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Decolonial Reflections on Hemispheric Partitions
The "Western Hemisphere" in the Colonial Horizon of Modernity and the
Irreversible Historical Shift to the "Eastern Hemisphere"

Abstract:

In this article I introduce two variations in the conversation with the proposed topic, "Theorizing Hemispheric Studies of the Americas." The first variation, and the first part of my article, would ask whether it is "Hemispheric Studies" we should theorize or the "Invention of America(s) and the idea of (Western) Hemisphere"? In this regard, I would ask the following questions: why is there a growing interest in the Western Hemisphere today and why in Hemispheric Studies? The second question, related to the first, is: what would we like to know by theorizing Hemispheric Studies of the Americas (Western Hemisphere) at the present moment in which everyone on the planet is witnessing what seems to be the irreversible shift to the "Eastern Hemisphere" (Mahbubanu; Froetschel)? Or, a third question: is there nothing specific we would like to know or understand, or are we open to whatever we can "find"?

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About fifteen years ago I explored the meaning of the “Western Hemisphere” in the colonial horizon of modernity. Today, in first decades of the twenty-first century, the economic and political fields of power are rapidly being re-oriented. The expression is more than metaphorical. Firstly, “orientalism” is being superseded, not reversed. Superseded because the “Orient” (from East to South Asia and to South East Asia), are no longer voiceless places and people subjected to Western Orientalists. Secondly, because Hegel’s narrative in his well-known lesson in the philosophy of history has taken a very paradoxical shift: Spirit—tired of Europe and the US where Hegel anticipated it will move (and it did)—is returning to the East.

One cannot engage in hemispheric reflections or in theorizing Hemispheric Studies of the Americas without being aware that such reflections are performed someplace in the heavens (or in the hells, as the case may be), looking from above or from below the hemispheric distribution of the planet without *sensing* how the planetary hemispheric distribution shaped the sensibility of the reflecting subject.

Hegel’s narrative, tracing the trajectory from the birth of the State in ancient China, moving Westward through India, Persia and reaching Greece and Rome, landed in Western Europe, more specifically in Germany. It appears as if Germany was the end of Spirit’s journey when, indeed, it was the beginning of the narrative. And this means, that the beginning was the idea of Spirit arriving in Germany. To justify the itinerary and to create the illusion of “history”, the beginning of the journey had to be elsewhere. In other words, it was *the presence of the enunciation that invented the past of Spirit’s journey*. That fiction works well because when Spirit arrived in Germany, it looked like it was a “natural” journey rather than a narrative that *started* in Germany to tell a story that *started* in China. What matters was the presence of the enunciation rather than the Spirit’s journey.

Hegel surmised that the route of Spirit would continue, cross the Atlantic and dwell in the US. But, Hegel said, that is the future and his narrative was about the past. South America was dismissed as a place of “caudillos” and civil wars. Africa was out of history. Today Spirit, after being deceived by European history, crossed the Atlantic and indeed dwelled in the US. Deceived again, it decided to continue its route to the West and return to its place of origination. It was Columbus’s dream: to reach the Orient, from Europe, navigating toward the West. The return of Spirit to the East makes us realize that indeed the East is the West seen not from the location of European but from the location of people in the Western Hemisphere, the Americas Hemisphere (Mignolo, “Geopolitics of Sensing and Knowing”).

I would revisit here this essay and introduce two variations in the conversation with the proposed topic, “Theorizing Hemispheric Studies of the Americas.” The first variation, and the first part of my

article, would ask whether it is "Hemispheric Studies" we should theorize or the "Invention of America(s) and the idea of (Western) Hemisphere"? In this regard, I would ask the following questions: why is there a growing interest in the Western Hemisphere today and why in Hemispheric Studies? The second question, related to the first, is: what we would like to know by theorizing Hemispheric Studies of the Americas (Western Hemisphere) at the present moment in which everyone on the planet is witnessing what seems to be the irreversible shift to the "Eastern Hemisphere" (Mahbubanu; Froetschel)? Or, a third question: is there something specific we would like to know or understand, or are we open to whatever we can "find"?

1. The Invention of America and of the Western Hemisphere

1.1.

