information needed in order to know if the ancestry of an individual or a family was “purely” Christian or “non-Christian” in the case they were Christian converts. The discourse of “purity of blood” did not question the humanity of the victims. What it aimed was to surveil those populations with non-Christian ancestry in terms of how far or close they were to Christianity in order to confirm if the conversion was real or not. For the Castillian Christian Monarchy, Muslims and Jews were humans with the “wrong God” or “wrong religion.” They were perceived as a “fifth column” of the Ottoman sultanate in the Iberian Peninsula (Martín Casares 2000; Carrasco 2009; Galán Sánchez 2010). Thus, the old European Medieval religious discriminatory discourses such as the old anti-semitic discourses (judeophobic or islamophobic) were used against Jews and Muslims in the conquest of Al-Andalus.

It is important to emphasize that since the possibility of conversation was still open, the old anti-semitic European Medieval religious discrimination of the Castillian Christian Monarchy (at the end of the 15th century) was not yet racial and included among semitic people both Muslims and Jews⁶. As long as the Muslims and Jews con-

6. It is the recent Western European, North American and Israeli Zionist orientalist literature that after Second World War excluded Arabs from semite people and reduced the definition of

verted to Christianity, the doors for integration were open during the Medieval Spanish Monarchy conquest of Al-Andalus (Galán Sánchez 2010; Dominguez Ortiz 2009). The humanity of the victims was not in question. What was in question was the religious identity of the social subjects. The social classification used at the time was related to a theological question about having the “wrong God” or the “wrong religion” to stratify society along religious lines.

In sum, what is important here is that the “purity of blood” discourse used in the conquest of Al-Andalus was a form of religious discrimination that was not yet fully racist because it did not question in a profound way the humanity of its victims.

III. THE CONQUEST OF THE AMERICAS IN RELATION TO THE CONQUEST OF AL-ANDALUS: GENOCIDE/EPISTEMICIDE AGAINST INDIGENOUS PEOPLES, MARRANOS, MORISCOS, AND AFRICANS

When Christopher Columbus presented for the first time the document known as “The Indian Enterprise” to the King and Queen of the Castilian Monarchy, their response was to accept it and postpone it until after the conquest of all the territory known as Al-Andalus. They ordered Columbus to wait until the final conquest over the “Kingdom of Granada,” the last sultanate in the Iberian Peninsula. The idea of the Castilian Christian Monarchy was to unify the whole territory under its command by the rule of “one state, one identity, one religion” in contrast to Al-Andalus where there were multiple Islamic states (sultanates) with recognition of rights to the “multiple identities and spiritualities inside their territorial boundaries” (Maíllo Delgado 2004; Kettami 2012).

The project of the Castilian Christian anti-semitism to racial discrimination against Jews. The latter is part of a perverse Zionist strategy to conflate Arab-Muslims’ critique to Zionism as equivalent to anti-semitism (Grosfoguel 2009).

Monarchy to create a correspondence between the identity of the state and the identity of the population within its territorial boundaries, was the origin of the idea of the nation-state in Europe. The main goal that the Queen and the King expressed to Columbus was the unification of the whole territory under the power of the Christian Monarchy as a first step before going abroad to conquest other lands beyond the Iberian Peninsula.

The final conquest over Muslim political authority in the Iberian Peninsula was finalized in January 2, 1492 with the capitulation of Granada’s Nazarí emirate. Only nine days later, on January 11, 1492, Columbus met again with Queen Elizabeth. But this time the meeting was held in Granada’s Alhambra Nazarí Palace where Columbus got the royal authorization and resources for his first voyage overseas. Only ten months later, on October 12, 1492, Columbus arrived at the shores of what he named “Indias Occidentales” (West Indies) because he wrongly believed that he had arrived to India.

The relationship between the conquest of Al-Andalus and the conquest of the Americas has been under-researched in the literature. The methods of colonization and domination used against Al-Andalus were extrapolated to the Americas (Garrido Aranda 1980). The conquest of Al-Andalus was so important in the minds of the Spanish conquerors that Hernan Cortés, the conqueror of Mexico, confused the Aztecs’ sacred temples with Mosques.

