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Denial of Coevalness as an Epistemic Injustice

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Introduction

In this thesis we will outline why denial of coevalness should be considered an epistemic injustice. In section 1 we will state what constitutes an epistemic injustice, and shortly touch upon why we think that denial of coevalness could be qualified as an epistemic injustice; by the end of this work, we should have shown that calling denial of coevalness a practice of epistemic injustice was justified. After those opening remarks and clarifications, we will proceed to section 2. In section 2.1 we will explore the idea of denial of coevalness as proposed by the German anthropologist Johannes Fabian, then in section 2.2 we will proceed to explore the understanding and usage of that term by Argentinian philosopher Walter Mignolo.

The reason for exploring two different authors that use the concept, fundamentally, in the same manner has its explanation in the fact that while Johannes Fabian is mainly interested on how the denial of coevalness has been a part of the anthropological practice, specially in anthropological writing, and he focuses his research in its occurrences after the Enlightenment, Walter Mignolo proposes that the first denial of coevalness occurred when Spanish/European explorers/colonizers arrived in what today is called Latin America. Furthermore, Mignolo focuses on how the denial of coevalness extends to other fields, such as philosophy. We will explore the encounter of the Spanish/European with the “Indians”, guiding our research by the insights found on Mignolo’s and Todorov’s writings referring to this period so that we may understand, through a paradigmatic example, what denial of coevalness amounts to.

Then in section 2.3 we will explore how this denial of coevalness that happened in the meeting between colonizers and indigenous people, and that was deepened

through anthropological and ethnological research, is still happening today. In section 2.4 we will try to outline the positive understanding of the term coevalness in the writings of Fabian and Mignolo. We will analyze the problems and limits that both Fabian's and Mignolo's proposals may have, as both treat coevalness only as being denied from certain people, while the positive account of coevalness remains very vague in both thinkers. In section 3.1 we will describe José Ortega y Gasset's own idea of coevalness, indicating the features that may help us develop a stronger concept of coevalness. In section 3.2 we will summarize and confront these ideas, and attempt to build a concept of coevalness that overcomes the epistemic injustice.

To avoid misunderstandings we will start by clarifying that this is not a thesis rooted on postcolonial theory¹, thus we don't ground the following thoughts on the writings of Edward Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, or Homi K. Bhabha; that said, there are parallelisms with the projects, Fabian himself saw in Said writings a confirmation of the plausibility of his own claims, yet his book didn't have Said "Orientalism" as an inspiration, so we will have some brief notes where the thematics overlap. Mignolo makes a distinction between decolonialism and postcolonialism, and one of those distinctions is the authors that are taken as a starting point, while postcolonialism is rooted on a theoretical background consisting of European thinkers, such as: Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Derrida and Antonio Gramsci, decolonialist thinking tries to root itself on the colonial experience, so it tries to analyse both the ancient voices of the "locals", as well as their current complaints.

A further reason for us choosing to avoid Postcolonialism is the area of conflict we're exploring: postcolonial thinking has been rooted on experiences of Imperialism in Africa and Asia, and take as a starting point the Imperial/Enlightenment period, thus focusing on the experience and writings from

1 For a detailed overview on the difference between decolonial and postcolonial projects see Mignolo, W. (2011).

the European nations that mainly invaded those areas, linking Orientalism with the French and English experience and their respective colonies, other countries and colonies may appear on their writing, but the main focus is always on those nations; we will focus more on the Colonial/Renaissance, and the area call the Americas or the Indies that they “discovered”, while focusing on the experiences and writings from the Spanish nation, thus making the present work more akin to a decolonial position than a postcolonial stance, that said, we will point out, as stated on the previous paragraph, some parallelisms between both projects, as well as some divergences when we will find the comparison fruitful for elucidation on some issue; a decolonial voice and a postcolonial voice are not necessarily opponents to each other, we’re not taking a polemical stance to the postcolonial project, ideally what a decolonial position amounts to, is a further voice to sharpen concepts and to exchange concerns and ideas with different projects for a more including future.

Throughout this work we will try to shape coevalness into a term that is fundamental in epistemic relations, a necessary ingredient to have a meaningful interaction with the other speaker/knower, a dimension that, if not affirmed, will always produce an epistemic disadvantage and will block meaningful epistemic exchange between knowers, for the time being we will define coevalness as an equal sharing of the present time; the main focus of this thesis is to show the epistemic harm produced when another person or group of people is denied coevalness, while there are certainly ethical and political questions that are linked to this phenomenon, we will not deal with them directly. We decided to tackle this topic because we believe that denial of coevalness still exists, and hopefully explaining how it came to be, and how it was solidified, will help us find a solution on how to dissolve this situation.

1. Epistemic Injustice

1.1 What is Epistemic Injustice?

Given how we normally think about justice in philosophy, the idea of epistemic injustice might first and foremost prompt thoughts about distributive unfairness in respect of epistemic goods such as information or education.²

In contrast to the opening lines of Miranda Fricker's book regarding epistemic injustice, we will, for the purposes of this thesis, take a broader definition of epistemic injustice; we define epistemic injustice as the *systematic harm done to a person regarding their capacities as a knower, based on their belonging of a certain group*. This means that we consider epistemic injustice as prejudice toward the epistemic abilities possessed by an individual, such the capacity for epistemic agency, or developed epistemic resources, based on their appearance, language, social group, or any other external factor putting them in a weakened position in the face of their supposed listener or listeners. Fricker herself proposes two kinds of epistemic injustices: *Testimonial Injustice* and *Hermeneutical Injustice*. The first regards the unwillingness to seriously consider an individual statement merely because of their belonging of a group. The second concern is how this exclusion of certain individuals to influence the shared hermeneutical pool, may cause the hermeneutical resources that people use on a certain society to be shaped only by some members from the society, instead of all of them; this results in a further disadvantage for the excluded members, because they are already on a conceptual disadvantage given an epistemic conflict. These two injustices are not necessarily separate from each other, on the contrary, they tend to reinforce one another. Testimonial injustice causes the unjustly marginalized group to struggle in order to influence the

² Fricker, M. (2008:5).

hermeneutical resources possessed by the main society, and this in turn makes it easier to further marginalize the group, given that the society's hermeneutical resources tends to ignore the concepts these marginalized voices are trying to propose.

There are other proposals regarding epistemic injustices, but in this thesis we will neither defend nor reject any specific position, instead we encourage that these proposals may be individually followed regarding the situation when a group is denied coevalness by the society. Given the dimensions and objectives of this thesis, it is in the interests of clarity to operate with a generalized concept of epistemic injustice, but we hope that further work will be done that takes into account the current discussions about defining different epistemic injustices. We believe that what is common to all the different definitions of epistemic injustice, is that we can identify that the knower's ability as a knower, as being recognized as a capable epistemic agent, is either weakened, damaged or denied by another group, harming the possibilities of a just epistemic exchange; until both subjects are considered to be in a situation in which both can contribute to a meaningful exchange on equal grounds, injustice will continue to be committed.

Epistemic injustice is a subset, or a type of injustice, differentiated from other types and subsets of injustices by its focus on the epistemic dimension. One can commit some types of injustices without committing an epistemic injustice. Obversely, one can be harmed in many different ways without being harmed as an epistemic subject. Political and ethical injustice can happen while still respecting the epistemic attributes of the other subject. Epistemic injustice happens only when there is harm, a wrongful attitude or action regarding the epistemic abilities of a subject, be it that the subject is treated as a mere epistemic object, or that he/she is excluded from influencing the common hermeneutical resources pool, or dismissing his/her voice because of his/her identity, epistemic injustice always comes back to an injustice regarding the

epistemic abilities or expressions of a determinate subject or group. In all these circumstances, epistemic injustice tends to reinforce and be reinforced by other types of injustices, so it is not in conflict with other subsets of injustice. The implications and the motives that epistemic injustice has in connection with other types of injustice are too broad and context-dependent to be fully analyzed in a paper of this length. Rather, this work will aim to construe and analyze how certain views and goals were conducive to committing the epistemic injustice of denial of coevalness, and how, when it became accepted, denial of coevalness helped to establish other injustices toward the people who had been wronged.