In order to theorize "Hemispheric Studies of the Americas" it would be advisable to first ask a theoretical historical question: when did the idea of the Americas and of the Western Hemisphere emerge and why? For "America" did not exist before 1504. There was no idea of America either and even less the awareness that the planet was divided in two Hemispheres. So that both "America" and "Western Hemisphere" are not entities but geopolitical ideas to organize the planet; or, if you wish, there are entities configured by an idea constituted by a name and a cartographic image. The point is that the idea did not come about by way of the universal consensus of all existing civilizations. No, it came from Western Christians who had already conceived the world as divided into three continents: Asia, Europe and Africa. The notion that the planet divided into three continents only made sense for Western Christians. But that is not all: the idea of East and West, Western and Eastern Hemisphere needed first the idea of the America that was first christened "New World." However, the continental land and islands that became the New World for Europeans was not new for the millions of people that for perhaps 20,000 years had been dwelling in the lands about which the European did not know.

To be fair, people inhabiting Anahuac, Tawantinsuyu, Abya-Yala and the hundreds of other territories on the continent, did not know about the "Old World" either. The distinction between Old and New World is tantamount with the distinction between Indias Occidentales e Indias Orientales for the Spaniards and America for people north of the Pyrenees. The division between Indias Orientales and Indias Occidentales was the creation of Pope Alexander VI. The second was introduced by an Italian man of letters, Pietro Martir d'Anghiera, toward the last decade of the Fifteenth Century, after the famous letter by Amerigo Vespucci, the Italian explorer, financier and navigator who realized that Columbus had not landed in Cipango or India, but in a "Mundus Novo," a New World (Vespucci).

Castilians conquerors (Hernán Cortés), Italian explorers (Columbus, Vespucci) and men of letters in Castile (Anghiera) were the first, in Europe and in the world, to write about and map the continent they did not know about. Mayan, Aztec and Incan civilizations that were dwelling in the continent when Spaniards arrived had a totally different conception of the world. Written and printed information and conceptualization about land and people unknown to the actors who were writing and mapping had a tremendous effect: it transformed ignorance into ontology and fiction into truth. This is the context in which I propose to theorize American Hemispheric Studies.

1.2.

I opened up my lecture in Bielefeld with a two-minute statement by Native American theologian Richard Twiss (*Theology of Manifest Destiny*). If you check the statement on YouTube, you will soon see the reasons why I started with his statement. There is a common historical ground among theologian and secular Native Americans thinkers, First Nations people of Canada and Pueblos Originarios of South and Central América: that common ground is the invasion of European colonizers since late fifteenth century and through all the sixteenth century. Be they Spaniards, Portuguese, English or French, there was little difference from the perspective of the people being invaded: different languages and the same inhumanity, even among those who defended the “Indians” but considered them somewhat defective.

There is a common ground among thinkers of Afro-American descent in the Caribbean, in continental South and Central America and some US Afro-America (e.g., Cornel West) for whom 1492 is the point of reference of the life and death of the continent. Although the slave trade started in earnest during the Sixteenth Century, 1492 is the date of reference that created the conditions to the transportation of enslaved Africans to “America.”

There is also a common ground among thinkers of European descent, either of theological or of secular persuasion, in considering that 1492 is the point of reference in the making of the life and death of the continent. A considerable difference distinguishes the group of European descent from the first two: people of European descent divide between those who considered the invasion beneficial for Indians and Blacks and those who consider it a genocidal intervention. We do not encounter that division, at least with such clear profiles, among Indians and Blacks. The majority agrees in both demographic groups that the invasion was genocidal.

The bottom line is that all the disputes about the New World were disputes about Europeans in Europe and Europeans in the New World first, and then between Creoles (people of European descent) among themselves and among Europeans. Indians and Blacks were being discussed but were not being allowed to enter the discussion. The two pillars that set up the debate about the

continental divide among Europeans were decided by appropriating and expropriating lands, dividing among themselves and naming the new territories based on their own memories.

A second historical moment came in two instances. It was by the end of the Seventeenth Century that European cartographers divided the planet into two hemispheres, the Western Hemisphere and the Eastern Hemisphere. However, in the Nineteenth Century, the US appropriated the idea of “Western Hemisphere” claiming US sovereignty on the continent and disputing European expansionism. This was a crucial move for international politics in the sense that, up to that point, the idea of the “Western Hemisphere” referred to European colonies in the New World/America. From that moment onward Western Hemisphere named and defined “America” from a US perspective and management: the US became equivalent to America.

