

The “No Place” of the elderly person: a criticism to Modernity

Rodrigo Bordin¹, Maria de Lourdes Bernart², Danielle Bordin³, Juliana Mara Nespolo⁴,
Suelyn Maria Longhi de Oliveira⁵, Haydee Padilla⁶, Claudineia Lucion Savi⁷, Guilherme
Mocelin⁸, Marcia Antunes da Rocha⁹

^{1,2,4,5,7,9}Postgraduate Program in Regional Development. Federal Technological University of Paraná. Pato Branco, Paraná, Brazil.

³Nursing Department. State University of Ponta Grossa. Ponta Grossa, Paraná, Brazil.

⁶World Health Organization. Postgraduate Program in Regional Development. Federal Technological University of Paraná. Pato Branco, Paraná, Brazil.

⁸Postgraduate Program in Health Promotion. Santa Cruz university. Santa Cruz do Sul, Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil.

Received: 24 Oct 2022,

Received in revised form: 10 Nov 2022,

Accepted: 15 Nov 2022,

Available online: 21 Nov 2022

©2022 The Author(s). Published by AI
Publication. This is an open access article
under the CC BY license
(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

Keywords— Modernity. Aging. Elderly.

Abstract— In addition to providing longevity, Modernity brought the imposition of productivity and socialization standards. The present study aimed at thinking about the reflexes of Modernity/Coloniality to human aging. It was carried out an exploratory research with a literature review. Conceptual aspects and issues arising from the Modernity/Coloniality crisis were addressed, which indicates a homogenizing epistemology; dilemma about the (non) place of the elderly; and concepts of Transmodernity and decolonial thinking. It was evident that the elderly person is neglected, being seen as a stigmatized subject and prone to suffer from loneliness and rejection, considered useless to productivist mechanisms, which leads to occupy a non-place in society. It is concluded that it is necessary to think and act in the light of Transmodernity and Decoliality, so that a pluriverse look at aging can be glimpsed in order to break with the reflections of Modernity/Coloniality and it emerges the attention to the formulation, implementation and evaluation of concrete actions that enable the exercise of citizenship for the elderly.

I. INTRODUCTION

Population aging is in different stages around the world, a phenomenon that results from a decline in fertility and not a decline in mortality, as a population becomes older as the proportion of elderly individuals increases and the proportion of elderly individuals decreases. younger individuals, that is, for a given population to age, there must also be a lower fertility rate (WHO, 2015).

The demographic transition originated in Europe and its first phenomenon was the decrease in fertility, observed in the Industrial Revolution, the modern period. The increase in life expectancy occurred insidiously and slowly and was made possible by better social and sanitation

conditions, in addition to the use of antibiotics and vaccines (WHO, 2015). In Latin America, especially in developing countries, a phenomenon similar to what happened in Europe can be observed today, but with different implications.

Modernity, in addition to providing longevity, has brought about the imposition of standards of productivity and socialization that point to the exclusion of the elderly, attributing a negative value to them, emphasizing the incapacity, fragility or inadequacy of the elderly in relation to society. These stereotypes represent a culture of valuing the new and, as a consequence, point out that the elderly, despite all the accumulated experience and the contributions made to the constitution of today's society, is

often nothing more than a problem. This fact justifies studies on this path.

It is necessary to break with this stereotype and propose, from the diversity of the world, an epistemological pluralism that recognizes the existence of multiple visions that contribute to the widening of the horizons of the world, of experiences and alternative social and political practices (SANTOS, 2006).

In the social context, the human being is closely linked to the process of work, production, achievements and gains, in view of this, aging can allude to a threatening phase, as the elderly person loses place, voice and turn to the youngest and which consequently produces more. Thus, the present study aims to think about the reflexes of Modernity/Coloniality to human aging.

