DIREITO & POLÍTICA

Direito e Política, vol. 21, n. 1, 2026

LEGACIES OF COLONIALISM: AN EXPLORATION OF ITS IMPACT ON THE IDENTITY OF LATIN AMERICA

Ernani de Paula Contipelli

Contextualization: The article discusses how deeply rooted historical factors, especially colonialism, continue to affect political stability, economic development, and social cohesion in several developing nations. The research highlights that the relationship of interdependence established between colonizer and colonized persists long after the end of formal colonization, shaping the current identity of Latin America and influencing its dynamics within the contemporary global order.

Objectives: The main objective of the article is to explore the enduring legacies of colonialism in Latin America by examining its profound influence on key areas: society, politics, and the economy. The research seeks to analyze how the interconnections among these three areas help explain the formation of Latin American identity and how colonial practices continue to impact modern regional issues such as social inequality, political instability, and economic dependency.

Methodology: The research adopts a postcolonial approach, which serves as a critical theoretical framework for challenging traditional and Eurocentric assumptions about international relations. The methodology involves analyzing the concept of region (space, population, and shared values) and conducting a historical examination of three structural axes: the hierarchical and multiethnic formation of society, political dynamics (focusing on the phenomenon of caudillismo), and the economic structure (through the lens of dependency and neo-colonial theories).

Results: lonialism is not merely a historical episode, but an enduring condition of the present. Nevertheless, the region possesses the capacity for transformation through projects of integration, regional cooperation, and a reconfiguration of the political imagination aimed at collective sovereignty and justice.

Keywords: Latin America; Postcolonialism; Neocolonialism; Caudillismo.

LEGADOS DEL COLONIALISMO: UNA EXPLORACIÓN DE SU IMPACTO EN LA IDENTIDAD DE AMÉRICA LATINA

Contextualización: El artículo aborda cómo factores históricos profundamente arraigados, especialmente el colonialismo, continúan afectando la estabilidad política, el desarrollo económico y la cohesión social en varias naciones en desarrollo. La investigación destaca que la relación de interdependencia creada entre colonizador y colonizado persiste mucho más allá del fin de la colonización formal, moldeando la identidad actual de América Latina e influyendo en sus dinámicas dentro del orden global contemporáneo.

Objectivos: El principal objetivo del artículo es explorar los legados duraderos del colonialismo en América Latina, examinando su profunda influencia en áreas fundamentales: sociedad, política y economía. La investigación busca analizar cómo las interconexiones entre estas tres áreas ayudan a comprender la formación de la identidad latinoamericana y de qué manera las prácticas coloniales impactan problemas modernos de la región, como la desigualdad social, la inestabilidad política y la dependencia económica.

Método: La investigación adopta un enfoque poscolonial, que sirve como un modelo teórico crítico para desafiar las suposiciones tradicionales y eurocéntricas sobre las relaciones internacionales. La metodología implica el análisis del concepto de región (espacio, población y valores compartidos) y el examen histórico de tres ejes estructurales: la formación jerárquica y multiétnica de la sociedad, la dinámica política (centrándose en el fenómeno del caudillismo) y la estructura económica (desde la perspectiva de las teorías de la dependencia y del neocolonialismo).

Resultados: El colonialismo no es solamente un episodio histórico, sino una condición duradera del presente. Sin embargo, la región posee capacidad de transformación mediante proyectos de integración, cooperación regional y una reconfiguración de la imaginación política orientada hacia la soberanía colectiva y la justicia.

Palabras clave: América Latina; Poscolonialismo; Neocolonialismo; Caudillismo.

LEGADOS DO COLONIALISMO: UMA EXPLORAÇÃO DE SEU IMPACTO NA IDENTIDADE DA AMÉRICA LATINA

Contextualização do tema: O artigo aborda como fatores históricos profundamente enraizados, especialmente o colonialismo, continuam a afetar a estabilidade política, o desenvolvimento econômico e a coesão social em várias nações em desenvolvimento. A pesquisa destaca que a relação de interdependência criada entre colonizador e colonizado persiste muito além do fim da colonização formal, moldando a identidade atual da América Latina e influenciando suas dinâmicas na ordem global contemporânea.