Theodore Roosevelt made clear in 1904-1905 by amending the “Monroe Doctrine” a century after its proclamation saying that Europe shall stay out of “American” soils as the US became the guardian and the putative manager of countries in the Western Hemisphere to prevent European colonialism. [1] Since then, the rhetoric of US foreign policy has promoted the US as the agents of world order and world freedom. It was an interesting move indeed: the US became the imperial guardian of the Western Hemisphere. The rhetoric of salvation changed. Europe was confronted by the US and denounced for their imperial designs. In the process, the US affirmed its state autonomy simultaneously with the vision of its own imperial design molded in the name of liberty. What is unique in the appropriation of the idea of Western Hemisphere was the complementarity between the ideology of liberty upon which the Founding Fathers built their arguments and, simultaneously, the justification of US imperial expansion as a struggle in the name of liberty and democracy. “Hemispheric America” became then the US and the rest. Here again we could revisit Richard Twiss.

2. The Irreversible Shift to the Eastern Hemisphere

Although the division between East and West was based on how Christians imagined and visualized the world with Jerusalem and later on with Rome at the center, the fiction acquired ontological status. The distinction was taken for granted and the rhetoric of the global order is still predicated on the presumed “existence” of two entities, the East and the West. More recently the Global South complicated the picture. Global South was a notion that had some currency in the 1970s, when it was taken up by Third World and Non-Aligned states. With the end of the Cold War the division between Three Worlds lost currency and the Global South gained ascendancy.

I am bringing this scenario into consideration between “Hemispheric America” and “The Western Hemisphere” because it is crossed over by the Global South in two ways: There is, on the one

hand, South and Central America and, on the other, North America. In the middle is the Caribbean, which is also counted as Global South. But that is not all because there is also the South of the North (e.g., the South of the US.) (Leavander and Mignolo). The superposition of the Global South over Hemispheric America flags the power differentials in the very same Hemisphere—power differentials that can be accounted for by the history of coloniality from 1500 to the present.

Today the Global South is parallel to the rising visibility, economic force, and political power of the Eastern Hemisphere, according to the aforementioned Seventeenth Century European cartographers' invention and, later on, the politics of US Manifest Destiny. This shift means that for the first time in 500 years (since Pope Alexandre VI divided the planet between *Indias Occidentales* and *Indias Orientales*) the Eastern Hemisphere is no longer a complement to the Western Hemisphere but becoming an equalizer.

The return of China is more than economic growth. It includes the affirmation and strengthening of political decisions in the inter-state arena. It also means that Western coloniality (e.g., the hidden logic of imperial discourse of civilization, progress and development) focused in the ideas of the modern nation-state, liberalism and industrial capitalism since the late eighteenth century came into full planetary force. The Opium War was one telling episode. It dismembered the long lasting traditions of Chinese dynasties. China is now recovering, after 150 years of disarray, returning and leading the way of the global shift to the Eastern Hemisphere. By redressing the balance of global forces, it changes the configuration and profile of the Western Hemisphere. It is provoking the US to regain the leadership that it gained in the second half of the 20th century. [2] South and Central America as well as the Caribbean now have open options. It depends on the government of the moment whether a given state will align its political and economic balance and make an alliance with the Eastern Hemisphere or remain tacked to the North of the Western Hemisphere.

The implications of the shift are enormous. The most daring is that the shift dismantles the basic partition of the world since Alexander VI: now the East is both in the West and in the South. And the South is both in the East and the North. A multi-polar ordering of the world is erasing the modern/colonial division in Hemispheres and continents. That is to say, economic and political forces establish trans-hemispheric alliances and trans-cardinal-direction alliances. Take the case of the BRICS states. Certainly, China is in the Eastern Hemisphere according to the modern/colonial imaginary and Brazil is in the Western Hemisphere, but also in the Global South. South Africa is certainly in the Global South but in between the Western and the Eastern Hemispheres: the Atlantic and the Indian Ocean kiss each other south of Cape Town.

But that is not all. Many South and Central American countries, following the leadership of Brazil, are joining the shift toward the East so that states in the older Western (or American) Hemisphere

are running away from the US control of the Western Hemisphere. The shift is leaving the US with the remains of what, until recently, was clearly Hemispheric America.

The political shift across hemispheres has a name: Dewesternization, a turning away from Westernization initiated by Western European states (Latouche). And dewesternization means to dispute the overarching control of global affairs by four states in the Western Hemisphere: England, France, Germany and the US (GEFU). GEFU is in the Northern Hemisphere leaving below and behind the Southern Hemisphere in Europe: Greece, Italy, Spain and Portugal, grouped in an ingenious and problematic acronym: PIGS. Do they belong to the Global South or to Western Europe? Certainly not Greece, which by its geographical location is closer to West Asia, but certainly, yes; Greece being one of the symbolic pillars of “the West.”

