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# Undemocratic by color: The hidden racial logic and hierarchical structure of US military interventions to promote democracy in Latin America

*Não democrático segundo a cor: a lógica racial e a estrutura hierárquica ocultas nas intervenções dos Estados Unidos para promover a democracia na América Latina*

*No democrático según el color: la lógica racial y la estructura jerárquica ocultas de las intervenciones estadounidenses para promover la democracia en América Latina*

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Fábio Santino Bussmann\*

Lorena Granja Hernández\*\*

## Abstract

Decisive structural consequences of racism to US interventions to promote democracy in Latin America remain unexplored. The paper claims that racial dehumanization and its epistemic and political consequences make the US stand, in regard to Latin America, as a super-sovereign that can, at any time, point to a Latin American government as undemocratic/*unrepresentative of its people*/not legitimately sovereign and attempt to remove it

\* Doutorando em Relações Internacionais no Programa de Pós-Graduação em Relações Internacionais da Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro (PPGRI-UERJ). (santinobussmann@gmail.com) ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2999-2854>.

\*\* Doutora em Ciência Política pelo Instituto de Estudos Sociais e Políticos da Universidade do Estado de Rio de Janeiro. Bolsista de pós-doutorado da FAPERJ atuando no PPGRI-UERJ. (granjahernandezlorena@gmail.com) ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4314-0818>.

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from power, in a structural-hierarchical, rather than anarchical, logic. This line of thought is the result of the expansion of decolonial concepts, which the paper also puts in dialog with sources that support the claim beyond decoloniality.<sup>1</sup>

**Keywords:** Decolonial Thought; International Relations Theory; US Military Interventions; Democracy Promotion; Latin America.

## Resumo

As consequências estruturais do racismo, decisivas nas intervenções dos Estados Unidos para promover a democracia na América Latina, permanecem inexploradas. O artigo afirma que a desumanização racial e suas consequências epistêmicas e políticas colocam os Estados Unidos, em relação à América Latina, como um super-soberano que pode, a qualquer momento, apontar um governo latinoamericano como antidemocrático / não representativo de seu povo / não legitimamente soberano e tentar retirá-lo do poder, em uma lógica estrutural-hierárquica, ao invés de anárquica. Essa linha de pensamento resulta da expansão dos conceitos decoloniais, que o artigo também coloca em diálogo com fontes que sustentam o presente argumento para além da lógica decolonial.

**Palavras chaves:** Pensamento Decolonial; Teoria das Relações Internacionais; Intervenções Militares Estadunidenses; Promoção da Democracia; América Latina.

## Resumen

Las consecuencias estructurales del racismo decisivas en las intervenciones estadounidenses para promover la democracia en América Latina siguen sin explorarse. El artículo afirma que la deshumanización racial y sus consecuencias epistémicas y políticas hacen que Estados Unidos se erija, con respecto a América Latina, como un super-soberano que puede, en cualquier momento, señalar a un gobierno latinoamericano como antidemocrático/no representativo de su Pueblo/no legitimamente soberano y tratar de sacarlo del poder, en una lógica estructural-jerárquica, y no anárquica. Esta línea de pensamiento resulta de la expansión de los conceptos decoloniales, que el artículo también pone en diálogo con fuentes que apoyan tal afirmación más allá del argumento decolonial.

**Palabras clave:** Pensamiento Decolonial; Teoría de Relaciones Internacionales; Intervenciones Militares Estadunidenses; Promoción de la Democracia; América Latina.

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## Introduction

There is already critical work on interventions to promote democracy. Important authors show: a) that the US is inconsistent in the promotion of democracy (Busso 1991); b) that this tenet is an excuse to advance other US interests (Coatsworth 2006); c) that interventions to promote democracy are ineffective to bring liberal democracy<sup>2</sup> to the interfered countries (Meernik 1996); d) that the promotion of democracy is the reordering of societies according to western standards (Holmqvist 2014); e) and even how racial classifications are a contributing factor to interventions to promote democracy (Constance 2008). A call, nevertheless, to take racism as a constitutive feature of these interventions stands (Howell and Richter-Montpetit 2019). Sabaratnam (2017) partially takes up this challenge in the study of how structural (and structuring) racism and its global development into a hierarchical difference between western and non-western subjects cause state-building interventions to fail, analysis the author deems as possible only from a decolonial point of view.