Objectivos: O principal objetivo do artigo é explorar os legados duradouros do colonialismo na América Latina, examinando sua profunda influência em áreas fundamentais: sociedade, política e economia. A pesquisa busca analisar como as interconexões dessas três áreas ajudam a compreender a formação da identidade latino-americana e de que maneira as práticas coloniais impactam problemas modernos da região, como a desigualdade social, a instabilidade política e a dependência econômica.

Método: A pesquisa adota uma abordagem pós-colonial, que serve como um modelo teórico crítico para desafiar as suposições tradicionais e eurocêntricas sobre as relações internacionais. A metodologia envolve a análise do conceito de região (espaço, população e valores compartilhados) e o exame histórico de três eixos estruturais: a formação hierárquica e multiétnica da sociedade, a dinâmica política (focando no fenômeno do *caudilhismo*) e a estrutura econômica (sob a ótica das teorias da dependência e do neo-colonialismo).

Resultados: O colonialismo não é apenas um episódio histórico, mas uma condição duradoura do presente. No entanto, a região possui capacidade de transformação por meio de projetos de integração, cooperação regional e uma reconfiguração da imaginação política que vise a soberania coletiva e a justiça.

Palavras-chave: América Latina; Pós-colonialismo; Neocolonialismo; Caudilhismo.

INTRODUCTION

Various historical factors, including cultural influences, economic conditions, and political and social issues, play a significant role in shaping the international order[1]. As these factors contribute to the evolving nature of international relationships, institutions must continually adapt their structures and strategies to remain relevant and effective. This ongoing process of adaptation leads to significant changes that profoundly influence international relations and the identities of institutions across various historical contexts.

However, certain historical factors are deeply rooted in the development of specific institutional identities within different regions. These must be considered to fully understand the current challenges and dynamics at play. For instance, the legacy of colonialism has had lasting effects on political stability, economic development, and social cohesion in many developing nations, significantly influencing their contemporary situations and relationships on the world stage.

Albert Memmi's work, "The Colonizer and the Colonized", highlights the importance of understanding historical interactions to address current global challenges. He demonstrates that the colonial relationship creates a deep interdependence between the colonizer and the colonized. This dependence shapes the identities and behaviors of both groups that persist long after formal colonization has ended. These historical legacies continue to influence contemporary international relations, underscoring the necessity of understanding the past to navigate today's global issues effectively[2].

The present article aims to explore the enduring legacies of colonialism in Latin America, examining its profound influence on key areas such as society, politics, and the economy. By analyzing the intricate interconnections between these three factors, we can better understand how colonial histories have shaped Latin American identity. Therefore, the discussion will analyze specific colonial practices and their lasting impacts on modern issues such as social inequality, political instability, and economic dependency that characterize contemporary Latin America.

3.1 POST-COLONIALISM AND THE CONCEPT OF REGION

Postcolonial approaches aim to illuminate the complexities of the contemporary world order by examining the enduring legacies of imperialism and colonialism. These frameworks assert that such legacies are still evident in a range of global institutions,

[1] Cultural factors encompass the beliefs, traditions, and values that define societies, which can conduce to multiple perceptions and interactions among nations. Economic factors involve trade relationships, resource distribution, and financial systems that impact global interdependence. Political and social issues, such as governance structures, power dynamics, and social movements, can also greatly influence diplomatic relationships and conflict resolution.

[2] MEMMI, A. **The Colonizer and the Colonized**. (H. Greenfeld, Trans.). *Beacon Press, 1957*.

international trade practices, cultural identities in the Western world, and various other geopolitical issues[3].

In examining a key example of the postcolonial approach, Kwame Nkrumah underscored the characteristics of neo-colonialism: "The essence of neo-colonialism is that the State which is subject to it is, in theory, independent and has all the outward trappings of international sovereignty. In reality, its economic system and thus its political policy is directed from outside"[4]. This perspective highlights the paradox faced by nations that appear sovereign but are, in practice, heavily influenced or controlled by external forces, often leading to a loss of genuine autonomy and independence in decision-making.