As far as Hemispheric America was mostly profiled in one of its sides, the Atlantic, the distinction between Western Hemisphere and the West was blurred. Once again, Western Europe and today the European Union, plus Britain, are no doubt in the West (that is, West of Jerusalem which was where Christians located themselves and for that reason attributed Europe to Japheth), but not in the Western Hemisphere. It never was, even from the initial division of the world in two hemispheres, much before the US would claim control and ownership. On the other hand, in the 21st Century the Western Hemisphere is, paradoxically, turning to the West, to the Pacific. China, after all, is at the East of Europe but at the West of the Western Hemisphere. Recently, the US has started an international project to secure the presence of the West within the East and the South: The Pacific Alliance announced by Hillary Clinton in her discourse in Honolulu in November of 2011, although President Barack Obama’s lobbying preceded this discourse (Clinton).

Shortly after Hillary Clinton’s discourse in Honolulu, four states in the Global South of Hemispheric America initiated their own project Pacific Ocean project. It was, apparently, an initiative of South American states in the Western Hemisphere (Chile, Peru, Colombia and Mexico), that is, the most conservative and neo-liberal prone that goes with the project of re-westernization (Bilbao). In the most recent meeting of the Alianza del Pacifico in Colombia, President Juan Manuel Santos invited President Barack Obama as his guest of honor. These four countries are joining Obama’s efforts to re-westernize the world. Re-westernization is Obama’s response to de-westernization, that is, to the return of China and the rise of BRICS “alliance.” The Alliance of the Pacific plays in confrontation with MERCOSUR AND CELAC (Comunidad de Estados Latino-Americanos y Caribeños).

Clearly then, the Western Hemisphere or Hemispheric America is being partitioned between De-westernization and Re-westernization, the first led—in the continent—by Brazil and the second by the US. Now, in this historical seismic shift, the unity of Hemispheric America or the Western

Hemisphere is exploding into pieces and being redistributed in the remaking of the global order. What is different in this remaking is that Western Europe and the US are no longer leading it at their will. Economic growth (that is, not led by the IMF and the World Bank) is really something of the past. This tendency will accelerate; there is no return to the renaissance global hemispheric order that persisted for 500 years.

The buzz on this was, “Oh, things are not that simple. They are more complex.” And one wonders: so then what do we do with the complexity and the denial of simplicity? These are questions that do not much affect a theoretical understanding of global shifts as they impinge on how disciplinary territories are mapped and defended. The problem that presents itself quite often is the epistemic and political lag between disciplinary formation and the understanding of socio-historical processes in order to orient our action within them.

Decolonial thinking, in one of its strand at least, claims the second option and the delinking for the strictures of disciplinary formation. To think the world decolonially, when the questions are asked about hemispheric formations, means to think through the compound complex, indeed, of the rhetoric of modernity (and their successful mapping of the world) and the logic of coloniality (the persistent making and remaking of global injustice behind the promise of the rhetoric of modernity). “Hemispheric studies” is for us, decolonial thinkers, something else.

Now, what shall be noticed in this line of reflections is that “Hemispheric Studies” is an initiative whose point of origination is the North of the Western Hemisphere and in Western Europe. Nowhere else on the planet, not even South and Central America, has a strong investment in this. If there are some interested, it is because of US and Western Europe initiatives. As far as I know it is not a concern of scholars dwelling in the South of the Western Hemisphere, including the Caribbean. Neither is it an initiative of scholars dwelling in the South of Europe. At close inspection it seems that the US and Germany are the two locations where Hemispheric Studies of the Americas flourish.

Why is this so? One answer that is often mentioned in the platforms of such studies is to overcome the division between North and South America on the one hand and the Caribbean on the other, and concentrate on hemispheric unity. However, when you look at the remapping of West and East, the Global South and the South of Europe, the South of the Global North along the lines I sketched above, you would again understand that these projects are initiatives of the North, not of the South or the Caribbean (Levander and Mignolo). In the South and the Caribbean scholars and intellectuals have other concerns and relatively little interest in Hemispheric Studies or in the creation of Hemispheric Institutes.

3. The Underlying Fields of Forces Remapping Eastern and Western Hemispheres

Inter-American relations are, as I mentioned before, divided between the states that go along with and are supported by United States foreign policy on the one hand and the states that have opted to join dewesternizing forces on the other. Now the fact is, as has already been remarked, that such a situation is far from ideal. It is, one could say, like delinking from the lion to give oneself to the tiger. For better or worse, it is the way it will be most of the twenty-first century, and I cannot anticipate what will come next, which brings up the question of strong and smaller states in the international order and of course in the Western Hemisphere of the Hemisphere of the Americas and the Caribbean.