In addition to the genocide of people, the conquest of Al-Andalus was accompanied by epistemicide. For example, the burning of libraries was a fundamental method used in the conquest of Al-Andalus. The library of Cordoba, that had around 500,000 books at a time when the largest library of Christian Europe did not have more than 1000 books, was burned in the 13th century. Many other libraries had the same destiny during the conquest of Al-Andalus un-

til the final burning of more than 250,000 books of the Granada library by Cardenal Cisneros in the early 16th century. These methods were extrapolated to the Americas. Thus, the same happened with the indigenous "códices" which was the written practice used by Amerindians to archive knowledge. Thousands of "códices" were also burned destroying indigenous knowledges in the Americas. Genocide and epistemicide went together in the process of conquest in both the Americas and Al-Andalus.

A similar process happened with the methods of evangelization used against indigenous people in the Americas (Garrido Aranda 1980; Martín de la Hoz 2010). It was inspired in the methods used against Muslims in the Iberian Peninsula (Garrido Aranda 1980). It was a form of "spiritualicide" and "epistemicide" at the same time. The destruction of knowledge and spirituality went also together in the conquest of both Al-Andalus and the Americas.

However, it is fundamental to also understand how the conquest of the Americas affected the conquest of "Moriscos" (converted Muslims) and "Marranos" (converted Jews) in the Iberian Peninsula in the 16th century. The conquest of the Americas was at the center of the new discourses and forms of domination that emerged in the long 16th century with the creation of the modern/colonial world-system. Here the contribution of Nelson Maldonado-Torres is crucial when he said that the 16th century transformed the ancient forms of imperial social classification that existed since the 4th century when with Constantine, Christianity became the dominant ideology of the Roman Empire. As Maldonado-Torres (2008a) said:

... the conceptual coordinates that defined the 'fight for the empire' and the forms of social classification of the 4th century and of later centuries prior to the "discovery" and conquest of the Américas

change drastically in the 16th century. The relationship between religion and empire would be at the center of a dramatic transformation from a system of power based on religious differences to one based on racial differences. It is for this reason that in modernity, the dominant episteme would not only be defined by the tension and mutual collaboration between the idea of religion and the imperial vision of the known world, but, more precisely, through a dynamic relation between empire, religion, and race. Ideas about race, religion, and empire functioned as significant axes in the imaginary of the emergent modern/colonial world ... (p. 230)

If the military and evangelization methods of conquest used in Al-Andalus to achieve genocide and epistemicide were extrapolated to the conquest of indigenous people in the Americas, the conquest of the Americas also created a new racial imaginary and racial hierarchy that transformed the conquest of Moriscos and Marranos in 16th century Iberian Peninsula. The conquest of the Americas affected the old forms of Medieval religious discrimination against Moriscos and Marranos in 16th century Spain. The first point to emphasize in this history is that after months of navigation through the Atlantic Ocean, the moment Columbus stepped out of the ship he wrote in his diary the following on October 12, 1492:

... it seemed to me that they were a people very poor in everything. All of them go around as naked as their mothers bore them... They should be good and talent servants, for I observed that they quickly took in what was said to them. And I believe that they would easily be made Christians, as it appeared to me that they had no sect. (my own translation)

This statement by Christopher Columbus opened a debate for the next 60 years (1492-1552). As Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2008a) argues, in the late 15th century, Columbus' notion of "people without sect" ("people without religion") meant something new. To say "people without religion" today means "atheist people." But in the Christian imaginary of the late 15th century, the phrase "people without religion" had a different connotation. In Christian imaginary, all humans have religion. They could have the "wrong God" or "wrong Gods," there could be wars and people could kill each other in the fight against the "wrong God," but the humanity of the other, as a trend and as a form of domination, was not yet put in question. What was being questioned was the theology of the "other." The latter was radically modified after 1492 with the conquest of the Americas and the characterization of indigenous peoples by Christopher Columbus as "people without religion." An anachronistic reading of this phrase might lead us to think that Columbus referred to "atheist people." But not having religion in the Christian imaginary of the time was equivalent to not having a soul, that is, being expelled from the realm of the human. As Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2008a) said:

To refer to the indigenous as subjects without religion removes them from the category of the human. Religion is universal among humans, but the alleged lack of it among natives is not initially taken to indicate the falseness of this statement, but rather the opposite, that there exist subjects in the world who are not fully human. ...Columbus' assertion about the lack of religion in indigenous people introduces an anthropological meaning to the term. In light of what we have seen here, it is necessary to add that this anthropological meaning is also

linked to a very modern method of classifying humans: racial classification. With a single stroke, Columbus took the discourse on religion from the theological realm into a modern philosophical anthropology that distinguishes among different degrees of humanity through identities fixed into what would later be called races. (p. 217)

Contrary to the contemporary common sense, "color racism" was not the first racist discourse. "Religious racism" ("people with religion" vs. "people without religion" or "people with soul" vs. "people without a soul") was the first marker of racism in the "Capitalist/Patriarcal Western-Centric/Christian-centric modern/colonial world-system" (Grosfoguel 2011) formed in the long 16th century. The definition of "people without religion" was coined in late 15th and early 16th century Spain. The debate provoked by the conquest of the Americas was about whether the "people without religion" found in Columbus' voyages were "people with a soul or without a soul." The logic of the argument was as follows: 1) if you do not have religion, you do not have a God; 2) if you do not have a God, then you do not have a soul; and 3) if you do not have a soul, you are not human but animal-like.

The debate turned "people without religion" into "people without a soul." This colonial racist debate produced a boomerang effect that redefined and transformed the dominant imaginary of the times and the Medieval religious discriminatory discourses. The concept of "purity of blood" acquired a new meaning. "Purity of blood" was not any more a technology of power to surveil persons that have a Muslim or Jewish ancestry in the family tree in order to make sure he/she is not faking conversion as in 15th century conquest of Al-Andalus. The meaning of "purity of blood" after the conquest of the Americas with the emergence of the concept of "people without a

soul" shifted from a theological question about having the "wrong religion" into a question about the humanity of the subject practicing the "wrong religion."⁷

As a result, the great debate in the first five decades of the 16th century was about whether "Indians" have a soul or not. In practice, both the Church and the Spanish imperial state were already massively enslaving indigenous people assuming the notion that "Indians" have no soul. State racism is not a post-18th century phenomenon, but a phenomenon that emerged following the conquest of the Americas in the 16th century. However, there were critical voices inside the Church questioning this idea and proposing that "Indians" have a soul but were barbarians in need of Christianization (Dussel 1979; 1992). They claimed that since the "Indians" have a soul, it is a sin in the eyes of God to enslave them and the job of the Church should be to Christianize them using peaceful methods. This debate was the first racist debate in world history and "Indian" as an identity was the first modern identity.

The category of "Indian" constituted a new modern/colonial identity invention that homogenized the heterogeneous identities that existed in the Americas before the arrival of the Europeans. It is also important to remember that Columbus thought he had arrived in India and, thus, leading to the use of the term "Indian" to name the populations he encountered. Out of this eurocentric geographical mistake, emerges "Indian" as a new identity. But to question if "Indians" have a soul or not was already a racist question that referred directly to the

7. It is important to remember that Latin was the written language of 16th century Europe. Since the Christian church was the authority of knowledge through Christian theology, the debates about the conquest of the Americas in Spain travelled to other European territories through the Church networks. Thus, the debates about Columbus and the Spanish Christian theologians on the New World and the subjects found there were read with particular attention in other parts of Europe.

question of their humanity.⁸

In 16th century Christian imaginary, this debate had important implications. If "Indians" did not have a soul, then it is justified in the eyes of God to enslave them and treat them as animals in the labor process. But if they had a soul, then it was a sin in the eyes of God to enslave, assassinate, or mistreat them. This debate was crucial in the mutation of the old European medieval religious discriminatory discourses and practices. Until the end of the 15th century, the old islamophobic and judeophobic discourses were related to having the "wrong God," the "wrong theology," and to the influence of Satan in the "wrong religion," without questioning the humanity of their practitioners.⁹ The possibility of conversion was available for the victims of these discriminatory discourses. But with the colonization of the Americas, these old medieval discriminatory religious discourses mutated rapidly, transforming into modern racial domination.