Therefore, postcolonial approaches are widely regarded as significant forms of critical theory because they rigorously challenge the foundational assumptions underpinning international relations. These frameworks interrogate established theoretical claims by arguing that they often rest on flawed premises, primarily rooted in Eurocentrism and a narrow understanding of global dynamics[5].

Furthermore, postcolonial theorists emphasize the profound and lasting effects of empire and colonialism on contemporary international order, revealing how historical injustices and power imbalances continue to shape geopolitical interactions and relationships. By analyzing the legacies of colonialism, these approaches uncover the ways in which they inform current economic, social, and political patterns, thus offering a more nuanced understanding of global affairs[6].

To effectively apply a postcolonial approach to Latin America, it is essential to explore the concept of the region through three interconnected components: geographic space, the population inhabiting that space, and the shared values of its inhabitants.

A region can be defined as an imagined territory that includes a cross-national area where a group of individuals shares a common set of values, beliefs, and practices that evolve over time due to various factors such as historical events, cultural exchanges, and social interactions.

This process contributes to the formation of a collective identity and a unique

---

[3] LOOMBA, A. **Colonialism/Postcolonialism**. 3rd ed. London: Routledge, 2015.

[4] NKRUMAH, K. **Neo-Colonialism**: The Last Stage of Imperialism. London: Panaf Books, 1981.

[5] In these approaches, decolonization refers to the complex processes through which colonial powers withdrew from territories in Asia, Africa, the Caribbean, and Latin America, leading to significant social, economic, and cultural transformations. It involves struggles for self-determination, resistance against imperial rule, and diverse strategies for achieving sovereignty and reclaiming identity. This process also includes psychological and intellectual efforts to challenge the lasting effects of colonialism, emphasizing the revival of indigenous agency, languages, and spiritual practices. By focusing on indigenous perspectives, decolonization aims for a more equitable understanding of history, culture, and society, seeking to dismantle the legacies of colonial domination (FANON, F. **The Wretched of the Earth**. London: Penguin, 2001).

[6] YOUNG, Robert J. C. **Postcolonialism**: An Historical Introduction. Oxford: Blackwell, 2001, pp. 4–11.

cultural landscape, fostering a sense of belonging among the people. As this identity solidifies, it often leads to the development of normative frameworks and institutional structures that reflect the shared values of the community. These elements work together to shape the regional identity and influence the relationships among its inhabitants and with external entities.

Every regionalist project possesses distinct characteristics that are evident in its ongoing development processes, which often reflect the unique historical, social, political, and economic contexts of the region[7]. These characteristics illustrate the specific ideas, values, and norms that guide interactions among various actors—such as governments, local communities, non-governmental organizations, and international bodies—and institutions, shaping integration proposals tailored to the region's specific needs and identity.

The interplay among regionalism and identity is complex and multifaceted; these elements do not exist in isolation but rather coexist in a dynamic relationship that enhances one another. Throughout history, this interaction has significantly influenced sociopolitical developments, affecting the roles and collaborations of multiple actors and institutions at domestic, regional, and international levels.

For instance, cultural identity can bolster regionalist movements by fostering a sense of belonging and shared purpose, while regional cooperation can enrich cultural expressions and promote economic development. Therefore, understanding this intricate relationship is crucial for analyzing how regionalist projects evolve and succeed over time[8].

1.1 WHAT IS LATIN AMERICA?

The intersection of three distinct groups—Native Americans, Europeans, and Africans, along with their descendants—has profoundly shaped the cultural landscape of Latin America. This interaction has led to a rich tapestry of traditions, languages, and beliefs, creating a complex identity unique to the region.

Throughout history, there has been a continuous quest to identify and celebrate the shared elements that contribute to a sense of common identity and culture among diverse communities. This ongoing search reflects Latin America's aspiration for integration and unity, as it navigates the legacies of colonialism that have defined its

[7] HAAS, E. B. **International Integration**: The European and the Universal Process, p. 378. International Organization 15, n. 03, 1961.

[8] This argument aligns with Hettne and Söderbaum's concept of "*regionness*", which views regions not just as geographic areas but as dynamic social and political constructs influenced by shared identities, values, and institutions. They highlight the mutual reinforcement between regionalism and identity: identity lends legitimacy and unity to regionalist initiatives, while regional frameworks cultivate a sense of belonging and collective purpose (HETTNE, Björn; SÖDERBAUM, Fredrik. **Theorising the Rise of Regionness**. *New Political Economy*, v. 5, n. 3, p. 457–472, 2000).

historical narrative.