These are the conditions under which taking up on the invitation to “theorize hemispheric studies of the Americas” it would be beneficial to start by asking, once more, what the expression means. In my understanding it means that “hemispheric” studies are not, cannot be, only of the “Americas.” Or better yet, the Americas do not have the privilege of being the only hemisphere on the planet and of having a life of their own. Therefore, “hemispheric studies of the Americas” means first to have an understanding of how the hemispheric division of the planet came about, how it was maintained, who benefited and how it is now falling to pieces. It also means, in the second place, that “hemispheric studies” should be understood in relation to “oceanic studies” for the Eastern and Western hemispheres are surrounded and interconnected by oceans. “Oceanic studies” if you wish could either complement or undermine “Hemispheric studies.”

So the next question that shall be put to the hemispheric studies of the Americas would be: why hemispheric studies of the America now? Certainly, the answers to this question would abound, but the bottom line may be obscured. The bottom line is this: why do we need hemispheric studies of the Americas now and why do we need to theorize them? Any theoretical investigation starts with a question—if there is no question, there is no need to investigate or theorize because there is no problem to address or question to answer. Furthermore, what distinguishes an empirical question from a theoretical one? Max Horkheimer addressed the issue in his classic article “Traditional and Critical Theory” (1987.) Empirical questions are formulated on the assumption that something exists and the knower wants to know more or understand something of what there is. Theoretical questions ask how what there is came to be what it is. That means that “hemispheric studies of the Americas” is not something that the theoretical subject takes for granted. But there is still another layer, the third: the decolonial view of the world and understanding the semantics of oceanic and hemispheric consideration. This brings coloniality into the picture for the division of the planet since the late fifteenth century goes hand-in-hand with the logic of coloniality. Carl Schmitt

provided a Eurocentered analytic history of this in the formation and transformation of the “second *nomos* of the earth” and the emergence of global linear thinking. [3]

Once we accept the premise that “hemispheric America” is not a given but a historical fiction that gained ontological currency, then we have to ask how that fiction came to be, and why a fiction gained ontological currency. I have touched on this issue above. It is necessary, however, to recast it in the current stage of the argument. Let’s refresh our memories:

hemisphere (n.)

late 14c., *hemysperie*, in reference to the celestial sphere, from Latin *hemisphaerium*, from Greek *hemisphairion*, from *hemi-* “half” (see hemi-) + *sphaira* “sphere” (see sphere). (“Hemisphere”)

Now, if one hemisphere is half of the planet, then the other half is the second hemisphere—clear and simple enough. But the hemisphere could have been “cut” to above and below the equator, that is, Northern and Southern Hemispheres. If that division would have been used, then the Americas would not today be one Hemisphere but part of the Southern or Northern Hemisphere. And indeed, the expression is not un-known. [4] The Southern Hemisphere more or less coincides nowadays with the Global South. But not quite: half of Africa would be in the North and a significant portion of South America would also be in the North. This may sound strange, but the bottom line and question is: if both divisions of the semi-spheres, South/North and East/West are possible and legitimate, why did the second catch on while the first did not?

Here we go again to the realization that both divisions do not have anything to do with the planet but with who decides on the division of the planet. European Christian who were in control of knowledge and institutions decided, and they had the possibility of depicting (mapping) the planet according to their views and needs. What were their views and needs? Let’s first attend the views.

If we look at the famous T/O map after what I just said, we can see that there is no clear East/West division. [5] There are indeed “three hemispheres”, which is a non-sense if we take seriously the etymology of the word. So the planet was not divided in hemispheres but in three continental landmasses separated by water. The “three” was not serendipity and did not depend on landmasses but on the meaning of number three in Christian cosmology. Each part of the planet “belonged” to one of Noah’s son. We do not see hemispheres but hierarchies: Asia corresponds to Shem, Africa to Ham and Europe to Japheth. A basic knowledge of biblical narrative is sufficient to understand the hierarchy: Christians did not inhabit the land of Shem or Ham but the land of Japheth. At that point, before the Crusades, the center was Jerusalem.