Our unprecedented claim is that the US stands, in regard to Latin America (LA), as a super-sovereign, because it can, at any time, point to a Latin American government as undemocratic and, since sovereignty lies with the people (*demos*) in the model of the modern nation-state, unrightful representative of state sovereignty, and attempt to remove this government from power, in a structural-hierarchical, rather than anarchical, logic.<sup>3</sup>

This point is made theoretically by exploring and systematizing the decolonial perspectives that: racial hierarchies and the dehumanization of racialized populations it brings about makes liberal democracy working as western ones

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2 We understand liberal democracy, in a definition close to common sense, as “a democracy based on the recognition of individual rights and freedoms, in which decisions from direct or representative processes prevail in many policy areas.” (Collins 2022).

3 The decolonial claim made here is structural in a holistic sense, since, as in Quijano’s (2002, 2005) fashion, we analyze the grand historical structure of the Colonial Matrix of Power, its consequences for the western universalization of liberal democracy, and its racial dehumanization around the globe, how this last element, in the structural relations between social groups inside LA states, makes it systematically impossible that liberal democracy in this region works as in the West, and, how, on its turn, this domestically structured predicament, by providing continuous grounds for legitimization/justification/excuse of US military interventions to promote democracy, structures this interstate relation in a particular way. Decolonial thought is, in fact, about structures and structuring in multiple levels of analysis, that are inseparable from each other, starting from the grand structure of the Colonial Matrix of Power. This structural-holistic worldview is essential for the claim made in this paper.





impossible<sup>4</sup> in Latin American countries<sup>5</sup>; that the West controls knowledge about what liberal democracy is, and isn't; and by recalling the commonly accepted argument that this political regime model is directly connected to nation-state sovereignty, through the tenet of "popular sovereignty".

Although this theoretical exploration is the focus of our work, it is also supported by empirical observations. These are made accordingly to the certainty that decolonial work cannot deal with data from a methodological perspective that is part of western epistemic totalitarianism, which includes positivism and any measurement of success and failure of democracy. At the same time, decolonial thought is not a critic of rationality itself and does not preclude confirming claims with data.

The difference between primary and secondary sources, though, does not exist in decoloniality, since the presupposition that knowledge (secondary) is produced to represent a primary reality is in direct contradiction with that thought tradition, which assumes that knowledge makes realities, rather than representing them. So, what we call empirical observations is the establishment of a dialog between decolonial thought and other subjective renderings of reality that are usually called data. Indeed, fundamental decolonial thinkers, such as Aníbal Quijano, Walter D. Mignolo, and María Lugones have all grounded their thoughts on such sources.

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4 This is a particular condition of countries that have a population constituted of a majority of racialized people (Quijano 2005). The US, for example, has a big racialized population, that is, nevertheless, still a minority. Also, racism is not only about skin color, in decolonial thought, but also about languages, religion, and geopolitical classifications (Mignolo 2005), which helps to understand why all people living in Latin America, including the white-skinned populations of Chile, Uruguay, and Argentina, are affected by racism, being dehumanized as Latinos (Mignolo 2005). Our point is that Latin American elites, being racialized as Latinos in the West but being racists themselves, internally see their population as less human than them and, therefore, do not allow the establishment of a western like liberal democracy, which would give some political power to their countrymen. We restricted our claims to Latin America and not to all of the non-western world, since the theoretical pillar of our analysis is taken from Quijano (2005) and the author's point about the matter of political democracy in non-western regions is almost exclusively built on Latin-American cases. Expanding his theoretical claims horizontally to other cases would divert from our goal here, that is just to explore the implications of his worldview, grounded as it is in Latin America, to IR concepts as they apply to the region. Also, from Mignolo's and Walsh's (2018) point of view, parts of the Rest, are different in how they experienced coloniality. Countries that were never colonized, such as Iran or China are subject to the expression of coloniality called imperial difference, differently from Latin America which was completely colonized. We just bring this difference to show why we restricted our research to Latin America, but not to discuss the conceptual implications of these differences.

5 The decolonial point that racism makes liberal democracies working as western ones impossible in LA is unprecedented when compared to the works of O'Donnell (1972, 2009), Linz and Valenzuela (1994), Diamond, Linz and Lipset (1989), Llanos and Marsteintredet (2010), Pérez-Liñán (2007) and Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán (2013), about the patterns of instability of LA democracies, to the decolonial critique on the epistemic level to this kind of work (da Silva 2019), and even to Cunningham's (2000) pointing to the fact that racism (only) hurts democracy.