II. METHODS

In light of the objective outlined and based on the theoretical elements that permeate Modernity/Coloniality, combined with the search for key concepts and authors who discuss the theme, this study was built through a bibliographic survey (YIN, 2016) presenting the reflexes of Modernity / Coloniality with regard to human aging and the place of the elderly in this context.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

With the expansion of Europe, at the end of the 15th century, under the justification of colonial conquests in the face of the consolidation of a nascent bourgeoisie, there was a great and ambitious socioeconomic, political and cultural project, called Modernity/Coloniality, which had René Descartes and Francis Bacon as precursors. This expansion took place through two aspects that generated a new historical awareness: the maritime expansion and the astronomical revolution, factors that questioned the Christian cosmovision about the origin of life, establishing the milestones for a supposed rational interpretation that characterized Modernity / Coloniality (QUIJANO, 2005).

According to Mignolo (2017, p. 30), “the structuring of thought at that time meant, in fact, the appreciation of the knowledge resulting from a Eurocentric culture, to the detriment of other sources considered inferior”. In this way, Modernity/Coloniality characterized the emergence of the autonomous subject, who actively positions himself before the world and transforms nature and society at the service of his interests, driven by a mental construction that guides this transformation (ESCOBAR, 2003). Also characteristic of Modernity/Coloniality are the control and exploitation of work, which included slavery and the shipment of products to the metropolis. Therefore, “far from being a separate phenomenon, Coloniality became

the most hidden face of a process that was carried out by the economic powers of the time” (MIGNOLO, 2016, p. 12).

For Dussel (2005), Quijano (2005) and Mignolo (2017), Modernity and Coloniality are faces of one and the same reality, indicating that the main reason for European expansion was not only to find a shorter route to the East, but to expand an economic system that determined behavior through the accumulation of capital. Coloniality is a founding part of a modern/capitalist/colonial world-system that is built through exploitation, oppression and violence, destroying local memories and challenging new social forms, from the top down. In this sense, colonialism is an essential part of the construction of modernity and the expansion of capitalism (DUSSEL, 2005).

The most persistent negative legacy of colonization is racial discrimination and ethnic subordination; “history, far from being universal, is the history of a Eurocentric culture” (QUIJANO, 2005, p. 130). In this context, it is this unethical genealogy, which Quijano (2005) called colonial modernity and coloniality of power, which, in the eyes of the colonizer, was seen as an opportunity to take civilization, religion and culture to other parts of the world. A division that served to legitimize a societal model: “the West versus the rest” (p. 135). A worldview that imposed European hegemony over other communities seen as subaltern and poor.

For Latour, “Modernity is always in relation to, displacing an archaic and stable past to a space of alterity” (1994, p. 17). In addition to this distinction between two times, an archaic and a modern past, the existence of a controversy about the valorization of each of these times is linked to Modernity. Thus, “the modern is based on a double temporal asymmetry that is fundamental to it” (LATOURE, 1994, p. 20). The first asymmetry “separates the beings of antiquity and the modern beings into two regions of different existence” (p. 20); the second evaluates the two temporalities of the first asymmetry, that is, it must be considered that there is an intrinsic value in them, that there is a better and a worse one.

According to Mignolo (2017, p. 12), “the rhetoric of Modernity hides a colonial logic, which was naturalized by European hegemonic models that imposed cultural values”, consolidating a myopic view of superiority to the detriment of other cultures. Thus, the universal values of Modernity are confronted with a multiplication of national, cultural, racial and religious particularisms, which makes it go into crisis, but it is “precisely in the crisis of the modern project and its main elements that new conceptions about the socioeconomic structure and its various aspects” (QUIJANO, 2005, p. 119).

It is a fact that, although Modernity represents an advance in individual rights and duties, the spaces of freedom and liberation are limited “by the imperatives of homogenizing universality, by inconstant rationality and by technologically imposed integration and functionality” (SANTOS, 1997. p. 69).

It is undeniable that Modernity brought great conquests; it is also a fact that the great technical-scientific advance allowed a better well-being to society. However, these advances have brought about a homogenizing structuring of life (SANTOS, 2006), which, for Mignolo (2017, p. 13), “promotes the destruction of cultures”. Thus, modern society boycotts people's creativity impulses so that they fit into standards, facilitating the flow of large-scale industrial production and promoting consumerism, which is the basis of Capitalism, in which having overlaps with being (MIGNOLO, 2016).