But Jerusalem was not the center of the world for all. It was the center of the world only for Christians. The Bunting Clover Leaf map is univocal. [6] It was drawn in 1581. For Jews Jerusalem is the heart of Judaism, dating back to around 1700 years BC. But it was not necessarily the center of the world, as it was mapped in the Christian T/O map around 6th century AC. For Christians, Jerusalem is the city of the minister of Jesus Christ. The ministry of Christ is date between 27 and 36 AC. For Jews, Jerusalem is the Ancient Testament. Christian Jerusalem is the New Testament. In the Bunting Clover Leaf map, what predominates is Christian Jerusalem, for Western Christians were in command, the Jews having been expelled from the Iberian Peninsula by Western Christians at the end of the 14th century.

In chapter 5 of *The Darker Side of the Renaissance* entitled “Geometric and Ethnic Centers”, I argue that until the creation of the renaissance world maps (Gerardus Mercator *Orbis Terrae Compendiosa Descriptio*, 1569; [7] Abraham Ortelius, *Typus Orbis Terrarum*, 1570) each civilization on the planet had its own ethnic center, including of course, Jerusalem as the ethnic center of Jewish and Christian cosmologies. What Mercator’s and Ortelius’s maps did was to project the *ethnic center into a geometric one*. [8] The move had tremendous consequences—uplifting for those belonging to the civilization in which the world map was made, and devastating for all the other ethnic centers that did not have the possibility, the potential or the need to project their own ethnic center into a geometric one. At that point Rome changed status: from being the Christians ethnic center, it became the center of the world. That was precisely the moment in which Pope Alexander VI divided the planet between *Indias Orientales* and *Indias Occidentales*.

Rome became the center of the world and in consequence the center of enunciation. It managed to impose over other civilizations its own conception of the planet and be recognized as the geographical location of universal knowledge—theological knowledge in this case. The Atlantic Ocean became the center of trade and commerce and, for that reason, the expanded center of the world: ancient Rome and the emerging Mediterranean. The Atlantic Ocean encompassed the Eastern Coasts of the New World and the Eastern Coasts of Africa and Europe. The “triangular trade” (commodities from the New World to Europe, guns and manufacture from Europe to Africa, enslaved human beings from Africa to the New World)—this and no other shall be the foundation of any “hemispheric studies of the Americas.” The triangular trade meant also the dismantling of co-existing civilizations of the New World, mainly those of the Andes (Tawantinsuyu) and Mesoamerica (Anahuac). Any hemispheric studies of the Americas that do not start from this historical foundation would be like any study of European civilizations ignoring Greece and Rome.

4. Five Hundred Years Later: from the Atlantic to the Pacific and the Indian Ocean

The Western Hemisphere or Hemispheric America is not a lump of land surrounded by water. It is, and it always has been since the name “America” was bestowed upon the landmasses that became the Western Hemisphere, a field of forces in the modern/colonial and European self-consolidation and imperial expansion. If we start from this premise, the question is not to “study” Hemispheric America but what “questions to ask about the inventions of America, the Western Hemisphere and Hemispheric America.” A field of global forces, the Western Hemisphere and America were constituted from the perspective of the emerging Atlantic commercial circuit, but it is now turning to the Pacific. Turning to the Pacific has been a major move and declaration from the Obama administration (Clinton). Even before Hillary Clinton’s declaration in November 2011 in Honolulu responding to the China challenge, Barack Obama had already announced this turn in Japan in 2009 (Chen and Goldman). It was also at this time that, coincidentally, Chile, Peru, Colombia and Mexico formed the Alianza del Pacífico. More recently, Barack Obama was invited as the guest of honor to the meeting of the Alianza held in Colombia. You get the picture: the four neo-liberal oriented countries in South America are allied with the US. On the other hand, the Atlantic MERCOSUR are working toward delinking from the control and management of the US.

Hemispheric America is being partitioned according to the emerging global order prompted by the growing influence and power of BRICS countries, parallel to the growing economies such as Turkey (that has an ambiguous relation with the US because of Syria) and Indonesia (with a declining enthusiasm toward US global leadership). Economic growth brings confidence in state identity, national confidence, political decision-making and courage to reject the instructions received from Western imperial states. [9]

I have mentioned two trajectories today and for years to come, as “de-westernization” and “re-westernization.” The larger scenario is the following. After 500 years of the consolidation of Western Civilization (e.g., “westernization”) of the world and consequent imperial expansion, by 2000 the situation began to change. In retrospect the signs of the changes were in place but not very visible yet. What was changing? Simply put, the Westernization of the world was a long, persistent and changing process from the sixteenth century under the flags of Spain and Portugal, to the nineteenth and half of the twentieth century by England, and after WWII by the US (Latouche). [10] What was changing was that the long history was coming to an end. Not the end of Western Civilization but the end of Western domination. One current example: Vladimir Putin stealing the show and proposing a diplomatic way out to the global Syrian crisis and stopping the military intervention announced by Nobel Peace Prize recipient Barack Obama. This is but a small example, but there are many, of the dewesternization of the world.