The historical pursuit of a Latin American identity can be understood through the themes of unity and the recognition of shared characteristics, as articulated by Simón Bolívar (1783-1830). Bolívar is often referred to as the "Great Liberator" of South America for his pivotal role in freeing several countries from Spanish colonial rule.

Following a significant military defeat in Venezuela in 1814, Bolívar went into self-imposed exile, during which he wrote the important political essay "The Jamaica Letter." Completed in 1815, this essay not only reflects on the independence movement across Latin America but also serves as a call for the diverse populations to unite in their quest for freedom.

In one notable section of the essay, Bolívar thoughtfully explores the concept of Latin American identity and the potential for political and social integration among the various nations[9].

In 1865, after the independence wars in South America during the early 19th century, José Maria Caicedo, a Colombian thinker and politician, came up with the term "*Latin America*". He created this term to support the colonial goals of Napoleon III in the region.

By using "*Latin America*", Caicedo wanted to highlight the cultural and language connections between countries colonized by Spain and Portugal. He also recognized the impact of French-speaking areas, especially in the Caribbean and parts of Central America. This broader term was important because it shaped the political situation of the time and emphasized both the shared identity among Latin American countries and the outside forces trying to control the region[10].

The Latin American region has a rich and complex historical background that is defined by the interplay of three key features: social structures, political dynamics, and economic systems.

These elements have been profoundly shaped by the enduring legacies of colonialism, which introduced hierarchical social classes, centralized political power, and exploitative economic practices.

As a result, the identity of Latin America today is heavily influenced by this colonial

[9] Bolivar articulated his vision for a unified continent by stating: "It is a grand idea to envision the consolidation of the New World into a single nation, united by agreements into one bond. It is reasoned that, because these regions share a common origin, language, customs, and religion, they should aspire to establish a single government that fosters cooperation and solidarity, allowing the newly formed states to unite in a confederation that embodies the strength of their shared heritage." In doing so, Bolívar highlighted the importance of unity in overcoming colonial legacies and advancing toward a collective future, where mutual support and cooperation could lead to prosperity and stability for all Latin American nations.

[10] REID, Michel. **Forgotten Continent**: A History of the New Latin America, p. 20. New Haven: Yale University, 2007.

past, manifesting in issues such as social inequality, political instability, and economic dependency[11].

These historical influences continue to provoke vigorous debates among scholars, policymakers, and activists regarding the most effective strategies for promoting development in the region that respects both social justice and environmental responsibility.

Understanding this historical context is essential for navigating the challenges and opportunities that Latin America faces as a region in its path toward full development.

2. COLONIAL SOCIETY: ITS STRUCTURE AND LASTING IMPACT TODAY

Throughout history, the oligarchies that have wielded power across the continent continue to exert their influence today, entrenching systems of poverty and exacerbating inequality.

This legacy disproportionately affects historically marginalized communities, such as Afro descendants, who often face systemic discrimination and limited access to resources, as well as Indigenous peoples, who struggle to protect their land and cultural heritage.

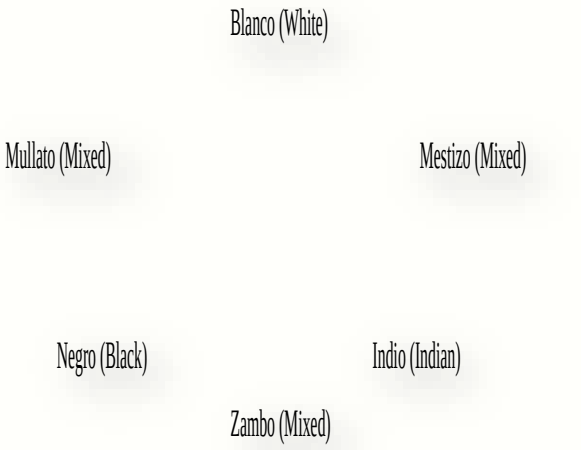
The socioeconomic disparities are stark, leading to a cycle of disadvantage that perpetuates exclusion from political representation, economic opportunities, and social services. These ongoing dynamic serves to highlight the urgent need for comprehensive reforms that address the root causes of inequality and empower these vulnerable populations.