I've chosen to focus on the idea of epistemic injustice, instead of epistemic violence or epistemic oppression, for the following reasons: The term violence elucidates the harm that epistemic injustices may produce, but the term seems to pose a necessary antagonistic interaction. Epistemic injustice seems to allow for a broader view of harms being committed, among which is a refusal of true epistemic interaction. Epistemic injustice can happen even with the best of intentions. In addition, the term "violence" seems to forge a path where the ones that have actively produce epistemic violence to the marginalized group are the ones that have all the responsibility to change, while a condition of epistemic injustice seems to leave a place for a just kind of epistemic interaction, where both parts contribute to the epistemic exchange. As for the concept of epistemic oppression, this seems to be dependent on the willingness, an intentionality, of the oppressor to oppress other epistemic agents. As we will see in the sections that follow, this is not the only way to deny coevalness. Indeed, coevalness can be denied without full consciousness, or even because someone is trying to help. Nevertheless such a case would constitute an epistemic injustice, though I am not sure whether it would constitute an epistemic oppression. This being stated, both epistemic violence and epistemic oppression are relevant may overlap with epistemic injustices, as such we should be aware that some cases

of denial of coevalness could be understood under the framework of those concepts.

Given that epistemic injustice is not incidental, analysis of specific cases tends to illuminate how a society may be structured. Understanding how epistemic injustices come to be, and how a group suffers from them are fundamental for changing the injustices in which are built into some societies. It also gives us a new understanding of certain practices and opinions, while giving us new perspectives when we look at our collective histories. Understanding our problems is the first step to changing the inequities that still exist on our societies. This thesis aims toward helping us be more conscious of them and presses for a change of attitude regarding certain ideas that still prevail in our times.

1.2 How is denial of coevalness related to epistemic injustice?

We shall briefly define coevalness as a sharing of present time, claiming that it is a fundamental dimension for just epistemic relations between epistemic subjects. We believe that if coevalness between epistemic subjects that share a present time is denied, then an epistemic injustice will be inevitably committed. (see section 2.1) When there are two or more groups sharing a territory engaging in constant interaction, and one or more of these groups is believed by the majority to belong to a time different than the one of our common present, then these groups are being harmed in their epistemic abilities. As a consequence they could be marginalized in epistemic debates or their positions could be disqualified in the present, based on the belief that they belong to a different, more primitive time, one that should not have any say on how we discuss or use our epistemic resources. When coevalness is denied then the possibility of an equal epistemic interaction is denied. The group or person whose coevalness has not been recognized will start from a disadvantaged position, in which his arguments and

opinions will be filtered through the belief that they are in some way backward or not fully developed. While considered as an epistemic subject this person or group can only be so in a deficient way, and will always remain in a disadvantaged position. For example, in an interview he will only have the role of the interviewee without being able to have the role of the inquirer. Thus his/her epistemic abilities are judged deficient to influence the way an interview should be constructed. The view that makes them a deficient epistemic subject, someone temporally situated in a previous stage of a homogenous line of development, makes these subjects perfectible, educable³, again defining their epistemic abilities as deficient in contrast to the main society. To maintain this view, different devices have been used, as we will see in the following chapters.

These have varied from the letters of the explorers, written with an European audience in mind, thus neglecting the views, sometimes even the reality of the people they were writing about. When drawing maps, certain peoples are based on the fringe, replacing the fantastical creatures who marked the borders of the unknown world. In such a way the native peoples were essentialized as in the famous questionnaires of the missionaries, in which the indigenous people had a say, but only insofar as they were considered carriers of information and memory, not as epistemic agents.

Denial of coevalness is a type of epistemic injustice, which means that it is not the only one, but that it usually is reinforced by other epistemic injustices. Not only that, but by being context dependent there are different factors that influence and deepen this epistemic injustice; social conditions such as class, gender and race, are interconnected with denial of coevalness, but the various ways they interconnect is too vast to fully do justice to on this thesis. Thus, we will not deal with any of these dimensions directly, but the reader must keep in mind that these factors are not separated, but are interwoven in social opinion.

³ See Sullivan, S. (2007: 159-160).

The denial of coevalness wrongly excludes and damages the voices of the groups to which it is applied; it contributes to solidifying other epistemic injustices such as testimonial injustice, creating a web where the epistemic subject finds himself/herself increasingly wronged by the society; if denial of coevalness stays in place, then there will be no possibility of a true epistemic encounter. We believe that being aware of this problem will contribute to solving it, while also helping to unravel the web of epistemic injustices. This in turn will make it more difficult for hermeneutical and testimonial injustice to happen unquestioned. As soon as we start reflecting on the motives and effects that arise from denying coevalness, we inevitably arrive at reflecting on other types and subsets of epistemic injustice.

This thesis aims to contribute to the literature on epistemic injustice. Among authors currently addressing similar problems we find Shannon Sullivan and Sarah Lucia Hoagland, Sullivan explores how the idea of Puerto Rico as something “almost american, but not quite”⁴, has been constructed, while Hoagland demonstrates how denying relationality⁵, may help strengthen some notions that further distanciates meaningful epistemic engagements between different social groups, this distance and ignorance benefits, almost exclusively⁶, the group that distanciates and obscures the relationality between groups in society. We argue that the concept of denial of coevalness has to play a role on this debate, seeing that it is a relevant issue from which marginalized people suffer. We also hope that the idea of epistemic injustice will also be added to discussion on postcolonial and decolonial literatures, where we think it might also develop necessary critiques by these movements with respect to hegemonic ideas that trouble the societies in which they are interested.

4 See Sullivan, S. (2007).

5 See Hoagland, S. L. (2007).

6 Here we could consider a notion of resistance that benefits the disadvantaged group, an interesting example may be found in what Michel De Certeau calls tactics as opposed to strategies. See De Certeau, M. (2000).

2. Accounts of Denial of Coevalness

2.1 Exploring coevalness: What was denied? Johannes Fabian's approach to the problem.

In his famous book "Time and the Other", the German anthropologist Johannes Fabian introduced the concept of denial of coevalness. What does this concept mean? What does denying coevalness amount to? And why was Fabian concerned with the problem? Fabian notes how every ethnological experience, if it wants to be a meaningful experience, requires a shared time between the ethnologists and the subjects he studies. Otherwise there wouldn't be any ethnological practice, and instead it would be mere observation. If the ethnologists wants to be more than a bystander, then he must interact with the population he studies; the "Other", whom the ethnologist analyzes, and the ethnologist must share time for anything meaningful to happen, Fabian calls this experience "Intersubjective Time", a Time that is created by the encounter of more than one subject in mutual interaction. An interaction that does not happen in an Intersubjective Time by definition does not exist. You always need at least two subjects, and in the absence of one them, what takes place is mere study of an object, but not mutual communication.

Fabian found a problem in the relationship between the ethnologist's experience (that of individuals sharing space and time), and anthropologist's writings, were the Other is characterized by his "theoretical absence"⁷. The Other disappears into the background as a mere object of an analysis, not an epistemic agent on how

⁷ Fabian, J. (1983: XI).

knowledge of himself, and of his people, should be organized; the voices of the Other are marginalized through the process of disciplinary writing carried out by the academic who organizes and “gives voice” to his own experience. Here many anthropologists search for “complete” objectivity, thus trying to “cleanse” their experience from any influence and remnants of subjectivity, and as a consequence of any intersubjectivity, aspiring toward an objective report on “true” knowledge. What happens to the Intersubjective Time, fundamental to the ethnological experience and the anthropological knowledge, when the voice of the Other disappears on the shaping of the writing?