The context of the modern world, where what matters most is the search for efficiency and profit, causes the elderly to be treated with contempt, whereas in Modernity, aging is only associated with losses and diseases, which leads to the submission of the elderly person to this world system (BEAUVOIR, 2018). The discussion around the issue of the elderly in Modernity emphasizes the gains in terms of life expectancy that this provided, configuring a demographic growth that inverts the pyramidal form with which the population composition of several countries was described (CORREA, 2009).

The increasing trends in the elderly population in the world indicate that in the interstice 2015 to 2030, the number of people over 60 years of age or older will grow by 56%, jumping from 901 million to 1.4 billion. For 2050, the projection is that the number reached in 2030 will almost double, reaching 2.1 billion the number of elderly people in the world (WHO, 2015). The accelerated demographic transition that has been taking place in recent decades in the world and even more intensified in developing countries, such as Brazil, causes several concerns and difficulties regarding the place of the elderly in the social sphere (WHO, 2015).

In addition, some traits of the relationship between the elderly and Modernity/Coloniality are raised, which would configure a situation of loss or, at least, ambiguous, while individualistic values, which resize modern life, triggered changes in the family pattern, generating perverse effects. on the network of relationships in which the elderly were inserted, affecting the pattern of sociability, which took place vertically, horizontalizing it, and, consequently, homogenizing the web of relationships, also configuring the loss of their traditional roles, resulting in “loneliness

and the loss of quality of life as a result of impoverishment” (ZIMERMAN, 2000, p. 34).

Modernity built the stigma that being old is based on the idea that “it produces suffering of different kinds, loss of autonomy, frailties, physical weaknesses, isolation, constituting the end of the possibilities of maintaining a dignified life” (FRAIMAN, 2004). , p. 05). Thus, there is a strong rejection of old age, often causing the elderly to disdain their condition (BEAUVOIR, 2018).

“The colonial power matrix generates relations of domination and subordination of individuals” which denotes the elderly as a non-subject; the one who is situated as inferior/subaltern, denied recognition as a subject of rights (MIGNOLO, 2016, p. 89). Morin's perception (1999, p. 44) about aging is that “human beings, rejecting death as they do, refusing it with all their strength, tend to reject old age as well”, perhaps because of this phase of life. being the one that comes closest to death and thus “makes old age a burden for your life” (p. 45).

In this sense, being the human being marked by the awareness of the tragedy of death, he tries to invent the myths to deny it or to find it, thinking about the means to accept it and, then, he realizes that the problem of conscience and of the human being is crossed by time and made tragic by death; action that translates into agony for the human being, especially during old age (MORIN, 1999).

Morin (1997) also points out that it is difficult to perceive the origin, “the engine of the aging process” (p. 319), because for him the pathological character of old age is manifested on three levels: in the social; in the perception that healthy old age is pathological as old age in itself; death itself, which is pathological and is approximated by old age, which together with death is inscribed in the human genetic inheritance and that both: “normal and natural things, because both are universal and do not suffer any exception among 'mortals” (MORIN, 1997, p. 320).

Regarding the loss of authority that the elderly person faces as the development of civilizations takes place, Morin (1997, p. 147) points out that, “youth impulses accelerate history, making it a necessity, not the accumulated experience anymore. , but adherence to the movement”, which makes the “experience of the elderly unused, lost, dead, and with a tone of pessimism” (p. 149).

In view of the above, it is observed that old age carries a social mark linked to the rejection of the figure of the old, in general, fueled by the idea of unproductivity and decline (ZIMERMAN, 2000). Fraiman (1997, p. 25) points out that “getting old in modern society means growing old in a scenario of instability, generated by intense economic,

social, political, ideological and scientific transformations". These changes, in turn, occur very quickly, contributing to the emergence of insecurity and poor accommodation of the elderly.

Thus, the negative values that contaminate aging gain strength and old age becomes devalued, and in more extreme situations, "compared to a disease and must be fought and avoided at any cost" (BEAUVOIR, 2018, p. 56). For Correa, in this context, aging takes on the character of carelessness and negligence, while youth occupies a position of value to be maintained and sought after by all (2009).