The coexistence of Native Americans, Europeans, and Africans during the colonial period significantly contributed to the formation of a complex multiethnic society in Latin America.

This society was characterized by a social hierarchy that primarily hinged on the degree of European ancestry, with individuals of predominantly European descent often occupying the highest social strata. In this stratified society, mixed-race groups were frequently perceived as inferior to those with unadulterated European lineage, leading to entrenched social prejudices and discrimination.

To better illustrate this intricate social structure, we can envision a pentagon that represents the five main ethno-racial groups in Latin American society:

[11] CARDOSO, Fernando Henrique; FALETTO, Enzo. **Dependency and Development in Latin America**. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979.



The pentagon framework highlights the multifaceted nature of identity and status within Latin American societies, where lineage and race profoundly influenced individual experiences and opportunities[12].

The term "Blanco," which translates to "White," historically referred to individuals of European ancestry in colonial Latin America. This demographic was further categorized into two distinct groups:

"*Peninsulares*" - These were individuals born in Spain or Portugal who migrated to the colonies. They occupied the highest echelons of colonial society and held the most prestigious offices, including viceroys, governors, and high-ranking officials in the military and administration. Their exclusive access to power and resources often created tensions with other social classes, particularly the Creoles.

"*Creoles*" - This group comprised individuals of European descent who were born in Latin America, often to Peninsular parents. While they frequently served as military officers and held some local administrative positions, they faced systemic barriers that limited their political influence. Despite their wealth and education, Creoles were typically excluded from the top levels of governance, leading to a growing sense of disenfranchisement and eventual calls for independence from colonial rule.

These two categories played significant roles in shaping the social and political landscape of colonial Latin America, laying the groundwork for future movements toward independence and social change.

For instance, the Creoles significantly contributed to the liberation struggle due to their connection with European ancestry and distinct local culture. They sought to assert

[12] LOCKHART, James; SCHWARTZ, Stuart B. **Early Latin America**: A History of Colonial Spanish America and Brazil. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.

their rights and identity in a society that often relegated them to the status of second-class citizens[13].

Their educational background further distinguished them; many were sent abroad to prestigious universities in Europe, where they were exposed to Enlightenment ideas that emphasized reason, individual rights, and the principles of liberty. This intellectual awakening inspired them to advocate for independence and challenge colonial rule, ultimately leading to the widespread movements for independence that swept across Latin America in the early 19th century.

The Creoles' role as leaders in these movements was essential in effectively transforming Enlightenment philosophies into actionable goals for a new, independent Latin American identity. However, they also maintained the stratified structure of colonial times, with the "*Whites*" positioned at the top of the social hierarchy.

The colonization of Latin America was marked by profound and ongoing tensions between European colonizers and the mixed descendants of Europeans and Indigenous people, known as Mestizos, who occupied a middle position within the social hierarchy; and mixed descendants of Europeans and Africans, called Mulattos, often faced further marginalization. Indigenous people and enslaved Africans were typically positioned at the lowest rung of this hierarchy[14].

This period revealed stark contrasts between wealth and poverty, with a small elite known as the "*Blancos*" often holding vast resources. Meanwhile, most of the population, characterized by a complex interplay of racial and social identities shaped by resistance, adaptation, and hybridization, struggles with economic insecurity and systemic inequality.

2.1 COLONIAL SOCIETY: ITS STRUCTURE AND LASTING IMPACT TODAY

Latin America's identity as a distinct region is closely tied to its colonial past. The colonial era saw European powers claiming and exploiting vast territories, which resulted in significant demographic, population, and cultural shifts. As Walter D. Mignolo notes, "*the entire continent emerged as such in the European imagination as a massive expanse of land to be appropriated, peoples to be converted to Christianity, and labor to be exploited*"[15].