Before we can continue, we will briefly clarify what Fabian considers the three major uses of Time⁸:

° *Physical Time*: It serves as a parameter or vector in describing sociocultural processes. And while it is a parameter of cultural processes, it is not subject to cultural variation.

° *Typological Time*: It does not measure movements, but it works more as a reference to the quality of states, such as: literate vs. preliterate, rural vs. urban, and so on. Fabian notes that Typological Time seems to be constitutive of anthropological discourse.

° *Intersubjective Time*: As we have seen before, this Time focuses on communication and interaction as constitutive parts of human nature⁹.

In broad terms we could say that for Fabian, denial of coevalness is a failure to understand and practice fully Intersubjective Time, submitting its experience to a structure of Typological Time or Physical Time, to the point where the notion of intersubjectivity disappears. This phenomenon is easy to find in the scholars that were highly influenced by social evolutionists, considering that they put the Other in a different Typological or Physical Time from the start, and some of them even

8 Fabian himself makes use of capital letters when referring to these typologies, we will respect this decision and write time with a capital “T”.

9 See Fabian, J. (1983: 22-25).

denied the contemporaneity of those who they were studying. However, the phenomenon is not restricted to this group of anthropologists, but also applies to practitioners of functionalism or of structuralism who leave Time out of the equation, either by circumventing it or preempting it¹⁰. Circumventing coevalness is understood as closing Time in a capsule for a specific population, meaning that different populations, or tribes, are regarded as having different Times, though each could be studied with a “timeless” theory and method. Fabian identifies relativist and functionalist theories and research as examples of this attitude. Different people are assigned to different “Gardens of Culture”, places that are unrelated to each other and that follow their own logic. By following the basic principles that each “Garden of Culture”, there is a definite exclusion from these people from the Time and present of the researcher and, by consequence, of the society he belongs to, preventing “their” Time to irrupt into “ours”. There is a border which societies cannot overcome, and thus, all these theories finish by creating distance between societies. While the practice has its value, in that it strives to understand a culture in its *own* terms, they result in encapsulating them, reducing them to a functioning of concepts, thus breaking the possibility of intersubjective exchange, and by consequence of true epistemic interaction between individuals. In addition, such methods deprive the cultures being studied a possibility of a true *change* in the organization of their society, and not a mere evolution or “natural” transformation of their society. Johannes Fabian emphasizes this matter continually: by encapsulating them with their concepts and in their time, the circumvention of Time amounts to depriving the culture of change. The people are “walled-in” by the limits that concepts determined them with, being unable to view anything outside their wall, they can only hope to talk and reflect within it, not *about* it, leaving the anthropologist as the sole individual who can “fully” understand this society.

¹⁰ See Fabian, J. (1983: 37-71).

As for preempting coevalness, we think that this quote by Fabian will clarify what he means:

Rather than walling-in the Time of others so that it cannot spill over into ours, this school simply preempts the question of coevalness. Its strategy is to eliminate Time as a significant dimension of either cultural integration or ethnography.¹¹

The preempted coevalness tries to remove the subject as a source of knowledge, by making Time obsolete, and by reducing a society to principles, preempting coevalness results in depriving the people whose time has been preempted from creativity, from being informers and shapers of knowledge. Instead, the anthropologist presents them as being fully informed and shaped by the concepts in the developing of “their” Time.

By not dealing with the issue of Time, by bypassing it, choosing to focus on the basic principles that make a society work, we have as a result an isolated culture, one that has cut off its connections with other societies; these anthropological practices have only served to amplify essentialization of the Other, as well removing creativity from the possibilities for the cultures that are being explored.¹²

The denial of coevalness has had political uses, from being one of the tools to justify colonization or imperialism, or for organizing hierarchies within a geographical space. For Fabian, as well as for us, the pressing issue is the epistemological one of denying the interlocutor a role as a knower, as an epistemic agent. This harm to their epistemological status allows further harms to be enacted against them; as soon as we deny them an epistemological standpoint, we start creating hierarchies, and they find themselves in a disadvantaged position; ruled out of the building of collective knowledge, these people’s voices are reduced to mere data containers.¹³

11 Fabian, J. (1983: 52).

12 Here we could not on how Said also claims that the Orient has been essentialized, basically depriving the (different) peopl that live in it a Time in which to change. See Said, E. W. (1979).

13 This idea is very similar to what Miranda Fricker calls “Hermeneutical Injustice”.

The writing practice of the anthropologists submits their ethnological experience to a tabular and detached knowledge. They start submitting their experience through their cultural framework, excluding the way in which the natives would structure that knowledge themselves. When this happens the natives become a mere object of study, they find their voices erased from the production of knowledge and, thus, they become epistemic tokens that carry knowledge, not subjects that *produce* it.

Why does Fabian use the word coevalness and not contemporaneity, simultaneity, or synchronicity? For him both synchronicity and simultaneity refer only to events that happen at the same time, while contemporaneity asserts co-occurrence in Typological Time¹⁴; while coevalness aims at something more:

What I am aiming at is covered by the German terms *gleichzeitig* and *Gleichzeitigkeit*. The unusual *coeval*, and especially the noun coevalness, express a need to steer between such closely related notions as *synchronous/simultaneous* and *contemporary*. I take *synchronous* to refer to events occurring to the same physical time; *contemporary* asserts co-occurrence in what I called typological time.¹⁵

It refers to a common “occupation”, a sharing of time. That is to say, while the research might recognize the people, the tribes, they were studying as simultaneous or synchronous to their own, but this would be tantamount to saying merely that they are living in the same physical time. As already stated, this, is a necessary condition to do anthropological or ethnological work at all, otherwise they could not observe practices that were not there. The word “contemporary”, would signify that pre-literacy can cohabit with literacy, that some people would be practicing more advanced techniques or cultures, while others would still be stuck on the previous phase: though contemporary, researches could still deny the people coevalness. Recognizing contemporaneity, simultaneity, or synchronicity does not imply epistemic equality: in all of these instances we can deny a shared present, we could even claim that we can accept these three instances without

14 Fabian, J. (1983: 31).

15 Fabian, J. (1983: 30).

ever referring to Intersubjective Time. Academic writing may grant both synchronicity and contemporariness to the populations they study, but this does not suffice to avoid reducing these populations to epistemic objects instead of recognizing them as subjects. Only by avoiding the denial of coevalness, can the epistemic status of these people be respected.

Fabian thinks that the academic nature of anthropological writings has contributed to the marginalization of local voices, as well as facilitating the denial of coevalness. In these anthropological reflections, where Intersubjective Time seems to disappear and the Other is deprived either of Time, or also to some extent of history, of a voice, or even epistemic agency. As an interesting counterpoint he mentions Lévi-Strauss's *Tristes Tropiques*, yet the dominant practices keep denying the Other a coevalness in which to act, in which to be a subject. Belgian historian Berber Bevernage shares a similar hypothesis, but his interest is in the field of history and not anthropology. Bevernage, claims that the discourse of historians--we could even venture to say their writing-- can be regarded as a neutral discourse, one that limits itself to the description of past and present. Indeed, he gives five main characteristics of what historians believe time is:

- 1.- *time is homogeneous - meaning every second, every minute and every day is identical;*
- 2.- *time is discrete - meaning every moment in time can be conceived of as a point on a straight line;*
- 3.- *time is therefore linear;* and
4. *time is directional - meaning that it flows without interruption from the future, through the present to the past;*
5. *time is absolute-- meaning that time is not relative to space or to the person who is measuring it.*^{16 17}

But Bevernage believes that discourses of history possess a performative dimension¹⁸, one that by ascribing different times, actually produces them. It breaks the temporal line, and produces a 'distance' between past and present, one that if conjoined with the Typological Time referred to by Johannes Fabian refers

16 Bevernage, B. (2013: 17).

17 This resembles the idea of empty-homogenous time advanced by Benedict Anderson. See Anderson, B. (2006).

18 Bevernage, B. (2012b: X).

to, helps distance the groups that have been ascribed as belonging to the past from our present decisions and our present conscience. In this way history helps, consciously or not, to further damage the epistemic position of some groups, excluding them from the present and 'breaking-up' the connection they might have with it.