Even though the word "race" was not used at the time, the debate about having a soul or not was already a racist debate in the sense used by scientific racism in the 19th century. The theological debate of the 16th century about having a soul or not had the same connotation of the 19th century scien-

8. This skepticism about the humanity of other human beings is what Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2008b) called "misanthropic skepticism."

9. I refer to the social classification of the social system. As Maldonado-Torres argues, there were already individuals articulating discourses that could be identified as racist from a contemporary point of view. However, the social classification of the population in Medieval Europe was not based on racial classification, that is, it was not organized around social logics related to a radical question about the humanity of the social subjects. The social classification of the population based on racist social logics was a post-1492 process with the formation of the "Capitalist/Patriarchal Western-centric/Christian-centric Modern/Colonial World-System" (Grosfoguel 2011). Thus, in this article the argument about the emergence of racism is related to a post-1492 global social system and not to individual statements before 1492.

tificist debates about having the human biological constitution or not. Both were debates about the humanity or animality of the others articulated by the institutional racist discourse of states such as the Castilian Christian monarchy in the 16th century or Western European imperial nation-states in the 19th century. These institutional racist logics of “not having a soul” in the 16th century or “not having the human biology” in the 19th century became the organizing principle of the international division of labor and capitalist accumulation at a world-scale.

The debate continued until the famous Valladolid trial of the School of Salamanca in 1552. Since Christian theology and church was the authority of knowledge at the time, the Spanish Christian imperial monarchy put in the hands of a tribunal among Christian theologians the question about whether “Indians have a soul or not.” The theologians were Bartolomé de las Casas and Gines Sepúlveda. After 60 years (1492-1552) of debate, the Spanish imperial Christian monarchy finally requested a Christian theological tribunal to make a final decision about the humanity or lack of humanity of the “Indians.”

As is well-known, Gines Sepúlveda argued in favor of the position that “Indians” are “people without a soul” and, therefore, they are animals that could be enslaved in the labor process without being a sin in the eyes of God. Part of his argument to demonstrate the inferiority of the “Indians” below the line of the human was the modern capitalist argument that “Indians” have no sense of private property and no notion of markets because they produce through collective forms and distribute wealth through reciprocity.

Bartolomé de las Casas argued that “Indians” have a soul but were in a barbarian stage in need of Christianization. Therefore, for Las Casas it was a sin in the eyes of God to enslave them. What he proposed was to “Christianize” them. Both Las Casas

and Sepúlveda represent the inauguration of the two major racist discourses with long lasting consequences that will be mobilized by Western imperial powers for the next 450 years: biological racist discourses and cultural racist discourses.

The biological racist discourse is a 19th century scientificist secularization of Sepúlveda’s theological racist discourse. When the authority of knowledge passed in the West from Christian theology to Modern Science after the 18th century Enlightenment Project and the French Revolution, the Sepúlveda theological racist discourse of “people without soul” mutated with the rise of natural sciences to a biological racist discourse of “peoples without human biology” and later “peoples without genes” (without the human genetics). The same happened with the Bartolomé De Las Casas discourse. The De Las Casas theological discourse of “barbarians to be Christianized” in the 16th century, transmuted with the rise of the social sciences into an anthropological cultural racist discourse about “primitives to be civilized.”

The outcome of the Valladolid trial is also well known: although Sepúlveda’s view won in the long run, in the short run Las Casas won the trial. Thus, the Spanish imperial monarchy decided that “Indians” have a soul but are barbarians to be Christianized. Therefore, it was recognized that it was a sin in the eyes of God to enslave them. The conclusion seemingly meant the liberation of “Indians” from the Spanish colonial rule. But this was not the case. The “Indians” were transferred in the international division of labor from slave labor to another form of coerced labor known as the “encomienda.” Since then it became institutionalized in a more systematic way the idea of race and institutional racism as an organizing principle of the international division of labor and capitalist accumulation at a world-scale.