Also, knowing that there is great importance in decolonial work to the researchers own experience of coloniality, we have developed a theoretical claim that makes sense with our sensing of what happens to our region concerning the US and the West. The dialog with other subjective sources, that appear as data, is intended to show if our ideas are wider than our limited experiences and reach other similar sensings of the dynamic of US military interventions to promote democracy in LA. The table we prepared (at the end of the paper) is simply a summarization and systematization of part of the knowledge that we engage with here.

Having our claim and methods in mind, right after this introduction, we present the main concept of decolonial thinking, coloniality, and how it regionalized the world into the West and the Rest; we move on to show how the westernization of the Rest, a global order of coloniality, is the dynamic in which democracy is demanded and imposed in the last region as an epistemically totalitarian model; after that, it is pointed out that the racial dehumanization prompted by coloniality prevents, from the onset, stable liberal democracies working as western ones<sup>6</sup> in LA countries; in the sequence, we show how the interplay of the universalization of democracy, the connection of this regime to nation-state sovereignty, and the structurally compromised manifestation of liberal democracy in LA accounts for the logic of US military interventions to promote democracy that operates in a dynamic of international hierarchy; at the end, we present the table entitled “US Interventions and Democracy Promotion: socio-economic and political factors in Latin America (1965-2005)” and our final words.

## Coloniality, the West and the Rest

The concept of coloniality, created by Anibal Quijano and developed into the idea of the Colonial Matrix of Power (CMP) (Mignolo and Walsh 2018), is, like any

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<sup>6</sup> We do not evaluate but assume that democracies in LA do not work as western ones, based on the facts: that US governments already make this assumption as an argument to legitimate/justify/excuse their interventions to “reestablish”, “consolidate” or even “depose” governments; that McCoy (2006) points to the persistent democratic deficit in LA, a region whose governments have been regarded as “illiberal”, “hybrid”, or of “electoral authoritarianism”; that Quijano (2005) claims, based on historical and conceptual elements, that there are structural impediments to democracy in LA; that it is common knowledge that the political regimes in the region have often deviated from western-like liberal democracies to oligarchic, populist and authoritarian governments; and that the indicators we work with here point to a low-quality informal contact of the LA population with democratic institutions and practices.





other power structure, constituted by the permanent co-presence of domination, exploitation, and conflict (Quijano 2002). The control over domination and exploitation comes from knowledge production, since knowledge is a machine of world-making and managing rather than the representation of an objectively existing reality (Mignolo and Walsh 2018). Enunciation (actors, languages, and institutions) is where knowledge is produced and where, much more than in the content of this knowledge (the enunciated), power lies (2018). This is because, changes in the enunciation alter what is being enunciated but simply changing the contents of knowledge “doesn’t call the enunciation (the terms [of knowledge production]) into question.” (2018: 144).

In our current world, the place of making and managing realities on a global scale is reserved only to certain actors, languages, and institutions. The global enunciation of knowledge in the CMP is restricted to speakers of the western imperial languages, nowadays most of all English, but also Portuguese, Spanish, German, Italian, and French, and to leaders of certain knowledge-generating institutions, such as universities, the media and other corporations, and the state.

These *loci* where enunciation takes place in the CMP constitute its interiority (Mignolo 2007), which is rooted mainly in the West (Western Europe, USA, Canada, New Zealand, and Australia, Mignolo and Walsh 2018), but also present outside this region. On the other hand, the *loci* where enunciation of knowledge is deauthorized and destitute, from non-western people and civilizations and their descendants, is the exteriority of the CMP (Mignolo 2007). It is located most of all in the Rest (all other regions of the world, Mignolo and Walsh 2018), but also present in western countries, where these deauthorized and destitute people also reside, be it as immigrants, autonomous indigenous societies, or the racialized and LGBTIQA + population in general.<sup>7</sup>

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7 The expressions “Rest” and “West” capitalized as geographical regions are taken out of Kishore Mahbubani (1992). In the decolonial though tradition the terms “west” and “rest” appear only in lower case (Mignolo and Walsh 2018). The inclusion of Canada, New Zealand, and Australia into the concept of the West is based upon Quijano’s statement that these are countries of European identity (2005). The inclusion of the US, Britain, and the European Union into the concept of the West is already present in Mignolo and Walsh (2018). To all other matters, the West and the Rest equal the conceptual contents of “western civilization” and the “rest of the world (or of the planet)”, found in Mignolo’s work overall. Also, the links established in this paragraph between interiority and exteriority, and the West and the Rest are our systematization following our understanding of Mignolo’s work (more specifically, Mignolo 2007, Mignolo and Walsh 2018 and Mignolo 2011).