2.2 Spanish Colonialism: The Denial of Coevalness in “Latin America”¹⁹. Walter Mignolo’s account of Denial of Coevalness.

La mirada del colonizador ignora la ancestral mirada profunda del indio para ver y entender esta tierra, como ignora su experiencia y su memoria.²⁰

In his studies Walter Mignolo has utilized Johannes Fabian concept of “denial of coevalness” to explain what happened in the colonial meeting between Spanish and “Indigenous” people; he explains how the denial of coevalness, and not just denial of contemporaneity, was a part of every move of colonization, be it of space, of language, of memory or of time. While we will explore the genealogy and the specific instances of the ‘denial of coevalness’ that happened in the practices of colonization, we will also explore how denying coevalness is an epistemic injustice that goes beyond the colonization period and practices. While it is true that Johannes Fabian concerns himself with the anthropological practices and accounts, he doesn’t restrict his concept of “denial of coevalness” to them, he thinks that it is something that has happened in other contexts as well, and that it goes beyond a conceptions of mere physical time. Walter Mignolo thinks that one of those contexts was the colonial one, especially visible on the way the local ways of understanding were shadowed, silenced, or ignored.

19 The irony of having to insert the name of “Latin America” so that my chapter may be better understood is highlighted by the fact that the denial of coevalness was suffered by the people who didn’t spoke a Latin-related language, nor were directly related with Amerigo Vespucci. For a detailed analysis see Mignolo, W. (2005).

20 Bonfil-Batalla, G. (1990: 30). “The stare of the colonizer ignores the deep ancestral stare of the indian to see and understand his land, as much as he ignores his experience and his memory”. My translation.

Some colonialists, such as Columbus, did not make a great effort to establish a relationship with the locals, treating them more as “biological or zoological”²¹ curiosities rather than as real epistemic agents. As pointed out by the Mexican philosopher Eduardo O’Gorman’s and the Bulgarian-French philosopher Tzevtan Todorov’s work, Columbus, as many other explorers/colonizers that came after him, didn’t formulate knowledge about the natives by observing them, but had an *a priori* idea on how they should be, and continuously looked for confirmation on this view; that means that the natives played a role of confirmation of the ideas Colombus, and other explorers/colonizers, thought that these natives should possess on previous knowledge, such as the writings of Marco Polo, or the mythical descriptions that also appeared in ancient maps and chronicles, the locals just served to confirm these preconceptions or, in the best of cases, modify them, but because of it this framework, there wasn’t a true epistemic interaction, as the voice of the locals didn’t have any weight on how they should be perceived by these explorers/colonizers; this practice of determining the other through previous models, instead of producing it through interaction, applies not only to people who colonized and thought little on the capacities and abilities of these natives, as Colombus himself, but it also applied to the myth of the “good savage”, defended by many missionaries on their mission to defend the rights of indigenous people, this myth made all the indigenous equal, believing all of them to have “more christian qualities”, and saying that they were always obedient to their masters, it made them enter an abstract model, while ignoring their revolts, while also making it sound as if the awful conditions they were submitted to didn’t change their attitude, all because the experience was always to be interpreted through the “good savage” lens; this led for a maintenance of knowledge on these people that could not go beyond the paradigms already set by the Spaniards and Portuguese.

21 See Todorov, T. (1998: 13–58).

Others, like Hernan Cortéz, were more concerned to understand the way the natives acted and what were their beliefs²² than many of the other colonizers; this led to them being impressed by their productive practices (*poiesis*), praising the way they used technique and their way of building, but this admiration and recognition of their art (*techné*) was not usually extended to their abilities of possessing knowledge beyond the mere practical uses, on a cultural and epistemic level they never considered the local knowledge as anything but a primitive²³ way of understanding nature, human relationships and divinity; they could be praised as incredible workers, builders, even artists but they could not be recognized as epistemic equals, and all their epistemic qualities had to be either thought of as deviant or as imperfect forms of the knowledge possessed by the colonizers. Mignolo sees in these colonizers a mentality that will lead to Francis Bacon “*Novum Organum*”, the mentality that considers an understanding different from the one that has been shaped by one’s own culture as a not yet developed knowledge, or even worse, as mere fantasy.²⁴ As Mignolo sharply points out, differences were made into values, with the colonizers/explorers always deciding how to evaluate them.

Thinking colonization as a period unconnected with the ideas and concepts utilized on the Renaissance, and thus to the Enlightenment, is a big genealogical omission on how certain ideas solidified themselves on Western thought. The impact that the reports and the letters of the colonizers and missionaries had on shaping the structure of European thought has been an unexplored subject, one that Mignolo underlines as a reason for a lack of awareness to the injustices being committed to certain groups of people; we have to keep in mind that the letters

22 Not with the intention of understanding their culture for knowledge itself, but as means of being more able to take advantage of this knowledge so that they may colonize/convert the indigenous people. See Todorov, T. (1998).

23 As Pierre Clastres pointed out, the use of words such as primitive, just reinforce this kind of dichotomy, where the person attributing it, just reinstates it into their categorical thought. See Clastres, P. (1987).

24 See Mignolo, W. (1998).

and reports are always for another European, so that both the producer and the receiver of the knowledge are foreign to the topic they're sharing, but it is from this foreignness that the big schemas for this knowledge were built, it is through letters and reports that the European world comes to build a knowledge about the "Americans", the "Indies", and their practices and knowledges, and the main way they approached these people is through their own background of ideas, it is an assimilation which can only result harmful for the natives of the Indies.

Even the most recognized defender of the indigenous populations, Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas couldn't avoid categorizing the Indians as being a kind of barbaric people²⁵, as not yet civilized, because they lacked alphabetic writing; he could try to defend them on a lot of grounds, but when he praised them he remarked their qualities because they portrayed a "christian spirit", both the praise and the condemnations were only read as comparisons with the model the Spanish had, reducing them to either improvements, deficiencies or sameness, that these differences could be thought as different values was something that Las Casas did not consider. This practice is still practiced as we could see on a press conference made by the director of Spanish Television and Radio José Antonio Sanchez, on the first of April 2017, where he said that Spanish people never colonized any people, but that they only brought civilization; he did not only denied the big central cultures such as the Mayans, Aztecs, and Zapotecs with their complex economic and political systems, but he described the tribes and people who were conquered by them as being barbaric and in need of being evangelized and civilized; in this reasoning he places the populations in an imperfect or deviant state of humanity, one that can only be perfected or straightened by the arrival of the Spanish, bearers of the "true" knowledge, as soon as a nation, an individual or a society takes this stance, the person, society or nation they are investigating will find itself with the ability to communicate or think in an imperfect or deviant way,

25 See Mignolo, W. (1998: 129).

with the need to always be reconducted to the “right” kind of dialogue; this prevents for an equal epistemic exchange to occur, as one of the talkers will always find itself on a disadvantage position, with limited resources and a weaker position, in so far as is different, from the start²⁶.

The way the indigenous utilized the paintings or the quipus, as ways of writing²⁷, was not acknowledged, and all the differences were viewed as lack from the Other, Mignolo declares that it is in these practices that differences are made into values, and values are hierarchized, with the indigenous groups always being on a more disadvantageous position; while Todorov says that if there was a recognized single humanity, these assimilation that the Spanish colonizers brought conditioned them to see these other groups as imperfect. Using Fabian’s terminology, we could say that the colonizers mainly made use of Typological Time for understanding the place that these indigenous people should take in their contemporaneous world; the lack of (alphabetical) writing was considered a previous stage of man; other values, such as the lack of clothing, reinforced this view. The indigenous practices and knowledge becomes just an object of curiosity, instead of being an epistemic voice, the difference practices are just taken to be more primitive or as of less value than those of the Spanish. He explains that regional aspects began to be universalized, and when they were universalized then they became the measure of everything else, from this point the locals of the New World could only be behind in their interpretations, based on a universalized picture, they were the farthest from the highest point of civilization, the more elements of this universal theory they lacked, the farther away they were from being coeval to the colonizers, thus the project of colonization/conversion/education merged into a single process.