This appropriation involved not only the seizure of land but also the assimilation and erasure of Indigenous cultures, resulting in long-lasting impacts that are still felt

[13] Despite owning a vast majority of the land and businesses in the colonies, the Creoles found themselves marginalized in terms of political power, which was monopolized by the "*Peninsulares*", the elite class of individuals born in Europe. This disparity fostered deep-seated resentment among the Creole population, as they were often denied high-ranking positions in government or the military, creating a sense of disenfranchisement that fueled revolutionary sentiments.

[14] BURKHOLDER, Mark A.; JOHNSON, Lyman L. **Colonial Latin America**. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020.

[15] MIGNOLO, Walter D. **The Idea of Latin America**. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005.

today. Therefore, legacy of colonization has created a rich but troubled tapestry of cultures, languages, and social struggles that define modern Latin America society.

To bolster economic activities in the wake of the devastating extermination of indigenous populations, the Latin American colonies turned to the transatlantic slave trade as a crucial solution. Beginning in the 16th century and intensifying over the following centuries, this trade saw the forced migration of millions of Africans to the Americas.

These enslaved individuals arrived in large numbers, particularly in regions such as Brazil and the Caribbean, where their labor became integral to the cultivation of lucrative cash crops like sugar, tobacco, and coffee. In Brazil, the importation of African slaves was particularly pronounced, with estimates suggesting that over five million were brought to the country, making it the largest importer of enslaved people in the Americas.

The presence of African slaves not only transformed the demographic landscape of these colonies but also laid the groundwork for a complex cultural amalgamation that persists to this day. The enduring legacy of this history is evident in contemporary race relations, manifesting through social structures that continue to influence interactions and identity in Latin America.

The social legacies of the slave trade remain deeply woven into the fabric of Latin American society, with many individuals of African descent facing ongoing cycles of poverty and inequality. In Brazil, which imported nearly half of all enslaved individuals transported across the Atlantic slavery was only abolished on May 13, 1888, making it the last country in the Americas to do so.

When the enslaved populations were finally granted their freedom, they were released into a harsh reality, forced to fend for themselves amidst an economic crisis that left them without land, essential resources, or access to education. This precarious situation significantly impacts their descendants, perpetuating a cycle of disadvantage.

For instance, in Brazil, young Black individuals are disproportionately impacted by violent crime and incarceration. In 2011, Afro-descendants accounted for approximately 72% of homicide victims, and in 2020, 78% of those killed in police interventions were Black or Brown men aged 14–30. Moreover, as of 2017, 64% of prisoners were Black or mixed-race—far exceeding their share of the overall population. These statistics point to systemic inequities rooted in social and racial hierarchies that continue to shape both external violence and criminal justice outcomes.[16].

While white Brazilians have largely preserved their social and economic standing

[16] MARQUES-GARCIA, L., CONTE, A., SEDLACEK, G. L., & LABORDA, L. **Race Differences in Police Violence and Crime Victimization in Brazil** (IDB Technical Note No. 1669). Inter-American Development Bank, 2019.

since the colonial era, the violence arising from desperation, lack of opportunity, and internalized oppression within the Black community often manifests in tragic conflicts among themselves. This complicated dynamic illustrates once more the long-lasting repercussions of historical injustices and the urgent need for comprehensive social reform.

3. THE DYNAMICS OF POLITCS, THE ROLE OF PATRONAGE, AND THE HOPE FOR A SAVIOR

Politically, the end of European colonization in the late 19th and early 20th centuries did not lead to the establishment of a long-term project aimed at building nation-states with strong and democratic institutions. Instead, it resulted in the creation of a ruling class that supported personalistic leadership, embodied by figures known as *Caudillos*—military or political leaders who wielded significant personal power.

This leadership transformed the state bureaucracy into a mechanism for personal gain and patronage rather than the public good. Such practices—including corruption, nepotism, and clientelism—have not only persisted but have also taken on more institutionalized forms in various regions, undermining the prospects for genuine democratic governance and equitable development[17].

The process of independence in Latin America aimed to solidify the ambitions of Creole elites, who were established during the colonial period, to become the legitimate ruling classes in the region and gain direct access to international trade. Despite this aspiration, the oligarchic colonial order remained largely unchanged, resulting in no significant transformation of the economic and social structures.