"In Modernity, the elderly are placed in a level of social denial, where they start to live the wills and desires imposed by those around them" (FRAIMAN, 2004, p. 34). In this way, the elderly person tends to live from limitations imposed by discourses that place old age in an excluding level and in a sphere of rejection, estrangement and contempt.

Thus, "in Modernity, old age is felt and seen as the "non-place, that place I don't think about, don't know and don't want to be" (ZIMERMAN, 2000, p. 28); it is the different, the strange, the uncomfortable, because:

In modern societies, old age is synonymous with refusal and banishment. Refusal dressed in different clothes: some, quite evident, go through segregation and social isolation, rupture of affective, family and friendship ties, denial of the right to think, propose, decide, do, by expropriating one's own body; others, more subtle, are found in the protective tone, often surrounded by cynicism, with which we deal with our "old people" (ALMEIDA, 2003, p. 41).

Given the above, there is an inversion of values, which is the result, among other factors, of the Industrial Revolution, technological advances and the excessive appreciation of developmental theses, which have as their objective the production force, obviously much closer to the young people of the world. than that of the elderly. Furthermore, throughout Modernity, the production of scientific knowledge was configured by a single epistemological model, as if the world were monocultural, which decontextualized knowledge and prevented the emergence of other forms of knowledge that cannot be reduced to this paradigm (SANTOS, 2006).

There is, then, a kind of

epistemicide, that is, the destruction of some local forms of knowledge, the inferiorization of others, wasting, in the name of

colonialism, the richness of perspectives present in cultural diversity and in the multifaceted visions of the world they lead (SANTOS, 2006, p. 33).

In this sense, it is pointed out that the social place of the elderly person would be almost a non-place, because although from the investments of the last decades they are recognized as subjects, included in the current cultural panorama (even because it would be impossible not to include the age group that most grows in the world), the elderly are pushed to the edges of the social structure, admittedly "obliged to subjectivity anchored in passivity, to the poverty of symbolic exchanges and to the renunciation of the role of social agents" SOUSA (2006, p. 15). That is, they are pushed towards the loss of all power, even over themselves.

Modern and capitalist society has structured a productive system consistent with its interests, relegating the elderly to oblivion. The child must be educated so that, as an adult, he will become a worker suited to the needs of society (ALMEIDA, 2003). Young people and adults must be trained and professionalized to assume a specific role within the productive sphere, ensuring the efficiency of the economic system in constant development and change, but what about the elderly? The truth is that there is no place for the elderly person within modern and capitalist society! This uncomfortable reality of social exclusion that accompanies the elderly has already been observed and analyzed by authors such as Simone de Beauvoir (2018) and Ana Perwin Fraiman (2004).

From the perspective of capital, the elderly person represents the worker who has already become unproductive and obsolete and who must give way to new generations of workers, endowed with updated knowledge and a greater willingness to work.

Modernity/Coloniality entered a crisis and opened the world to uncertainty and to the whole system in a temporal arc of transition, Wallerstein summarizes the set of challenges arising from this, by pointing out that:

The question we face today is, how can we move from European universalism – the last perverse justification of the existing world order – towards something much more difficult to achieve: a universal universalism, which rejects essentialist characterizations of social reality, leaves behind so many particular universals, reunites the supposedly scientific and humanistic in a single epistemology and allows us to look with highly clinical and completely skeptical eyes at any justification of "interference" in the

hands of the powerful against the weak (WALLERSTEIN, 2007, p. 101).

Alluding to the elderly, there is their insertion in a level of social denial, starting to live the wills and desires imposed by modern and capitalist society. This fact occurs, above all, because old age is understood from the idea of finitude. Thus, understanding that Modernity has a hidden and violent face, that is, Coloniality (QUIJANO, 2010, p. 109), it is necessary to recover the “multiple forms of social experience and the people who were and are made invisible, silenced and disregarded, who are in the exteriority of Eurocentric Modernity”, but even if denied and covered up, in the case of this study, the elderly still exist (DUSSEL, 2010, p. 315).

To this recovery, if it can be called that, decolonial thinking can help, while

defends the urgency of rescuing the modern promises of a freer and more egalitarian society — inscribed in modern constitutions — since freedom and equality are social pretensions that have become legitimate in Modernity, but which coexist, in apparent contradiction, with inequality equally modern of Coloniality and Capitalism (MIGNOLO, 2017, p. 18).