26 One argument that Sanchez employs as justification for his belief that the Spaniards have never been colonizers, but instead carriers of civilization, is the great knowledge and role they played on the Renaissance, claiming that their knowledge of Dante and Michelangelo was somehow enough to prove their inability to be cruel or uncivilized.

27 See Mignolo, W. (1998 and 2005).

What would have happened if they were seen as coeval? Then their social practices wouldn't be imperfect forms of the Western paradigm, but would be different. Otherness is not colonizable; the only way to colonize someone is by transforming them into a sameness that leaves the foreign elements out. It amounts to a forced translation meant for a reader that has no shared identity with this Otherness; coincidentally this was the period where letters shaped the way on how the indigenous people were perceived by the Europeans, as such the knowledge was shaped for the receiver, more than it respected the locals, they were part of an adventure, but never a shaper of knowledge. That function remains only to those that are coeval to the knowers, and as we have seen, the indigenous people were denied this right.

Let's develop the argument by looking at Tzvetan Todorov 'La Conquista de América: El Problema del Otro', in this book Todorov points out the incapacity of the colonizers to recognize the Other as someone with the same dignity as them but different, he summarizes this in one phrase:

Columbus has discovered the Americas but not the Americans.²⁸

He points out that the colonizers negate the existence of a different human substance, and that they can only recognize an imperfect state of it. That means that the natives were either non-humans, being closer to the beasts than to man, or were just humans caught in a backwardness state of mind.

Why does it have to be necessarily an imperfect state of man for the colonizers and not a different character? Because the imperfect state leaves the possibility of being perfected through a conversion into the Catholic Faith; the only way of imparting evangelization, is if there is a subject that can be evangelized, so the recognition of humanity comes at the price of a positioning of an imperfect knower. The Indians were inferior because they lacked the knowledge of Christ, they possessed the seeds of Christian qualities, but didn't have them in practice.

²⁸ Todorov, T. (1998: 57). My translation.

Both Todorov and Mignolo claim that writing was one of the main instruments that colonizers used to legitimize these claims²⁹. While the colonizers could recognize the rhetoric abilities, and the complex speeches that the Indians were capable of, they noticed that they lacked of a written tradition; this 'lack' put them on an inferior plane, they hadn't yet 'developed' communication and their knowledge was inferior because it didn't possess know the concept of a book. Absolute knowledge came from books, from the Sacred Scriptures to Nebrija's grammar-nation founding of Spain, knowledge's paradigm resided in the written word. Because of their lack of their written word, the colonizers assumed these people to lack history, so they brought them to themselves to bring them history.

In the ancient Greek world history, as it was for Herodotus, had been mainly a recollections about events that had been seen, thus contemporary to the knowers, one would start building history from the narratives and the voices of first-hand knowers, seeing that they were the one's that had experience the events that unfolded, that was different from the way of understanding history for the Romans, for them history consisted on a narrative of past events, and it had to do more with identity building and was driven by a need to recover a past that they felt theirs.³⁰

The colonizers view of history was more in sync with the latter, though their situation in the Americas resembled Herodotus condition the most. So they denied the second to the locals, while building one from both canons, constantly overlapping one view to the other. The alliance between memory, history, written word and knowledge between the Spanish colonizers that we could use Isidore's of Sevilla explanation on why the letter is so useful for history: it is because the "letters tie things up" thus keeping them from:

flying away with all those things that are forgotten.³¹

Because the populations they found in America had no alphabetic writing, they could not picture them having an actual history, how could they have accurate

29 See Todorov, T. (1998) and Mignolo, W. (1998).

30 Mignolo, W. (1998: 136).

31 As quoted in Mignolo, W. (1998: 138).

knowledge of their past and of the events if it wasn't written down on a book? The Spanish tried to solve that problem writing their history for them; here the locals played a role only as bearers of information and not of producers of knowledge or active voices on how to structure it; whatever didn't enter into the idea of history of the colonizers was left out, seen as discourses of different areas. The colonizers and the missionaries dictated what was important and what was not based on their own observations, when the locals were asked, it was always a question formulated by the colonizers, one that was meant to complete a questionnaire or a review, so the role the locals had was more of filling predetermined spaces, that not to produce or change the scheme of knowledge.

By doing this, they didn't erase the voices of the local people, but they did absorb and repress their own visions, they reduce the population to mere carriers of information, but not carriers of knowledge nor history, they needed someone to complete their knowledge, to bring them into civilization, to convert them, and obviously, the ones that decided how to do it were the colonizers.

2.3 Denial of Coevalness after the Colonization

We will try to argue that the denial of coevalness has been, and continues to be applied, around different disciplines and different discourses; and in all of them it entails an epistemic injustice on the other. In Latin American countries, "denial of coevalness" exists, and shadowing or obscuring these relations would be just a negation of the circumstances in which these countries are configured. We think that by analyzing the instances where these practices commit that epistemic injustice, will help us to recognize and restructure the way we've been talking about the thinking *of* the Other, to a way of starting a dialogue *with* the Other. Guillermo Bonfil-Batalla, among others, has explored how the independence movements were not enough to remove the colonization mentality, as they usually

were led by the *criollos*³², maintained the goals of their precedents and try to emulate the “European” countries, so they believe that the independence translated to a shift of epistemic relations, is not as accurate as most people assumed; the *criollos* were not mainly interested in shifting their views on the locals, but of obtaining more power and recognition. The indigenous side was more neglected on the nation building that consulted with, so that the solidifying of these nations were built more on the mix of the sons and daughters of Spaniards than not of a truly multicultural exchange.

This situation led to an uneven focus on how the nations should focus their infrastructure or their political identity, rarely did “Latin American” countries went and have gone beyond a *mestizo* identity³³, that while important, it is not enough for an epistemic injustice to disappear, one current example is the distribution of primary education in Mexico, where it is believed that indigenous schools are deficient, because the indigenous students have either an unwillingness to learn, or that the community is too chaotic and savage for them to really take advantage of the education given by the state, these opinions neglect the fact that eighty percent of the teachers do not speak the indigenous tongue of their students, thus making basic communication challenging, let alone any pedagogical practice³⁴. Another problem is the uneven focus and essentialization of indigenous groups; the attention that the Mayans, Mexicas and Incas have gathered, has made their cultures and their people garner more respect, but it has also produced a further marginalization to smaller groups as they are reduced to these identities of which, if they don't fit, then they suffer the consequences of not being considered as cultural as them.

32 Sons of Spaniard parents that, because they were born in the colonies and not in Spain, had less rights than the Spanish who were born in Spain.

33 *Mestizo* refers to a child born from a Spanish and Indigenous parents, a mestizo identity implies a recognition of both backgrounds.