This process of deauthorization and destitution that happens towards the exteriority of the CMP simultaneously constitutes its interiority. This double-faced process goes on since the Renaissance and the encounter with the New World. Then, Europeans began to dismantle, or disregarded as superstitious, irrational, and unscientific, the multiple centers of knowledge production and enunciation that constituted the cosmologies of civilizations in the Americas, Africa, and Asia, and established a universal truth, that could only come out of certain European or Europeanized institutions of knowledge and imperial languages. In sum, global epistemic totalitarianism was forged (Mignolo and Walsh 2018; Santos 2019). Here we will look at the dynamic of destitution and constitution regarding the concept of the hu(man), since it is fundamental to understand the point we will make about democracy and US military interventions to promote it in LA.

The modern and western enunciators (that are also Christian, white, male, and heterosexual) constructed the idea of the hu(man) according to their reflection in the mirror and universalized it as the only true concept about the *homo sapience*, disregarding every other comparable concept enunciated by other civilizations (Mignolo and Walsh 2018) and placing everyone that did not correspond to this image (non-white and non-Cristian people in the Rest) as lesser or non-humans. This is on the grounds mainly of racism (which encompassed religion since its beginnings with the purity of blood doctrine of the Spanish Inquisition).

Thereby, in the West, where most of the population is Christian and white, and, therefore, racially hu(man), racism affects only minorities and immigrants. In the Rest, on the other hand, racial dehumanization targets most of the population, having, therefore, widespread, and peculiar effects on the politics of the countries located in this region and, more specifically, on the workings of liberal democracies therein.

## **Westernization and liberal democracy**

The rhetoric of modernity presents the crude reality of coloniality, its destitution and domination/exploitation, as accidental and transitory (“downplayed” in Mignolo’s and Walsh’s words 2018: 178) to the “real” achievements/promises of modernity, that have been salvation, civilization(al) (mission), development,





and democracy. The global order by which such western promises are carried to the rest of the world is called westernization<sup>8</sup>. Westernization is, nevertheless, not only driven by the rhetoric of modernity and its bright promises, but also by coloniality, which accounts for the fact that in the widely racially dehumanized Rest, these promises are being made for more than 500 years, being rarely accomplished, and, even when, only in low degrees.

This doubled faced global pattern, by which the West, with its ideas, institutions, and people, has intervened and interfered in the Rest (Mignolo and Walsh 2018), is, differently from the image of the expansion of the anarchical society (Bull and Watson 1984; Watson 2009), not a process of integrating others, as equal members, into the values, rules, and institutions of a western society of states (that is another instance of the rhetoric of modernity). Westernization is rather the coloniality-driven marginalizing and dominating expansion of the West into other regions, under the cover of the promises of modernity, such as liberal democracy.

This government model originated in Europe and the West and became universalized (not being naturally universal) in the Rest of the world from the end of World War II until nowadays (Mignolo and Walsh 2018; Mignolo 2020a). A decolonial analysis is not intended at discussing if democracy is or not the best way of government. The decolonial critique is rather aimed at the totalitarian universalization, through westernization, of this regime type, as an undiscussable model, towards civilizations and peoples that have had their enunciation about government (Mignolo 2020a).

This epistemic imposition of liberal democracy done by the West towards formally independent countries in the Rest was clearly stated by the UN General-Secretary Kofi Anan when he declared that “Democracy does not belong to any country or region but is a universal right” at the World Summit “The Larger Freedom” in 2005 (quoted in Burnell 2007:2). But liberal democracy is advanced in the Rest also by more concrete means. This is visible in the foreign policy goal of many consolidated democracies, which are located mainly in the West, to promote democracy elsewhere (Burnell 2007); in the democratic condition to become a member of many Western-led international organizations (Wobig

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<sup>8</sup> In the twenty-first century, westernization turned into rewesternization. Even though there is an important difference between the two concepts, what is important to this work is that, nowadays, both project into the Rest the western model of liberal democracy (and economic development). (See more about rewesternization in Mignolo 2011:27-39, and Mignolo and Walsh 2018).