Thus, decolonial thinking seeks absolute emancipation from all types of oppression and domination, by articulating culture, politics and economics in an interdisciplinary way in order to build a totally innovative field of thought that privileges local epistemic elements to the detriment of the legacies imposed by the colonial situation. (MIGNOLO, 2017).

In the light of a pluriversal vision, deriving from transmodernity, under a decolonial perspective, the elderly person, when organizing and seeking to transform the reality in which he finds himself, has possibilities to act and consolidates himself as a “social actor, who is predisposed to fight for basic rights”, which, as a reflection of Modernity/Coloniality, are sometimes not respected. (ALMEIDA, 2003).

In this way, by assuming this social role, the elderly person is inserted in the process of social transformation, as an agent, presenting “conditions to express their desires, as well as their doubts and criticisms in order to make society a great collective construction”. and democratic” (ALMEIDA, 2003, p. 50). From pluriversality, different visions start to coexist and accept each other reciprocally, abandoning the “typically modern perception that there is only one option available” (MIGNOLO, 2017, p. 14), since the pluriverse is the “right to exist for coexist with the existing options” (MIGNOLO, 2015, p. 82).

With pluriversality and the emergence of a global political society, based on the right to be different, specificities are no longer understood and experienced as hierarchies, enabling the construction of a future

[...] towards a non-unjust world, where no human being has the right or the possibility to exploit or manipulate, nor the need to believe himself better or superior to another to justify his life, [...] working for the decolonization of knowledge and subjectivity, where political, constitutional and economic orders will emerge that no longer respond to the desires for success (whether capitalist or revolutionary, but in the same order of success), but to the desires and efforts to build a multiverse, [...] a world where many worlds fit together (MIGNOLO, 2008, p. 331).

In order to move in this direction, one must seek to carry out a “project distinct from modernity and post-modernity, an alternative path, called transmodernity” (DUSSEL, 2005, p. 55), which does not simply reject Modernity, as its starting point is the “denied alterity and, despite taking on the challenges of modernity, responds to them from another place, from its own reality, from its multiple social and cultural experiences” (DUSSEL, 2005, p. 58).

IV. CONCLUSION

The present study, which aimed at thinking about the reflexes of Modernity / Coloniality to human aging, shows that the elderly person is neglected since they are seen as a stigmatized subject and prone to suffer from loneliness and rejection, being considered useless. to productivist mechanisms, which leads him to occupy a non-place in society, since he is removed from the position of subject to be subjected to subjection to the desires of the younger population, and because aging is understood in the light of the idea of proximity to the end of life.

The fact is that the elderly population is growing rapidly, which implies the demand for more resources for this segment, in addition to a social and epistemological organization that allows it to include the elderly in a way that they are social agents aware of their rights and duties.

In this direction and in the light of what was evidenced in this study, it is necessary to think and act in the light of Transmodernity and Decoliality, so that a pluriverse look at aging can be glimpsed in order to break with the reflexes of Modernity/Coloniality. In addition, the reflection emerges that it is urgent and necessary to pay attention to

the formulation, implementation and evaluation of concrete actions that enable the exercise of citizenship to the elderly, not only by governmental spheres, but by Society as a whole in order to perceive and value the contributions that this population has made and can still make to regional and social development.

It is also important to think about the importance of educating the younger generations in terms of valuing the elderly and encouraging intergenerational actions as a strategy for better coexistence in today's society, valuing the elderly as the person who has done a lot for society and who in it it must take its place in order to contribute with its wisdom and life experience, envisioning what it can still do.