Underlying the process of westernization has always been a conceptual structure legitimizing political decisions and political and economic actions—the colonial matrix of power. It is this underlying structure of Western Civilization that allowed for both the consolidation and expansion of Western religion (Christianity), economy (capitalism), politics (liberalism and neoliberalism), racism (white supremacy), genderism and sexualism (patriarchy and heteronormativity), aesthetics (the universalism of the beautiful and the sublime), epistemology and hermeneutics (explanation and understanding according to Western norms of theology, science and philosophy). Euro-US actors and institutions managed to make believe that the world is, and should be, as seen through the lenses of the colonial matrix of power. In other words, through the rhetoric of salvation promoted under the name of modernity and globalization and the justification of illegal invasion, uses of force, expropriation and exploitation in the name of salvation (e.g., democracy, development, etc.).

What began to change and become visible is that more and more people around the planet are waking up and realizing that the world has many shapes, forms and colors; people around the world began to realize that they have fallen prey to a fiction and in that fiction they appeared as inferior and lacking humanity: inhuman conducts in the name of humanity has been and continues to be a fundamental part of the rhetoric of modernity, a rhetoric of salvation, progress, development and happiness. Thus, the awakening and consequent delinking from the illusion of the good of Westernization manifests itself in two major trajectories: de-westernization and the refurbishing of the meaning of “decolonization” during the Cold War. While decolonization in Asia and Africa were no doubt crucial moves, the first cycle ended up in the hand of corrupt governments (Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria, Libya, Syria) the consequences of which the world has been witnessing for the past couple of years.

The concept of decolonization emerged after WWII to name the process of liberation in Africa and Asia. “Decoloniality” is a concept that, interestingly enough, originated in Hemispheric America, not in the North but in the South (Mignolo, “Geopolitics of Sensing and Knowing”). What came into being after the collapse of the Soviet Union, perhaps because the idea that decolonization conceived meant that the natives might control the state and not the colonizer, was an illusion that brought about dictatorships and corruption. What was needed was not to “take the state” but to decolonize political and economic knowledge and consequently to decolonize subjectivities that had been captured and enslaved by the rhetoric of salvation and the illusion of happiness and well-being in the name of modernity.

From 1500 AD to 2000 AD, men and institutions of the European renaissance enlarged their views with the emergence of the Atlantic commercial circuits and the invention of “America.” These men

and institutions imagined and enacted the cycle of Westernization. Responses from the Tawantinsuyu and Anahuac, and Ayiti were there, but ignored, silenced and forgotten. Around 2000, at the Western end of the Pacific, the return of China and 9/11 became two visible signs that the world was no longer ready to submit to Westernization. The trajectory of Dewesternization was already visible. Dewesternization is a trajectory that doesn't question capitalist economy (the economy of accumulation, exploitation and corruption), but questions those who make decisions in the international arena. Dewesternization is a very complicated trajectory that shall not be ignored because it is complicated. As a matter of fact, Westernization was also complicated, but it was the only game in town. Not anymore. Dewesternization messed up the seemingly easy ride of Westernization. In fact, there were many who in the late 90s believed that we had arrived at the end of history. That is to say, Westernization was victorious to the end of time. By the first decade of the twenty first century even those who had believed in the end of history changed their opinion.

In 2008 the trajectory of Rewesternization began. It was inaugurated with President Barack Obama's speech in Cairo. Rewesternization is the attempt to regain US leadership in the world, leadership conquered in the second half of the 20th century, and lost thanks to the good governance of George W. Bush and Dick Cheney. The second moment was the announcement of the Pacific Alliance and the decision to move away from Pakistan and Iraq and concentrate on the Pacific. Clearly, Rewesternization was a response to the growing force of Dewesternization. And we are now in the middle of this war between capitalist states: on the one hand those who want to continue their hegemony and dominance, on the other those who are no longer willing to be dominated.

How these two trajectories impinge on Hemispheric America is already very clear, as I mentioned above. Hemispheric America is being partitioned in inter-state relations: Chile, Peru, Colombia and Mexico are joining Rewesternization through the Pacific Alliance while Brazil, Bolivia, Ecuador, Argentina, Uruguay and Nicaragua are joining Dewesternization and following up on the leadership of Brazil as a member of the BRICS countries. MERCOSUR, ALBA and CARICOM are other regional organizations that tend toward Dewesternization. Canada is also following in the footsteps of Rewesternization, keeping the NAFTA agreement alive.