2015; Ribeiro-Hoffmann 2016), as, for instance, in the very important case of the Organization of American States (OAS)<sup>9</sup>; in the intentional diffusion of the “democratic clause”, by the cooperation programs of the EU onto Latin American regional organizations (Dabène 2009); and in the increasing allocation of financial resources to promote democracy by the US, the EU, and the UN. Finally, western military intervention in the Rest in the name of democracy, which is a kind of regime change that we call here interventions to promote democracy, is itself a sign and instrument of the totalitarian advancement of liberal democracy from the West onto the Rest.<sup>10</sup>

The alleged reasons by US governments for military interventions have had, through time, different meanings (such as the war on communism or drugs) but have in common the criticism of the incapacity of the intervened countries’ to reach democracy. As Meernik (1996) states, the “democratic” justification has been the most frequently alleged reason for US military interventions, except for “national security”. For instance, “in the earlier history, the Mexican-American war was justified partly based on the right of Texans to self-determination and democracy; later, the rights of Cubans in the Spanish-American war were similarly defended; Woodrow Wilson fought World War I to make the world safe for democracy, and sent troops to Mexico, ‘to teach Mexicans the meaning of democracy’. In 1983, Ronald Reagan defended the US intervention in Lebanon by arguing that ‘if America were to walk away from Lebanon, what chance would there be for a negotiated settlement producing a unified, democratic Lebanon’ (...) Reagan also claimed that the US invasion of Grenada was a ‘military operation to restore order and democracy’. After the invasion of Panama, George Bush stated that ‘...the goals of the US have been to defend democracy in Panama’” (Meernik 1996: 391). This dynamic also continued in the Clinton administration with its attempts to restore democracy in Haiti (Meernik 1996).

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9 The OAS was also used as an instrument for coercive democratic promotion by the US in LA. More recently this organization has also opened the possibility to non-coercive democratic interference in LA, through its resolution 1080, which resonates with the Inter-American Democratic Chart signed in 2001, both grounded in the Inter-American System of Human Rights Defense (Ramírez 2019).

10 In fact, Burnell’s assumptions about international democracy promotion also include coercive instances, such as the use of force, that, in the author’s words, “might be called military interventions to promote democracy” that would exist because of (basically) two reasons: as a “moral obligation to help, spread, secure and defend this particular political order”, held “as [an] universal value” and as an instrument to achieve “good things” (Burnell 2007:10).





## Undemocratic by color

Effective liberal democracies are, for Quijano, not only about political rights and institutions but, also, necessarily, about a limited distribution of the control of productive resources, of land for instance (Quijano 2005), without which political democratization would not happen or only be formal and unstable (Quijano 2014). The distribution of political rights and productive resources would, together, be the expression of some social equality (Quijano 2002).

Social equality is limited, in modern and western societies themselves, by the effects of capital and individualism. Nevertheless, social equality has its place in this kind of society, because it is an interest of dominant groups to distribute some productive resources as means to lessen social conflict and strengthen internal markets (Quijano 2014).

The prerequisite, however, for these political and economic elites to pursue these interests and bring about some social equality would be to see the populations of their countries as equally human (even if not equal in social position). This would only be possible precisely in western countries, where the racial homogeneity of white majority populations has kept away the mental effects of racism (and dehumanization) in the relation between the elites and the largest portion of the population (Quijano 2005; 2014).

In LA countries, making concessions to the racialized and dehumanized population was unthinkable for the elites and, therefore, not even some social equality did become a reality (Quijano 2005). High socioeconomic inequality, related to the lack of distribution of productive resources, is, indeed, not only well-known but also a measured reality in the region since the 80' (see table 1).

Political and/or socio-economic impediments to democratization were the situation of the oligarchic republics of LA in the nineteenth century (Quijano 2002; 2005); of the populist regimes established in the region in the twentieth century, that advanced the distribution of income, but not of productive resources (Quijano 2013); and of military dictatorships also in the twentieth century, especially in South America. Oligarchy, populism, and authoritarianism are all regimes that fall short of the western model of democracy. Their occurrence in LA meant, thereby, that from the modern and western perspective about democracy, the region has been in an undemocratic, or, at least, lesser democratic predicament.





Beyond the fact that the history of LA countries shows a pattern of restrictions, instability, and dismissal of formal liberal-democratic institutions, through periods of oligarchic republics, populism, dictatorships and, more recently, disguised *Coups d'états*, also places and times in LA that saw the establishment of formal liberal-democracies have had a low-quality informal contact of the population with democratic institutions and practices.