34 See Mexicanos Primero (2017).

We can thus see that these practices have not disappeared, so we find it important to explain how they came to solidify through time. As we said on previous paragraphs, both in the colonization period as well as the post-independence period, in a less clear way, tended to disregard the local knowledge of their inhabitants, and the way that “Latin America” has been described shows that it is still a lack of something, the “Third World”, the “underdeveloped” countries, have to try to catch up to the Western Time. If they ever hope to do so, they have to look at what the Western World is doing, on this framework Indigenous knowledge becomes excluded from the debate. They become marginalized, they are shadowed, they’re only thought as remains of great civilizations that are no more. Five hundred years have passed and yet the notion is that nothing has changed with Them, that there is nothing more that we can learn, that their “Glory days” are over, and that the main interest we can get from them is just a historical look at a past that we don’t even feel like ours. The way we frame the indigenous cultures is to trap them on a past that is over, one that we prevent to bleed onto the present, thus neutralizing and silencing their voices. The disconnection we have with our indigenous populations, outside of history books is one of marginalization and denial, there is a territorial marginalization as with the tarahumara population, as well as a denial of recognition as we can see by people claiming to not have anything of *indio*; as if being an “indio” was a negative condition, almost a sickness that we want to avoid contagion of. By recognizing the indigenous only on their past, we negate their presence on our Time; as soon as that happens we reduced their opinions to what we already knew from the history books, in some cases, while going further to re-placing them as savages or as backward human beings, seeing their lack of some general traits shared in “our” society as a lack of humanity or development, “necessary” development for being accepted into the civilized world.

Their becoming epistemic objects, and not epistemic agents, seems very familiar to what we saw in the chapter of epistemic injustice, we can see that denial of coevalness may be linked and further aggravates different epistemic injustices such as Testimonial Injustice, and injustice based on the group a person belongs to³⁵. In this the people are excluded of the Hermeneutical Resources, their influence is limited and their accounts are dubious at best. Insurrection can only further damage the idea and essentialization we have of a group, forming and confirming a violent-primitive-natural characteristic that has been attributed in the past.

The legitimacy of their practices and the effect they can bring to societies are always questioned, if they even manage to be heard. Because of the denial of coevalness we don't think they can or should affect Our Time, what epistemic abilities are there left after such denial?

2.4 Sketches of coevalness in Johannes Fabian's and Walter Mignolo's theories.

As we have seen both Fabian and Mignolo reflect on the damage that the denial of coevalness produces on epistemic, cultural and political exchanges, both investigate different fields where this happens, and try to point out the injustice or the lack of epistemic justification to act in that specific way. Johannes Fabian is amazed on how anthropologists are able to submit the Intersubjective Time they experienced while doing ethnological work to an academic writing that demands an object of study. The contributions Fabian has made in recognizing the injustice of denying time to people we share it with, a time that is needed and in which communication is based on, and how it is linked to the development of European

35 Gender and Race certainly play a role on the denial of coevalness, but to explore this topic we would require more space to deal with it. For a deeper insight see Lugones, M. (2008), Fanon, F. (2008), and Quijano, A. (2007).

thought cannot be understated; Fabian's book is an appeal of conscience, a demand for a renewal of anthropology, as well as a renewal of how we speak of the other, to an invitation to speaking *with* the other, that not only means not possessing all the knowledge, or potential frameworks for the conversation, it also means that we must listen and discuss so that share topics and share time may arise.

Walter Mignolo's critique of the denial of coevalness is not a mere reappraisal of Fabian's points; Mignolo's book is one that not only asks for the same openness to diverse ways of thinking and practices, it is also a study that demonstrates the unjust invalidation of some practices, so that we may reconsider their epistemic, cultural and political relevance in today's world. Mignolo wants to disassociate himself from Postcolonialist theory, because he believes that the name reeks of an answer to a move, and one that arises after the colonizers have left the territory, physically if not ideologically, from the colonized territories; he believes that position deligitimizes the practices that are born before and as soon as the colonial period begins, these practices don't appear out of nowhere and he believes that we need to consider them as a new tradition from the colonial encounter. Mignolo's critique, then, does not stop with an explanation of the epistemic injustice, but it is an invitation to revise the practices and thoughts that were deligitimized, to open up the historical and cultural background into zones that have been marginalized.

What solutions do Fabian and Mignolo offer for the denial of coevalness? Johannes Fabian is very ambiguous on this part, sometimes seemingly saying that ethnological practice would be enough, making dubious the role than an anthropologist as himself can play on the knowledge regarding indigenous groups. On other sections it seems that the only way would be to always have *Intersubjective Time* as the main focus of every epistemic relationship, yet Fabian never really describes how Intersubjective Time could happen with more than two

individuals, he seems to reduce it to a one on one encounter, where both knowers are recognized by the other as such, and in which they share a time on which to build any meaningful interaction; is that something that could happen between groups of people? How could one deal with that on a university course? Or on an exchange where the Other does not appear if not as referent? How do we solve all this issues are things that can not be answered based on Fabian's book, he provides us with a way to recognize a denial of coevalness and its harms, but he does not offer a way to truly instaurate a coeval experience. A further "limitation" on Fabian's book, is that he is solely concerned with the practices and writings of anthropologists, while we deal with the denial of coevalness as a phenomenon that happens in everyday life. Fabian mentions that denial of coevalness is not a phenomenon restricted to anthropology, yet it is not his focus to explore this side, both Mignolo and this work try to provide a further examination to this fields.

Walter Mignolo is more specific, he claims that we have to *deny* the denial of coevalness for us to open up an alternative way of interacting with the knowledge of the Other as well as with the Other, we could say to prevent an epistemic injustice from happening, with that he means that we have to restructure how indigenous knowledge has been perceived, be it an 'exotic' knowledge, a 'backward' knowledge, or a knowledge that belongs entirely to the past, and accept it as part of the same time, that means to recognize that Guaman Poma Ayala did not live on a different time than Fray Bartolomé de las Casas, but that their writings were coeval, as well as their opinions. Mignolo clearly states:

(...) one of my main efforts was to postulate a denial of the denial of coevalness by spatializing time and by suggesting coevolutionary histories as alternatives to evolutionary ones told from a locus of enunciation created as the master locus.³⁶

This idea to disconnect a regional way of thinking that pose itself as universal through power relations and, thus opening up the space for different conceptions that have evolved through time is the first step to allow us to speak *with* the Other,

36 Mignolo, W. (1998:329).

and engage in a just epistemic exchange. His book shows us how traditions that were banished from the epistemic standards of knowledge from the West didn't disappear, they either evolved in isolation, merged and hybridized with the knowledge and practices that the colonizers introduced, appropriating these practices and shaping them to the transformation of their own knowledge and practices. This makes us understand that there isn't one universal chronological line of knowledge that develops and can assume and determine which practices belong in the present and which in the past, yet, while I do find this proposal useful when we have to look on previous experiences, it seems more a solution that repairs the damage done, instead of being one that recognizes coevalness from the start. Mignolo's option helps us to legitimize what history had deligitimized, but it does not solve the problem on how coevalness is still being denied on the present day, we need something more than a mere reparation, we need a concept of coevalness that includes the indigenous people from the outset. Mignolo's broadens the understanding and the instances where denial of coevalness happens, but we consider that his proposal of a denial of the denial of coevalness remains underdeveloped, making it hard to see if by denying a denial of coevalness, true coevalness is happening.

For us it seems that the main contribution that Mignolo and Fabian give is the critique of the situation, and the explanation on how this denial comes to solidify itself through time. It calls for a revaluation on how we relate to different discourses, be it political, epistemic, historical, anthropological where indigenous people and knowledge have been framed. It calls for a reaction on the marginalization and essentialization of people and convictions; the need for this revaluation is important, because until we can see the limits in which our society is built, it will be hard to change these limits into something possible. We first need to be aware of the problem so that we can face it, by looking into Mignolo's and Fabian's accounts we have explored the harms produced by denial of coevalness,

and we have venture to identify it as a kind of epistemic injustice. By denying coevalness we deny a true epistemic interaction with the Other, and by doing so we are harming his abilities as a knower, be it that we marginalize him from any epistemic encounter, or that we make their voices unreliable insofar as they are considered primitive, denial of coevalness is a distancing practice which prevents true epistemic encounters to occur.

Nonetheless we felt the need to express the “limits” on Mignolo’s and Fabian’s theories of coevalness as we believe that, while valuable, it is not enough to take a reactive stance, and to make the reflection on coevalness only of its negation, we must also search for ways to have a positive concept of it, one that goes beyond colonization and distancing practices, one that actually makes us share time with the Other.