Certainly, this politico-economic scenario doesn't exhaust the life of Hemispheric America. However, it frames the terrestrial and insular lands and waters into the global imaginary. For, it is an illusion to think that "Latin America", "America" and "the Caribbean" (meaning the insular Caribbean), are isolated entities and that to "study" them would mean to "look at what is inside." Hemispheric America is twice entangled in the global scenario. First, from the moment of its invention, "the fourth continent" meant that whoever labeled it knew that there were already three

others. And the only ones who knew there were already three continents (because they invented them and not because the earth was naturally divided in three continents from its creation) were Western Christians. The second entanglement is the history of Hemispheric America both in its international field of forces and in its inter-state relations. For, there are no continents that interact and inter-exchange in themselves, but only people through institutions in each of the said continents.

Which prompts the following questions: who are the persons (scholars) and institutions (agencies) interested in “Hemispheric Studies of the Americas?” Are scholars in South America and the Caribbean interested in Hemispheric Studies of the Americas? Maybe, but if there are, it is not a priority in the regions with concerns other than Hemispheric Studies beyond the triangulation between South/Central America and the Caribbean, the US, the EU and China.

That leaves us with the fact that Hemispheric Studies (of the Americas) is a concern of scholars located in Western Europe and the US. The question is: what for? What is at stake? What would be the purpose of “studying and knowing” Hemispheric America? To simplify a simple story, Hemispheric America is a conflicting field of forces within the Hemisphere but always in relation to the European Union (which is neither Western nor Eastern Hemisphere) and with the unavoidable fact that the Eastern Hemisphere is returning and that, according to several estimates, before 2020 China will be the first and the US the second largest economy in the world.

Some of the tasks ahead could be guided by some of these and similar questions: How would that impinge on the Hemispheric Americas? What do we need and want to know about ourselves and about the tsunami world order that will alter the long lasting formation, rise and consolidation of Western Civilization, the US of North America and Canada, and the continuing struggle of South America and Caribbean-America?

The cycle that started with the invention of America and later on the Western Hemisphere is closing. Theorizing Hemispheric Studies of the Americas means to start from this closing while, at the same time, knowing well the conditions under which America and the Western Hemisphere were created and under which the illusion is maintained.

Endnotes

[1] A reproduction of Roosevelt's *Annual Message to Congress* is available online. See below.

[2] At the moment of editing this article the world is witnessing one of the most evident (and distressing) moves to regain and maintain US leadership: President Barack Obama announcing first to invade Syria, to seek after his decision support from Congress, and bypassing the United Nations. All this means an effort to maintain the leadership of North Hemispheric America. Under these circumstances, who is theorizing the studies of Hemispheric America and what for?

[3] For an expanded version of the argument see my *The Darker Side of Western Modernity. Global Futures, Decolonial Options*.

[4] A Northern/Southern Hemisphere Map:

<http://withfriendship.com/images/g/33558/southern-hemisphere-shem.jpg>.

Accessed September 10, 2013.

[5] The Medieval Christian T/O map:

http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/7/70/T_and_O_map_Guntherus_Ziner_1472.jpg. Accessed September 10, 2013.

[6] The Bunting Clover Leaf Map, 1581:

http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/8/87/1581_Bunting_clover_leaf_map.jpg/976px-1581_Bunting_clover_leaf_map.jpg.

Accessed September 10, 2013.

[7] The Mercator World Map:

http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/5/58/Mercator_World_Map.jpg.

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[8] On the meaning of Ortelius's map see especially chapter 5 of my *The Darker Side of the Renaissance: Literacy, Territoriality and Colonization*. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2003.

[9] And certainly it creates anxiety in European institutions like the Goehte-Institute in Johannesburg, which now is promoting artists from BRICS countries, <http://www.fnbjoburgartfair.co.za/article/brics-project>. However, this generosity shall confuse no one. This move toward re-westernization is already behind the growing awareness and projects of dewesternization. See my article on Sharjah Biennial 11. "Re:Emerging, Decentering and Delinking: Shifting the Geographies of Sensing, Believing and Knowing." <http://www.ibraaz.org/essays/59/>.

[10] For re-westernization and its consequences, see my *The Darker Side of Western Modernity...op cit*.

[11] See my "Geopolitics of Sensing and Knowing." Sep 2011.

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