In essence, the newly independent Latin American nations continued to be characterized by oligarchic societies composed predominantly of white individuals who exploited non-white labor. These societies maintained an economy primarily based on agriculture and mining, which served external markets in exchange for manufactured and luxury goods[18].

[17] LYNCH, John. **Caudillos in Spanish America, 1800–1850**. Oxford: Clarendon Press, pp. 19–23, 1992.

[18] The wars of independence were driven by a growing sense of nationalism, but there was little consideration for the future of the newly liberated nations. This oversight ultimately led to a period of chaos and conflict among the ruling classes, as explained by Felipe Fernández-Arnesto: "*The independence wars were, in short, the making of the United States and the ruin of much of the rest of the Americas. To conduct these wars, all the affected (Spanish-American) states had to sacrifice liberties to caudillismo and civil values to militarism. People in the Americas often describe the chaotic politics, democratic immaturity, and economic stagnation of Latin American traditions as if they were an ancient curse or a genetic defect—what they call a Latin legacy*" (**1492**: The Year the World Began. London: Bloomsbury, 2011).

3.1 THE AGE OF CAUDILLOS AND ITS HERITAGE

According to Edwin Williamson, the phenomenon of the Caudillo refers to a charismatic leader who advances his interests through a combination of military and political skills. Such leaders are able to build networks of clients by dispensing favors and patronage using the state apparatus[19].

Caudillos exemplify a culture of personal authority, patronage, and clientelism at a primitive level, which dominated Latin American politics. This dynamic reveals how power was actually acquired and distributed at all levels of governance.

The overthrow of the Spanish Crown did not eliminate personalism and patriarchy. Instead, caudillos became prominent figures in the political landscape of the newly independent nations, forming alliances among various factions. This dynamic added new complexities and tensions to the already intricate political environment of Latin America.

The 19th century is often referred to as the "*Age of Caudillos*" in Latin America. However, during the 20th century, the practices associated with caudillos began to evolve, becoming more integrated into the bureaucracies of state governments and mechanism that favored certain individuals and allowed them to maintain political power.

This transformation paved the way for the rise of populism, a political approach that capitalized on the sentiments of the masses, often through charismatic leaders who positioned themselves as champions of the common people. Through this new populist framework, individuals were able to sustain political dominance in Latin America, demonstrating how the legacy of caudillos influenced modern governance and political identity in the region[20].

The caudillo figures that emerged during the authoritarian regimes of the 1970s were often embodied by powerful military leaders who wielded significant control over their nations. A prominent example of this phenomenon is found in Chile, where General Augusto Pinochet executed a coup d'état in 1973, overthrowing the democratically elected left-wing government of President Salvador Allende.

Pinochet's rise to power was not merely a matter of military force; it was also deeply intertwined with the interests of foreign corporations, which sought to safeguard their investments in Chilean resources and markets. Under Pinochet's regime, which lasted until 1990, the country experienced severe repression, characterized by widespread human rights abuses, including torture and disappearances, as he aimed to

[19] WILLIAMSON, E. **The Penguin History of Latin America**. London: Penguin, 2009.

[20] DE LA TORRE, Carlos. **Populist Seduction in Latin America**. Athens: Ohio University Press, pp. 143-147, 2010.

maintain control and eliminate opposition[21].

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The legacies of colonialism in Latin America form a structural framework that continues to shape social hierarchies, political cultures, and economic dependencies. These inheritances have been continually reproduced and reconfigured, manifesting today in persistent inequality, fragile democratic institutions, and chronic external dependence. Their resilience underscores that colonialism was not merely an episode in history but an enduring condition of the present.

Yet this legacy is not immutable. The region's hybrid cultural identities, traditions of resistance, and recurrent projects of integration reveal a capacity for transformation. Reframing development through a postcolonial lens—one that privileges historical redress, equitable redistribution, and autonomous regional cooperation—offers a path toward dismantling entrenched structures of dependency. Genuine regionalism, built on solidarity rather than competition, could foster sovereignty and collective strength.

Ultimately, overcoming the colonial condition requires more than economic reform; it demands a reconfiguration of political imagination. Only by confronting the deep asymmetries inherited from colonial rule can Latin America move toward a future that reconciles its plural identities with aspirations for justice, sovereignty, and sustainable development.