REFERENCES

- [1] ALMEIDA, V. L. V. de. Modernidade e velhice. In: **Revista Serviço Social & Sociedade**. São Paulo: Cortez. Ano XXIV, n.75, p. 35-54. Edição Especial 2003.
- [2] BEAUVOIR, S. **A velhice**. 2ª ed. Rio de Janeiro: Nova Fronteira, 2018.
- [3] CORREA, M. R. **Cartografias do envelhecimento na contemporaneidade: velhice e terceira idade**. São Paulo: Cultura Acadêmica, 2009.
- [4] DUSSEL, E. Europa, modernidade e eurocentrismo. In: Edgardo Lander (org.). **A colonialidade do saber: eurocentrismo e ciências sociais. Perspectivas latino-americanas**. Colección Sur Sur, CLACSO, Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires, Argentina, p. 55-70, 2005.
- [5] DUSSEL, E. Meditações anti-cartesianas sobre a origem do anti-discurso filosófico da modernidade. In: SANTOS, Boaventura; MENESES, Maria Paula (orgs.). **Epistemologias do Sul**. Coimbra: Editora Almeida. p. 283-336, 2010.
- [6] ESCOBAR, A. "Mundos y conocimientos de otro modo: el programa de investigación modernidad/colonialidad latinoamericano". Tabula Rasa, n.1, p. 58-86, 2003.
- [7] FRAIMAN, A. P. **Coisas da idade**. Coleção Plenitude – Volume II. Alexa Cultural, São Paulo, 2004.
- [8] LATOUR, Bruno. **Jamais fomos modernos: ensaios de antropologia simétrica**. São Paulo: Ed. 34, 1994.
- [9] MIGNOLO, W. The Geopolitics of Knowledge and the Colonial Difference. **South Atlantic Quarterly**, v. 101, n. 1, p. 57-96, 2002.
- [10] MIGNOLO, W. **La idea de America Latina: la herida colonial y la opción decolonial**. Barcelona: Gedisa, 2007.
- [11] MIGNOLO, Walter. **La opción de-colonial: desprendimiento y apertura: un manifiesto y un caso**. In: Tabula rasa, Bogotá: Universidad Colegio Mayor de Cundinamarca, n. 8, p. 243- 281, 2008.
- [12] MIGNOLO, W. **Habitar la frontera: sentir y pensar la descolonialidad**. Barcelona: Bellaterra, 2015.
- [13] MIGNOLO, W. Colonialidade: o lado mais escuro da modernidade. **Revista Brasileira de Ciências Sociais**, v. 32, n. 94, jun. 2016.
- [14] MIGNOLO, W. Desafios decoloniais hoje. **Epistemologias do Sul**, Foz do Iguaçu – PR, p. 12-32, 2017.
- [15] MORIN, E. **O homem e a morte**. Rio de Janeiro: Imago, 1997.
- [16] MORIN, E. Por uma reforma do pensamento. In: PENA-VEGA, A; NASCIMENTO, E. P. O. **Pensar complexo: Edgar Morin e a crise da modernidade**. Rio de Janeiro: Gramond, 1999.
- [17] OMS. Organização Mundial da Saúde. **World Report on Ageing and Health**. Geneva, 2015. Tradução Suzana Gontijo. Brasília: Organização Pan-Americana da Saúde, 60p. 2015.
- [18] QUIJANO, A. Colonialidade do poder, eurocentrismo e América Latina. In: LANDER, E. (org.). **A colonialidade do saber: eurocentrismo e ciências sociais: perspectivas latino-americanas**. Buenos Aires: CLACSO, 2005, p. 117-142.
- [19] QUIJANO, Aníbal. Colonialidade do poder e classificação social. In: SANTOS, Boaventura de Sousa; MENESES, Maria Paula (orgs.). **Epistemologias do Sul**. São Paulo: Cortez, 2010. p. 73-118.
- [20] SANTOS, B. S. **Um Discurso sobre as Ciências**. 9.ed. Porto: Edições Afrontamento, 1997.
- [21] SANTOS, B. S. **A Gramática do Tempo: para uma nova cultura política**. São Paulo: Cortez, 2006.
- [22] ZIMMERMAN, G. I. **Velhice: aspectos biopsicossociais**. Porto Alegre: Artes Médicas Sul, 2000.
- [23] WALLERSTEIN, I. Universalismo europeu. **El discurso del poder**. México: Siglo XXI editores, 2007.
- [24] YIN, R. K. **Pesquisa qualitativa: do início ao fim**. Porto Alegre: Penso, 2016.