3. A positive account of coevalness: José Ortega y Gasset concept of coevalness.

3.1 Explaining Ortega y Gasset's Coevalness

After seeing the negative effects that the denial of coevalness has caused we will try to find a dialogical alternative, ironically, on a Spanish author³⁷: José Ortega y Gasset. José Ortega y Gasset thought on coevalness before Johannes Fabian and Walter D. Mignolo did, yet his starting point wasn't the reflection of a dimension that was denied to some people, he thought about coevalness in positive terms, developing the concept around a group of questions regarding the problems on how to understand our lives and our connection to society, as well as a concept to help on historic research. By consequence, Ortega y Gasset's concept of coevalness does not share the same genealogy as the one that Fabian and Mignolo share, yet we believe that some of his thoughts on coevalness may help us surpass some of the "limits" that we found in their respective accounts. We will explore in this chapter his account of coevalness, and then we will focus on the features we think will allow us to sharpen the concept of coevalness into a positive program, to think of coevalness not only as something that can be denied.

37 This choice is not only motivated by the fact that Ortega y Gasset has a different framework regarding coevalness, or that he thinks that to think of contemporaneity is not enough; but it also stems from the influence Ortega y Gasset's thinking has had in the "Latin American" mind. Be it by his trips and publications in Argentina or by the exodus of his students to the area, for example Leopoldo Zea's presence in Mexico.

Reconstructing the thought of José Ortega y Gasset is not an easy task, his philosophy is always concerned with the circumstance in which he found himself in; he was more concerned in having an influence on the society as a whole and not only on philosophical academia, for those reasons his writings and his university classes were always planned for being accessible, he preferred to write articles on the newspaper than to write books aimed at philosophy scholars, he was a circumstantial thinker, concerned with contextual issues that were plaguing either Spain as a country, the University as an institution, or just everyday life concerns such as how to address an acquaintance, yet that does not mean that he does not have a systematicity of thought, or that he didn't develop constantly concepts, sharpening them throughout different writings and contexts. One preliminary concept that we have to mention is that for Ortega y Gasset, living is a constant task of interpretation, our life is not already defined, on the contrary it has the constant need of being defined and made sense of.

The main place where he tackles and develops the idea of coevalness is in the course "En Torno a Galileo", a course open to everyone, the course consisted in ten lectures where he dwells on the concept of coevalness and how it is inserted in his "Theory of Generations"³⁸. What does this theory of generations amount to? Ortega y Gasset believes that in every historical age, men are divided into three different groups, of which they belong to one. All of them inhabit the same space, at the same time, which makes all of them contemporaries of each other, but each group is distinguished because each of them has a system of concerns, beliefs and ideas that drive them, he calls this common factors a "vital horizon", a horizon that we constantly face to define, make sense, and live our lives; one shares this "vital horizon" only with the group they appertain, and not with the rest of their contemporaries. This sub-group is the one that Ortega y Gasset defines as coeval.

38 See Ortega y Gasset, J. (1947a).

Being coeval with someone doesn't mean to agree with him on every topic, it does not mean to share the exact same opinion, it fundamentally means that coevals share the same problems and, be it in agreeing or opposing the dominant of ideas of their time, they can recognize each other because they all belong to the same dynamic system of attractions and repulsions, their vital horizon makes them share a set of questions, one that they have to attempt to reply to so that they can make sense of their lives, thus this shared vital horizon, our belonging to a coeval group, is fundamental for our interpretation and definition of our lives. Being a contemporary means to share the same space in one's life, in the same Physical Time, with other people, being coeval means to engage in a vital manner with the ideas of the others, there is not a single universal approach on how one will face this engagement, thus plural answers ideas, and movements appear from a shared vital horizon, this engagement is fundamental so that we can define the characters of our life. Being coeval is not a condition that one can decide to grant to some individuals and deny to others, being coeval is a condition in which everyone is born with because the "vital horizon" of one's life necessarily clashes and depends with the vital horizon of the others.

Every "today", a specific date in Physical Time, is filled, for Ortega y Gasset, by three coeval generations, so every today is always a superimposition of different vital horizons extending through a shared space. Each generation is always positioned between two others, so a generation never finds itself isolated from the others, there's always continuity between generations and even change in paradigms show how closely knitted together one generation is to the other. A change of paradigm never occurs spontaneously, it can only happen with a shift of a shared vital horizon, there has to be an understanding of the paradigm one wants to break with, and a shared new horizon which one wants to strive for; and until a full generation does not shape this new horizon, the shift will not realize itself, there will not be a true change of paradigm, because the shared vital horizon

will still be in place; that means that the vital horizons change only with generations and not with individuals, an individual may already break from the paradigm, but finds himself bounded to the unwillingness of his coevals to change it, so he must structure his severance from the paradigm with the refusal to break from it of his coevals. Why is the theory of generations and, specifically, coevalness in Ortega y Gasset so important? As we have seen it has to do with a definition of a human subject that he gives, and to further clarify it we refer to his most famous formula:

Yo soy yo y mi circunstancia, y si no la salvo a ella no me salvo yo.³⁹

At its core, for Ortega y Gasset, the individual is always inserted in a circumstance with which he has to face so that his life may develop; an individual is never only just himself, but he is always thrown into a situation, one that he didn't choose but, in a sense, cannot avoid. While this circumstance is common to all of his contemporaries, the main conceptual and interpretative tools and beliefs he will have to take on this circumstance are the same as his coevals, thus making them an essential factor of his life, they are the one's with which he will forge the vital horizon of his age, be it by opposing them or by cooperating with them. To be coeval is to have to deal with one another in an attempt of an interpretation of the world, one that an individual cannot make on his own. So who wouldn't be coeval? Those who do not share the same problematic than us, those whose life is surrounded by different questions, questions from which they will shape their lives; that is the distinction that Ortega y Gasset uses to explain what will separate coevals from contemporaries.

Coevalness, for Ortega y Gasset, means the condition where people share a common problem or question that pesters their life, one that must be answered in one way or another; the answers may be completely diverse, but the problem is felt by the society at large, this does not mean that every single person will feel the

³⁹ "I am myself and my circumstance, and if I don't save it, then I won't save myself". My translation. Ortega y Gasset, J. (1947b).

problem with the same intensity, but everyone will find himself using convictions from previous generations, that thus become part of our own, and even if we are against them, we must know them; these convictions are formed and passed through diverse means, be it by family members, by school, or by other social groups, we constantly absorb these convictions; in a way, Ortega y Gasset says, our first way of thinking is always a foreign thinking, one that appertains to something and someone beyond ourselves⁴⁰. An individual has to go through his/hers society shared conceptions before he can go through his own. Coevalness thus means a shared conceptual scheme, even if there are more than one, and a shared life problematic, it is through these shared mentalities, these ideas will be valid even if I do not share them, and convictions that every person will build his or her own conceptions of the world, be it that they choose not to alter any opinion of what they have received, or that they will change every single conviction they possessed to forge a new interpretation of the world.

A further clarification is necessary, as we said at the beginning of this chapter, we're only taking some features of Ortega y Gasset's theory on coevalness, as we do not agree with some of its features, one of these features is the fifteen-year range that a coeval group possess with each other; he believes that the intimacy of ideas is just shared by people belonging to this group, while people outside might think similarly, they still belong to another generation, we believe that one of Ortega y Gasset's greatest merits is determining that coevalness is a shared problematic that people face, having the constraints of a fifteen-year range seems to harm more this idea, than to develop it. Another factor connected to his theory is that he thinks that a certain time has only three generations, those belonging to a coeval group formed by people from thirty to forty-five years, those belonging to a coeval group formed by those people who have from forty-six to sixty years and, finally, those belonging to a coeval group formed by those who have sixty-one to

40 See Ortega y Gasset, J. (1947a).

seventy-five years; the exclusion of certain groups as being able to be truly coeval outside of this framework seems unwarranted, and it is also a bizarre choice, seeing how in another essay⁴¹ he talks about coevalness as an instinct that children possess, and something that was common with the youth in antiquity, the same youth that would be through this coevalness instinct that the notion of society would arise. Even though we have decided not take into consideration these specific features that Ortega y Gasset discusses on his thinking, we still believe there are some notions inside his theory that will help us formulate a new concept of coevalness.