REFERENCES

BUCHELI, Marcelo. **Bananas and Business**: The United Fruit Company in Colombia, 1899–2000. New York: NYU Press, 2005.

BURKHOLDER, Mark A.; JOHNSON, Lyman L. **Colonial Latin America**. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020.

CARDOSO, Fernando Henrique; FALETTO, Enzo. **Dependency and Development in Latin America**. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979.

CONTIPELLI, E. Teoría de Constitución y Bases de la Institucionalidad. Santiago: RIL Editores, 2015.

[21] CONTIPELLI, E. **Teoría de Constitución y Bases de la Institucionalidad**. Santiago: RIL Editores, 2015.

DE LA TORRE, Carlos. **Populist Seduction in Latin America**. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2010.

FANON, F. **The Wretched of the Earth**. London: Penguin, 2001.

FRANK, André Gunder. The Development of Underdevelopment. **Monthly Review,** v. 18, n. 4, 1966.

GALEANO, E. **Open Veins of Latin America***:* Five Centuries of the Pillage of a Continent. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1997.

GLEIJESES, Piero. **Shattered Hope***:* The Guatemalan Revolution and the United States, 1944–1954. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991.

GREEN, Duncan. **Faces of Latin America**. New York: Monthly Review Press, 2019.

HETTNE, Björn; SÖDERBAUM, Fredrik. Theorising the Rise of Regionness. **New Political Economy**, v. 5, n. 3, 2000.

HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH. The Ties That Bind: Colombia and Armed Groups. New York: HRW, 2010.

YOUNG, Robert J. C. **Postcolonialism***:* An Historical Introduction. Oxford: Blackwell, 2001.

LYNCH, John. **Caudillos in Spanish America, 1800–1850**. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992.

LOCKHART, James; SCHWARTZ, Stuart B. ***Early Latin America****:* A History of Colonial Spanish America and Brazil. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.

LOOMBA, A. **Colonialism/Postcolonialism**. 3rd ed. London: Routledge, 2015.

MARQUES-GARCIA, L., CONTE, A., SEDLACEK, G. L., & LABORDA, L. ***Race Differences in Police Violence and Crime Victimization in Brazil*** (IDB Technical Note No. 1669). Inter-American Development Bank, 2019.

MEMMI, A. **The Colonizer and the Colonized**. (H. Greenfeld, Trans.). Beacon Press, 1957.

MIGNOLO, Walter D. **The Idea of Latin America**. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005.

NKRUMAH, K. **Neo-Colonialism***:* The Last Stage of Imperialism. London: PANAF Books, 1981.

REID, Michel. **Forgotten Continent***:* A History of the New Latin America. New Haven: Yale University, 2007.

SCHLESINGER, Stephen; KINZER, Stephen. **Bitter Fruit***:* The Story of the American Coup in Guatemala. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999.

QUIJANO, Aníbal. Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America. **Nepantla: Views from South**, v. 1, n. 3, p. 533–580, 2000.

HOW TO CITE:

CONTIPELLI, Ernani de Paula. Legacies of colonialism: an exploration of its impact on the identity of latin America. **Revista Direito e Política**. Programa de Pós-Graduação Stricto Sensu em Ciência Jurídica da UNIVALI, vº 21, nº1, 1º quadrimestre de 2026. Available in: https://periodicos.univali.br/index.php/rdp - ISSN 1980-7791. DOI: https://doi.org/10.14210/rdp.v21n1.p269-284

ABOUT THE AUTHORS:

Ernani de Paula Contipelli

Ernani Contipelli is a Professor at the Webster University - Campuses Leiden and Tashkent, the Central American Institute of Public Administration, United International Business Schools (UIBS), and Editor-in-Chief at Connections for Sustainability Journal. He holds two post-doctorate degrees in Comparative Politics and a Ph.D. in Public Law. He has experience in the academic field in different countries and various publications on his research areas of interest: Sustainability, Circular Economy and International Cooperation.

Recebido em: 27/10/2025
Aprovado em: 10/02/2026

Received: 27/10/2025
Approved: 10/02/2026