In that sense, around the time the US alleged democratic promotion to interfere (indirectly or non-militarily) or intervene (directly and militarily) in LA countries<sup>11</sup>, being these at this moment formal liberal democracies or not, the levels of support for democracy and political activism were low in the region, the perception that elections were fraudulent was frequent, the extent of participation in civil society and social group equality (including race and religion concerning the distribution of political power and enjoyment of civil rights) were many times low and, at best, mid-range (see table 1).<sup>12</sup>

The fact that these low indicators of informal quality of the democratic system are accompanied by high levels of economic inequality, in LA, shows that there is a correspondence between the two instances in a region where all the countries have most of their populations racialized. This indicates that there is concrete substance and plausibility to the decolonial argument that dehumanization prompted by racialization results in especially high levels of social inequality and that this last reality is an obstacle to the establishment of liberal democracy *working as western ones*<sup>13</sup> in LA. This is beyond the fact that dehumanization also impinges very negatively on the formal elements of democracy themselves. This through the historical disrespect of Latin-American elites, whenever in their westernized interests and against the interest of the racialized majorities, of the continuity of even formal liberal-democratic institutions, manifest in the many moments and kinds of *Coups d'états*.

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11 We have assembled such cases accordingly with data, available from 1960 onwards, about social and political indicators.

12 Not all data described here is available for all the countries. We chose to include de cases where there was, at least, data about social inequality and two indicators about democracy, as this is enough to give support to the points we make.

13 Here we are working with the western-centric idea of democracy and its western-centric indicators. It is not our opinion that LA is less democratic, we are only showing that the region is seen as such from the point of view of modern and western knowledge and actors.





## The coloniality of US military interventions to promote democracy in LA and its structural-hierarchical logic

As soon as liberal democracy became a western reality, it also constituted a universalized model (Mignolo 2020a). Ex-colonial LA countries, which, as seen, structurally tend to deviate from this “truth” about politics imposed by western epistemic totalitarianism, would become targets of westernization, in the form of democratization. This undeclared continuity of the civilizational mission also expressed itself in terms of inter-state security and violence. LA states have suffered military interventions, mainly by the US or US-led coalitions, openly justified/motivated<sup>14</sup> by democracy promotion. Reinforcing Meernik’s (1996) claim that democracy promotion is a primary justification/motivation for US military interventions, the cases we analyze from 1965 to 2005 show that democracy promotion was alleged by US governments in all these interventions (see table 1). This allows us to say that, in the cases seen here, the US regarded each LA country they intervened in as undemocratic or, at least, lesser democratic.

The US legitimization of its interventions on the grounds of democracy promotion is continuously possible since, as seen, LA countries do, in fact, not have, because of the structural reality of coloniality and its racial dehumanization, liberal democracies working as western ones, as shown, even if in a limited time frame, by the mentioned low indicators about liberal democracy in LA<sup>15</sup>. This shows a systematic correlation, what we theoretically take as structural causality, of the lesser liberal democratic condition of LA countries and the US having a continuous legitimized reason for military interventions in the region on the ground of democracy promotion.

The structural character of this legitimacy reveals itself as hierarchical if one looks closer at the epistemic and political logic of military interventions done by the US in LA in the name of democracy. Democracy is directly linked

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14 Bringing democracy to other countries may be a real motivation or an excuse to hide inexcusable interests. But, as important as the denunciation of democracy promotion as western hypocrisy is, it does not matter, to the concerns of this paper, if democracy promotion is a real interest or an excuse, but only how the discourse of democracy promotion makes interventions possible in a region that structurally tends to be less- or undemocratic.

15 Although we are not measuring democracy here, these indicators are commonly accepted, in a western-centric fashion, as a measurement of the “quality of democracy” (More details of those criteria are in the explanatory note of table 1).





to nationality not only in Quijano's (2002, 2005) decolonial thought but, more generally, in European (Eurocentric) history, since the Enlightenment, when "people's sovereignty" became the tenet on which both nationalization and democratization began to be drawn in the West after the American and French Revolutions.

The words the US used to legitimize their first military interventions in LA, the Mexican-American War, illustrate the understanding that the legitimization of US military intervention to promote democracy abroad operates in the logic that if there is no democracy as practiced in the West there is no sovereignty of the people that can be upheld by the government, that, thereby, does not represent the nation and the sovereignty of the state anymore. As Meernik (1996) tells us, in the mentioned war, it was not only the right of Texans to democracy that was upheld but also the right to self-determination. Military interventions in the name of democracy have been fought by the US since the beginning as liberations wars, in which the US knows what democracy is (and isn't) on the behalf of other peoples, and, through the connection between democracy and self-determination, delegitimize local governments as representatives of state sovereignty.

Since the US, as part of the West, and not LA, can enunciate what democracy is (at the epistemic level), and since, in the region, democracy, as practiced in the West, is never attained, the US, functions, in practice, as the constant guardian, and, if necessary and in the American interest, military enforcer, of democracy and permanent bestower of the rights of self-determination and sovereignty onto the countries of the region.