While “Indians” were placed in the “encomienda” under a coerced form of labor,

Africans who were already classified as “people without a soul” were brought to the Americas to replace “Indians” in slave labor. Africans were perceived at the time as Muslims and the racialization of Muslims in 16th century Spain was extended to them. The decision to bring captives from Africa to enslave them in the Americas was directly related to the conclusion of the 1552 Valladolid trial. Here begins the massive kidnapping and captive trade of Africans that is going to be enforced for the next 300 years. With the enslavement of Africans, religious racism was complemented with or slowly replaced by color racism. Since then, anti-black racism became a foundational constitutive structuring logic of the modern/colonial world.

The kidnapping of Africans and their enslavement in the Americas was a major and significant world-historical event (Nimako and Willemsen 2011). Millions of Africans died in the process of being captured, transported and enslaved in the Americas. This was a genocide at a massive scale. But as with the other cases outlined above, the genocide was inherently epistemicide. Africans in the Americas were forbidden from thinking, praying or practicing their cosmologies, knowledges and world views. They were submitted to a regime of epistemic racism that forbade their autonomous knowledge production. Epistemic inferiority was a crucial argument used to claim biological social inferiority below the line of the human. The racist idea in late 16th century was that “Negroes lack intelligence” which turned in the 20th century to “Negroes have low IQ levels.”

Another consequence of the debate about the “Indians” and the Valladolid tribunal was its impact on the Moriscos and Marranos in 16th century Spain. The old islamophobic and judeophobic medieval religious discriminatory discourses against Jews and Muslims were transformed into racist discrimination. The question was not any more about whether the religiously dis-

criminated population have the wrong God or wrong theology. The anti-indigenous religious racism that questioned the humanity of the “Indians” was extrapolated to the Moriscos and the Marranos questioning the humanity of those who pray to the “wrong God.” Those who prayed to the “wrong God” were conceived as not having a soul, as “soul-less subjects” (“*sujetos desalmados*”), non-humans or sub-humans. Similar to indigenous people in the Americas, they were expelled from the “realm of the human” being described as “animal-like” (Perceval 1992; 1997). The latter represented a radical transformation that goes from the inferiority of non-Christian religions (Islam and Judaism) in Medieval Europe to the inferiority of the human beings who practiced these religions (Jews and Muslims) in the new emerging Modern Europe. Thus, it is as a result of the impact of the conquest of the Americas in the 16th century that the old European islamophobic and judeophobic anti-semitic religious discrimination going back to the crusades and before, turned into racial discrimination. This is the boomerang effect of colonialism coming back to hunt Europe.

The entanglement between the religious Christian-centric global hierarchy and the racial/ethnic Western-Centric hierarchy of the “capitalist/patriarcal Western-centric/Christian-centric modern/colonial world-system” created after 1492, identified the practitioners of a non-Christian spirituality with being racialized as an inferior being below the line of the human. Contrary to Eurocentric narratives such as Foucault (1996), that situates the transmutation from religious anti-semitism to racial anti-semitism in the 19th century with the emergence of scientific racism, anti-semitic racism emerged in 16th century Spain when the old medieval anti-semitic religious discrimination was entangled with the new modern racial imaginary produced by the conquest of the Americas. The new racial imaginary mutated the old religious

anti-semitism into racial anti-semitism. Contrary to Foucault, this anti-semitic racism of the 16th century was already institutionalized as state biopolitical racism.¹⁰

The concept of “people without a soul” was not extended to Moriscos immediately. It took several decades in the 16th century to be extrapolated to Moriscos. It was after the mid-sixteenth century and, specifically, during the Alpujarras¹¹ trial that Moriscos were called “souless people” (“*sujetos desalmados*”). Moreover, after mid-16th century, as a consequence of being classified as “souless people,” Moriscos were massively enslaved in Granada. Despite the Christian church prohibition to enslave Christians and people baptized as Christian, Moriscos (Muslims converted to Christianity) were still enslaved (Marín Casares 2000).