Ortega y Gasset thought that the coevals were restricted to a geographical space, meaning that the coevals in Europe could not be coeval to those in Australia, seeing that they have different “vital horizons”, thinking that the concerns and the problems that structures the European societies were different than those that concern Australians. He does not think that a society has to forcefully be isolated because of an essential trait, far from it, he thinks that societies fluctuate between being inserted on a homogenous coevalness with others and with periods of a heterogenous coevalness because of specific events that define that region of humanity. What would the “Latin American” case amount to given these conditions? Certainly there are different groups, and different traditions, but do these vital horizons differ that much? Should they? It seems to me that here the vital horizons interconnect with each other, the concerns of both the “main” society and that of indigenous groups clash again and again on certain issues, fundamental for them to define their world; be it the treatment of nature, the definition of territory, the need and means of expression or even the education, these societies continue to interact with one another making their vital horizons conflict and. at times, merge with one another.

41 See Ortega y Gasset, J (1947c).

Because of this turn of events, the Indigenous people cannot remain marginalized, their vital horizon does not belong to a different time, but it does cry to be heard and to be dialogued with. As Bonfil-Batalla says, the non-recognition of this other side of “Latin America” makes only a superficial understanding⁴² of one’s world, we need to discover and face the deepness of our cultures and conditions if we really want to build an inclusive society, and not one that is built on hierarchies. We believe that this factor of sharing a vital horizon may prove useful for achieving this goal. This idea of coevalness stresses that coevalness is a need for interpreting one’s surroundings, and to recognize our coevals is to recognize the characters whom we will have to confront and refer to, if we want to have a more complete interpretation of the world.

To summarize we believe that these traits of Ortega y Gasset’s theory of coevalness must be implemented so that a just epistemic exchange can occur, it has to come after we’re aware on how denial of coevalness produces epistemic injustice, and informed with the harms on how denial of coevalness affects the Other, these traits must build a bridge to the other:

1. Coevalness is not something that a society or an individual decides to grant or deny, as could be the case with the missionaries, conquerors and anthropologists, but is defined by a structural problem that makes us face and cohabit with one another, making coevalness a condition in which we live in and not as society or individual decision.
2. Coevals are recognized because of the shared need to interpret one’s world. Interpretations may be diverse, but the problem brings people together, it is from this common problem that the different answers and different interpretations of the world and life will be born; and it is this structural concern that will link us to all the different opinions and ideas from our coevals. Because these structural problems and ideas are the one’s

42 See Bonfil-Batalla, G. (199: 9-37).

that bring us together, the shared questions, not the shared answers are the ones that define us as coeval, no answer brings with itself a legitimization of a new time, so there is no justification that a shared answer allow us to deny coevalness to different answers from our coevals.

3.2 Final account of coevalness

We believe that José Ortega y Gasset's theory cannot stand on its own, if we want to face the denial of coevalness as an epistemic injustice. The main problem is that Ortega y Gasset is not aware that coevalness may be denied to people with whom we share problems, even more, his own framework is one where people that share problem are still excluded from being coeval. We believe that these theory by itself could finish in producing the same distancing harms which Fabian and Mignolo try to explain. Thus we believe that the features we highlighted in Ortega y Gasset's theory have to be grounded on the awareness of denial of coevalness that we explored in section 2. Ortega y Gasset lack the awareness of the epistemic harm that denying coevalness could produce, yet this awareness may have been overloaded in Mignolo's and Fabian's accounts, prohibiting them from fully being able to think about coevalness as a positive term, one that allows an epistemic interaction where different answers share a same question, and different interpretations clash and mix with each other, providing a shared epistemic arena, based on the vital part that these epistemic matters have on the shaping of our lives. Coevals are people who challenge and deepen our understanding of the world, and of ourselves, to deny them this dimension harms all the parties involved, and damages an epistemic interaction which is fundamental for a society.

We believe that both a denial of the denial of coevalness, and an affirmation of coevalness are necessary to have just interactions, for a creation of an epistemic arena where different voices may be heard without relationships of power

determining whose epistemic framework may organize the whole encounter. Paulo Freire's pedagogy offers us already an example of having a dialogue *with* the Other and not *about* the Other. His pedagogy is based on the belief that one must create an epistemic program that develops from the concerns of its students, one that grows through collaboration and confrontation between teacher and students, thus making them both recipients and shapers of a pedagogical program. It is through this constant confrontation, that does not mean agreement, that we may really seek a just epistemic exchange, lacking an awareness of a denial of coevalness could prevent us from recognizing epistemic devices that distance the other interlocutor, harming him as an epistemic agent; but not focusing on the condition of coevalness itself may produce us to only take a reactionary stance on these issues, instead of being aware that coevalness is something we share from the outset, and we must strive to maintain it if we want a deeper understanding of the circumstance that surrounds us. As Ortega y Gasset, an honest thought is dialectic, and dialectic is collaboration⁴³.

Conclusion

In section 1 of this thesis we discussed what we thought constituted an epistemic injustice, remarking that is the systematic harm done to an individual regarding their epistemic abilities as a knower, based on an external factor. We said that an epistemic injustice is a lack of recognition of an individual's epistemic qualities as a knower. Subsequently we identified denial of coevalness as an epistemic injustice, pointing out that when coevalness is denied, a distance is produced, and this distance allows to ignore the epistemic qualities of an epistemic agent, positioning certain abilities as not fully developed because of this individual's place in Time. In section 2 we discussed both Johannes Fabian's,

43 See Ortega y Gasset, J. (1992a).

which focuses mainly on anthropological discourse and practices, and Walter Mignolo's, which broadens the scope both in practices and in time, theories regarding the denial of coevalness. We stated that for both of them denial of coevalness is a condition where some individuals or groups are pushed and excluded from an epistemic encounter, where misunderstandings reign. When we deny coevalness in an interaction there is no true communication, the individual or group who has been denied coevalness is in a disadvantaged position, one in which his epistemic expression and resources are going to be measured in a way in which they belong to the past, excluding this position from playing a role in epistemic matters concerning the society. We also learn that this denial of coevalness isn't something that happened exclusively in the past, but is something that the indigenous populations in America still suffer from. The structures that were used to colonize and discredit their practices are still in play today. In section 3 we explore José Ortega y Gasset's positive account of coevalness, believing that through it we may find a foundation for new ways of communication and cooperation between different societies.

By producing conscience of the damage a denial of coevalness produces, by the analyses of Mignolo and Fabian, and with the positive account of Ortega y Gasset's coevalness we hope to give a term that will stabilize epistemic equity for a cultural encounter, one that will avoid essentialization or prejudice; one that, if respected, will give us a chance to build better communication, and to revise how the institutions and our relationships with these past and present have been set.

Summary:

In this thesis we explore the idea of denial of coevalness as an epistemic injustice. We start by defining what we consider are the relevant factors of an epistemic injustice and why we consider that the denial of coevalness can be thought of as a kind of epistemic injustice, we then proceed to tackle the idea of denial of coevalness produce by two studies, one by Johannes Fabian, the other by Walter Mignolo; we highlight the fundamental epistemic injustice that denial of coevalness produces, trying to understand how it came to be and how it is maintained, then we confront our reflections with the concept of coevalness as proposed by José Ortega y Gasset, building from this three projects so that we can, not only identify denial of coevalness as an epistemic injustice, but point out a possible solution as well.

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