The systematic character of the potentiality (and reality) of US military interventions to promote democracy in LA shows the US as the *de facto* regional government, or super-sovereign, in epistemic, political, and military terms. When intervention is not an exception to sovereignty but a structural possibility<sup>16</sup>, which expresses a judgment, on the behalf of other peoples, if they have democratic rule and, as a consequence, if their government represents self-determination and holds legitime sovereignty, it constitutes rather a policing activity than war, and policing is a typical activity of governments.

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<sup>16</sup> Even in cases where the US has not come to direct military intervention, the democratic motivation or excuse has been mobilized (see table 1), which further indicates that this discourse makes such kind of interventions possible even when they do not take place.





This policing activity is not simply a matter of superior military, and/or (soft)power of one state over others that are weaker but functionally alike and equally sovereign and, thereby, relate to the stronger state in an anarchical structure (Waltz 1979), but a functional differentiation between a country that is a regional police force, taking over a function that would belong to the sovereign jurisdiction of another country (hyperfunctionality), deciding if it is democratic and its people self-determined, and states that become policed by it, suffering a structural and systematic nullification of their the (*de facto*) sovereignty/autonomy<sup>17</sup> over decisions that would be of internal concern (hypofunctionality).

This hyperfunctional acting of the US as a *de facto* regional government, and the parallel structural lack of *de facto* sovereignty/autonomy of LA countries, or their hypofunctionality, shows that, in this US-LA epistemic, political, and military relational context, the international structure is not anarchical. This is because, the two elements of international politics that compose structural anarchy, the absence of an international government, and the functional likeness, sovereign equality (Waltz 1979) and autonomy among political units (Buzan, Jones and Little 1993)<sup>18</sup>, meaning that these units would be able to decide for themselves how they will cope with their “...internal and external problems” (Waltz 1979)<sup>19</sup>, are effectively missing in this regional and thematic context.

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17 In traditional IR theories autonomy is equivalent to legal sovereignty (Tickner 2003).

18 In this work, it is also explained that, although the concept of anarchical structure reinforces the autonomy of states through the environment of self-help it creates, the existence of international anarchy itself presupposes the autonomy of political units (Buzan, Jones and Little 1993).

19 Sovereignty can be limited voluntarily through commitments to other states (Waltz, 1979). This excludes from our claim cases where LA states consented to US intervention.



Table 1 — US Interventions and Democracy Promotion; socio-economic and political factors in LA (1965-2005)<sup>1, 2</sup>

Year	Country	US action	The US Declared intention	Inequality	Democracy Support	Political activism (participation)	Clean elections	Civil Society Participation	Social Group Equality
1965	Dominican Republic	U.S. Armed Forces occupy Sto. Domingo	Democracy promotion, war on communism	(1986) 47,8	(2004) 64,7%	(2004) 31% low	(1975) 0,37 no-confidence	(1975) 0,35 low	(1975) 0,22 low
1981-1990	Nicaragua	Opposition (Contras) was armed by the US	National security, war on communism, democracy promotion	(1993) 57,4	(1996) 59%	(1996) 39% low	(1990) 0,69 some confidence	(1990) 0,56 middle	(1990) 0,33 low
1981	Ecuador	Military intervention in the Ecuador/ Peru War	Democracy Promotion	(1994) 53,4	(1996) 52%	(1996) 43% low	(1981) 0,73 high confidence	(1981) 0,53 middle	(1981) 0,40 low
1983	Grenada	US armed forces occupation and ousting of the government	Democracy Promotion, economic interests						
1988-89	Chile	Aid to anti-Pinochet opposition	Democracy Promotion	(1987) 56,2	(1995) 52%	(1995) 45% low	(1989) 0,79 high confidence	(1989) 0,23 low	(1989) 0,32 low
1989	Panama	U.S. military occupation	Democracy Promotion, war on drugs	58,9	(1996) 77%	(1996) 47% low	(1989) 0,22 no-confidence	(1989) 0,35 low	(1989) 0,40 low
1990-94-98	Colombia	Intervention in armed conflict by the US military	National security, war on drugs, democracy promotion.	(1992) 51,5	(1996) 61%	(1996) 40% low	(1994) 0,68 some confidence	(1994) 0,50 middle	(1994) 0,44 low
1991-94	Haiti	After coup against the country's president, U.S. troops restored the constitutional government	Democracy Promotion						