Now, “purity of blood” was related to “souless people” making irrelevant the question about how assimilated they were to Christianity. Their being was itself in question making their humanity suspicious. Thus, from then on they were not considered truly Christians nor equal to Christians. Anti-Morisco racism would be intensified during the later part of the 16th century until their mass expulsion from the Iberian Peninsula in 1609 (Perceval 1992, 1997; Carrasco 2009).

In sum, the conquest of the Americas in the 16th century extended the process of genocide/epistemicide that began with the conquest of Al-Andalus to new subjects

10. Scientific racism in the 19th century was not, as Foucault argued, a resignification of the old European “race war” discourse but a secularization of the old Christendom religious theological racism of “people without a soul” in the 16th century. The old discourse of “race war” inside Europe was not the foundation of scientific racism as Foucault insisted on with his “genealogy of racism.” The foundation of scientific racism was the old religious racism of the 16th century with roots in the European colonial conquest of the Americas. Foucault is blind towards the conquest of the Americas, colonialism and Spain’s 16th century.

11. These were the trials against Moriscos that arose in the Alpujarras mountains outside the city of Granada after the mid-16th century.

such as indigenous people and Africans, while simultaneously intensified through a new racial logic the genocide/epistemicide against Christians from Jewish and Muslim origin populations in Spain.

IV. THE CONQUEST OF INDO-EUROPEAN WOMEN: GENOCIDE/EPISTEMICIDE AGAINST WOMEN

There is a fourth genocide/epistemicide in the 16th century that is not frequently related to the history of the three genocides/epistemicides outlined before.¹² This is the conquest and genocide of women in European lands who transmitted Indo-European knowledge from generation to generation. These women mastered indigenous knowledge from ancient times. Their knowledge covered different areas such as astronomy, medicine, biology, ethics, etc. They were empowered by the possession of ancestral knowledge and their leading role inside the communities organized around commune-like forms of economic and political organization. The persecution of these women began from the late Medieval era. However, it became intensified in the 16th and 17th century (long 16th century) with the rise of “modern/colonial capitalist/patriarchal” power structures.

Millions of women were burned alive, accused of being witches in the Early Modern period. Given their authority and leadership, the attack against these women was a strategy to consolidate Christian-centric

12. The seminal work of Silvia Federici (2004) is one of the few exceptions. Although Federici’s work does not link these four processes in relation to genocide/epistemicide, she at least links the witch hunt of women in the 16th/17th century with the enslavement of Africans and the conquest of the Americas in relation to global capitalist accumulation, in particular, the early formation of capitalism, that is, “primitive accumulation.” Her work is focused on political-economy rather than structures of knowledge. However, her contribution is crucial for the understanding of the relation between the genocide/epistemicide of women and the other genocide/epistemicides of the 16th century.

patriarchy and to destroy autonomous communal forms of land ownership. The Inquisition was at the forefront of this offensive. The accusation was an attack to thousands of women whose autonomy, leadership and knowledge threatened Christian theology, Church authority and the power of the aristocracy that turned into a capitalist class transnationally in the colonies as well as in European agriculture.¹³ (...)

Silvia Federici (2004) argues that this witch hunt intensified between 1550 and 1650. Her thesis is that the witch hunt against women in European territory was related to primitive accumulation during the early capitalist expansion in the formation of the labor reserve for global capitalism. She linked the African enslavement in the Americas with the witch hunt of Women in Europe as two sides of the same coin: capital accumulation at a world-scale in need of incorporating labor to the capitalist accumulation process. In order to achieve this, capitalist institutions used extreme forms of violence.

Contrary to the epistemicide against Indigenous people and Muslims where thousands of books were burned, in the case of the genocide/epistemicide against Indo-European women there were no books to burn because the transmission of knowledge was done from generation to generation through oral tradition. The "books" were the women's bodies and, thus, similar to the Andalusian and Indigenous "books" their bodies were burned alive.

13. For an analysis of the transformation of the European aristocracy into a capitalist class in relation to the formation of the modern world-system see the work of Immanuel Wallerstein, specially his *Modern World-System*, Vol. 1 (New York: Academic Press).

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