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Year	Country	US action	The US Declared intention	Inequality	Democracy Support	Political activism (participation)	Clean elections	Civil Society Participation	Social Group Equality
1992	Venezuela	Support of the country's government against coup attempts	Democracy promotion	42,1	(1995) 64%	(1995) 50% some	(1992) 0,75 high confidence	(1992) 0,66 middle	(1992) 0,55 middle
1996	Paraguay	Democracy assistance	Democracy promotion	(1995) 58,2	59%	49% low	0,61 some confidence	0,45 low	0,32 low
1997	Guatemala	Pressures to replace the president	Democracy promotion	(2000) 54,2	53%	32% low	0,63 some confidence	0,54 middle	0,29 low
2000	Bolivia	Diplomatic pressure during the Cochabamba protests	Democracy promotion	61,6	62%	37% low	0,78 high confidence	0,64 middle	0,44 middle
2002	Venezuela	Tacit approval of a coup attempt against President Chávez	Democracy promotion	49	73%	66% some	0,70 some confidence	0,60 middle	0,55 middle
2003	Bolivia	Support for Sánchez de Lozada during conflict over gas	Democracy promotion	(2002) 59,3	50%	45% low	0,84 high confidence	0,68 middle	0,45 middle
2005	Colombia	Military support against internal terrorism	War on drugs, democracy promotion	53,9	(2004) 46%	39% low	0,64 some confidence	0,45 low	0,43 middle

1 Explanatory note: the many interventions the US made in LA countries are organized in chronological order. The column of US action sets the kind of intervention, direct military interventions are in red. The declared reason column shows the justification declared by the US government, the president, or another government officer, for the intervention, even if not exactly at the time it happened. The inequality level column is constructed with the available data from the Gini index, which is generally accepted as an estimation of inequality. This data is available from 1960 onward, but not for all the countries; Cuba and Grenada do not have a Gini Index estimated by the World Bank; Haiti's Gini index was estimated only for the year 2012. There are no available measurements about Grenada in any of the datasets used. We selected the year of the intervention or the one closest to it to pick the available data. We use the Latinobarometro data base (1995 to 2005) to show Latin Americans' perceptions about "Democracy support" (the level of acceptance and satisfaction that the people of a country have regarding the democratic regime) and "political activism" (the level of interest that people have in politics) at the time of the intervention, or when we had available data. The other three columns have The Global State of Democracy Indices (1975-2005) as a source, we chose the "clean elections" indicator, which shows to what extent the elections are free from irregularities in the year when the event happened (if it is available). Civil society participation denotes how much the population engages in self-generating, autonomous, voluntary, and organized civil society activities. Social Group Equality measures identity group (including race and religion) and social class equality regarding political power distribution and civil rights.

2 Table sources in chronological order: Andreu (1994); Corten (1994); Meernik (1996); Rapoport and Lauffer (2000); Bueno de Mesquita and Downs (2004); Cannon (2004); Paredes (2004); Coatsworth (2006); Gaviria, Thomas and Spehar (2006); McCoy (2006); Burnell (2007); Cannon (2008); Gómez (2008); Rojas (2009); Antón et al. (2009); Llanos and Marsteinredet (2010); Storm Miller (2012); Del Popolo and Schkolnik (2013); Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán (2013); Viana (2013); Soler (2015); Corrales and Romero (2016); ECLAC (2016); Del Popolo (2017); Pérez-Liñán and Polga-Hecimovich (2017); Salgado (2017); Freire et al. (2018); US Department of State (2018); Lorusso (2017); Valente (2018); ECLAC (2019); Mateo (2020); Mignone and Costantini (2020); Plank (2020); González (2020, 2021); Latinobarómetro (2021); Global State of Democracy Indices (2021); World Bank (2021).







## Final Words

The decolonial theoretical claim that there is a structural logic to US military interventions to promote democracy in LA prompting international hierarchy in these epistemic-political-military inter-state relations, can be possibly expanded. This with further research on this same practice done by the US and other western countries onto countries located elsewhere in the rest of the world, Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. It is also possible to imagine that other types of intervention, such as anti-terrorism and/or anti-possession of mass destruction weapons, perpetrated from the West onto the Rest could be found to operate in a structural logic that defies the concept of international anarchy. This, in its turn, would put under suspicion the global validity of the latter concept itself.

These endeavors need, however, to be made not only by developing decolonial concepts, but also by having a decolonial research attitude, committed to the understanding of the totality of international politics and security, but not incurring in epistemic totalitarianism. This can be avoided by taking the plurality of local histories seriously, as well as local voices and concepts/theories, which is especially well achieved by building research partnerships with people that think from their own experiences and locations.

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